

County Corrections and Law Enforcement

Wisconsin discussions about corrections typically focus on the state prison system. This is not surprising as most violent offenders are sent there. Wisconsin spends more than \$1.1 billion annually on a prison system that houses more than 22,000 offenders.

Often ignored are the costs of running county jails and county law enforcement. The state's 72 counties spend nearly \$500 million annually on corrections, and about that same amount on law enforcement.

BACKDROP

Two of the most important factors affecting county costs are crime rates and resources available to fund spending. Rising crime often leads to more officers and expanded jails. County corrections are affected mostly by nonviolent crime, as violent offenders are typically sentenced to state prison. However, law enforcement and corrections compete with other county programs for revenue streams that are often growing little.

Crime Rates

Since 2000, Wisconsin's crime rate has been either rising or falling, depending on your perspective. Violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) in Wisconsin rose during 2000-14, bucking the national trend. In 2000, Wisconsin had 237 violent crimes per 100,000 residents. Over the ensuing 14 years, the violent crime rate climbed 22% to 290 per 100,000 residents (see Figure 1, blue line). Nationally, violent crime fell 28% during those years,

though Wisconsin's rate remains significantly below the national rate.

Nonviolent crime (e.g., burglary, larceny, and vehicle theft) is more common, but has been declining. The rate of nonviolent crime fell 30% during 2000-14, from 2,972 per 100,000 residents to 2,088. A decline in nonviolent crime should be a positive for county correctional spending.

County Revenues Strained

For much of the past 14 years, counties have faced little or no growth in most state aid programs. And since 2006, the state has also limited the amount of property taxes they could collect. During 2000-07, total county revenues rose 36.4%, or an average of 4.5% per year. With more recent state aid cuts and tighter property tax limits, revenue growth halted during 2007-14, increasing just 0.5%.

However, after accounting for inflation and rising population, revenues fell 13.8%, from \$1,047 per capita in 2007 to \$903 per capita in 2014 (see Figure 2). For the remainder of this report, all revenue and spending figures are inflation-adjusted.

It is within this framework of rising violent crime, but declining nonviolent crime and inflation-adjusted total revenues that county law enforcement and corrections are examined.

STAFFING

The number of full-time county law enforcement employees declined slightly during 2007-14. Federal figures show employment falling 3.9% from 7,486 full-time workers in 2007 to 7,207 in 2014.

Figure 1: Wisconsin Crime Rate Patterns Mixed
Violent Crime Rises, Nonviolent Crime Falls, 2000-14

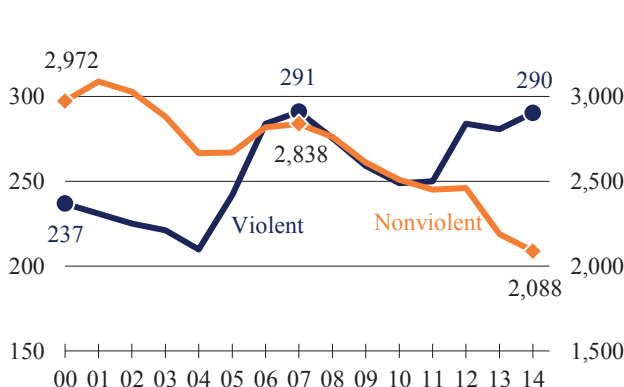
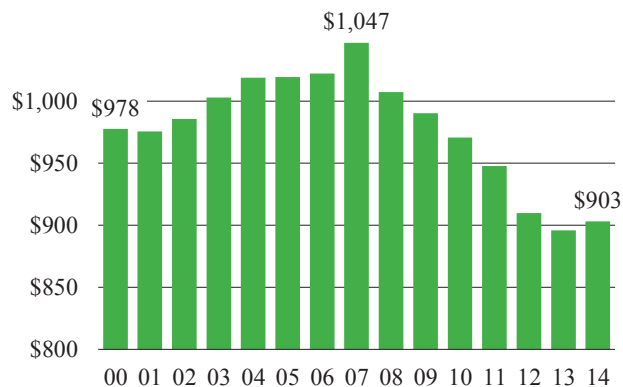


Figure 2: Per Capita County Revenues Declining
Inflation-Adjusted Per Capita Total Revenues, 2000-14



While the overall trend was down, there were exceptions; staffing increased more than 10% in 11 counties, and more than 5% in another eight. However, in 13 counties, full-time employment declined more than 10%.

COUNTY PRISONERS

In Wisconsin, offenders sentenced to confinement for more than one year are sent to state prison. Those sentenced to lesser terms typically are confined to a county jail.

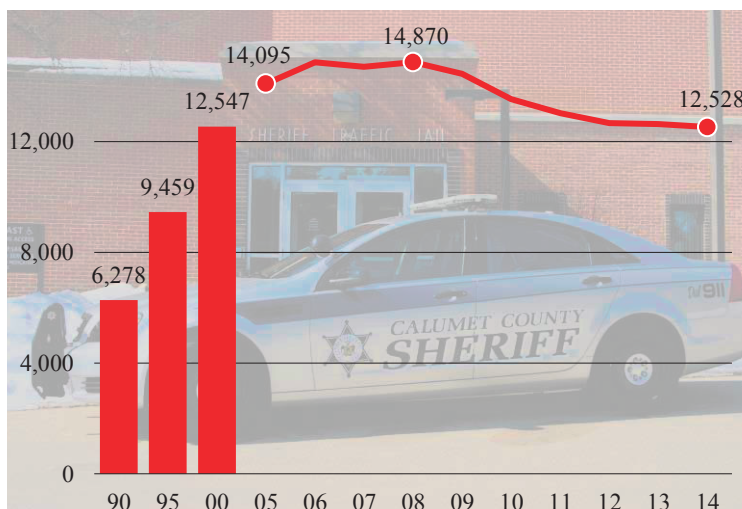
After increasing for decades, Wisconsin's county jail populations have declined in recent years. In 1990, the average daily population was 6,278. Over the next 10 years, that figure doubled to 12,547 in 2000 (see Figure 3).

After 2000, county jail populations continued to climb, but at a slower pace, increasing 18.5% to 14,863 by 2006. Populations then stagnated over the next two years, and have since declined steadily. In 2014, average daily populations were 16% below their 2008 peak.

COUNTY SPENDING

Despite total revenues declining, counties have maintained funding of law enforcement and corrections. In 2014, they spent a total of \$969.5 million, down just 0.3% from the \$977.1 million spent in 2007. A total of 18.2% of 2014 county spending was in these two areas, up from 16.6% in 2007. While combined spending has changed little, the mix of the two has changed, with spending on law enforcement rising and corrections falling.

Figure 3: County Jail Populations Declining
Average Daily Populations in Wisconsin County Jails, 1990-2014



Corrections

The pattern of county spending on corrections during 2007-14 reflects the decline in prisoner population. During those years, operating costs for county jails and other corrections programs fell 9.0%, from \$511.2 million to \$465.2 million. Capital spending—expenditures for such items as a new or expanded jail—was more volatile than operating expenses, ranging from \$9.1 million in 2013 to \$30.2 million in 2011. In 2014, capital spending for corrections was just two-thirds of its 2007 level (\$14.4 million versus \$21.5 million).

Table 1: Corrections Costs Vary
Counties Spending Most and Least Per Capita, 2014

Rk.	County	Amt.	Rk.	County	Amt.
1	Forest	\$205	63	St. Croix	\$44
2	Kenosha	143	64	Green	41
3	Milwaukee	142	65	Crawford	40
4	Sawyer	141	66	Iowa	37
5	Florence	138	67	Pierce	32
6	Dodge	120	68	Calumet	29
7	Columbia	119	69	Grant	23
8	Douglas	118	70	Eau Claire	10
9	Sauk	108	71	Menominee	10
10	Washburn	103	72	Iron	0

Per Capita. Relative to population, counties spent \$81 per person on corrections in 2014, down 10.3% from \$91 in 2007.

Spending per capita varied widely by county. In 2014, rural Forest County (\$205) spent the most, followed by urban Kenosha (\$143) and Milwaukee (\$142) counties (see Table 1). Ten counties spent more than \$100 per resident on corrections.

Iron County has reported no corrections spending since 2005. Eau Claire and Menominee (both \$10 per capita) spent the least. Grant (\$23) and Calumet (\$29) both spent less than \$30 per resident.

Per Inmate. An alternate way to consider corrections spending is per inmate (average daily populations). In 2014, statewide county correctional spending was \$37,132 per inmate, up 6.8% from \$34,766 in 2007.

Spending per inmate varied widely by county, though most counties—40 of 72—spent between \$25,000 and \$40,000 per inmate. Eight counties spent more than \$60,000 per inmate: Buffalo, Florence, Kewaunee, Lafayette, Pierce, Portage, Trempealeau,

and Washburn. At \$59,356, Milwaukee County spent slightly less.

Counties spending less than \$25,000 per inmate included three outliers. As mentioned, Iron County reported no corrections spending, while Menominee (\$776) and Eau Claire (\$3,919) reported less than \$4,000 per inmate. Other “low-spending” counties included Lincoln, Racine, Shawano, Vilas, and Waushara.

Law Enforcement

In addition to operating county jails and other corrections programs, counties also provide law enforcement services, including expenditures for officers’ salaries and benefits, communication, and crime prevention and related programs.

While total county spending declined 9.8% during 2007-14, law enforcement spending increased 10.2% from \$444.5 million to \$489.9 million. Part of that increase was due to unusually large capital expenditures on new or remodeled buildings, vehicles, or other law enforcement equipment. Excluding capital outlays, operating expenses rose 8.6% during 2007-14, from \$429.1 million to \$466.1 million.

By County. Wisconsin’s less populous, rural counties spend more per capita on law enforcement than more populous, urban counties. Several factors play a role.

First, urban counties have underlying municipalities with police departments, lessening the need for extensive county services. Second, and related, few towns have their own police departments, and are not legally required to do so. Instead, towns typically rely on the county to provide law enforcement. Rural counties have a greater share of their population living in towns, requiring a proportionately larger force.

Table 2: Per Capita Costs Higher in Rural Counties
Per Capita Law Enforcement Expenditures, 2014

Rk.	County	Amt.	Rk.	County	Amt.
1	Iron	\$323	63	Barron	\$70
2	Florence	300	64	Manitowoc	70
3	Menominee	233	65	Grant	70
4	Forest	223	66	Rock	69
5	Vilas	219	67	Outagamie	64
6	Marquette	192	68	Waukesha	58
7	Adams	182	69	Milwaukee	52
8	Bayfield	175	70	Chippewa	52
9	Rusk	170	71	Winnebago	47
10	Oneida	162	72	La Crosse	41

Finally, there is some minimum level of staffing all counties need. Urban counties spread these costs over more people, reducing per capita costs.

Two northern counties, Iron and Florence, spent the most per resident on law enforcement in 2014, \$300 or more per capita. Menominee (\$233), Forest (\$223), and Vilas (\$219) each spent more than \$200 per resident.

At \$41 per capita, La Crosse spent the least, followed by Winnebago (\$47), Chippewa (\$52), Milwaukee (\$52), and Waukesha (\$58) counties.

While spending levels were related to county populations, 2007-14 changes were not. On average, per capita law enforcement spending rose 7.0% during these years. It increased the most in Eau Claire (98.1%), Milwaukee (62.6%), Florence (43.3%), Ashland (43.3%), and Forest (38.1%) counties. Inflation-adjusted per capita spending declined in 26 counties. □

DATA SOURCES:

Federal Bureau of Investigation; Wisconsin Department of Revenue; Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance.

THE WISCONSIN TAXPAYER

February 2016 Vol. 84 Number 2

Publication Number USPS 688-800

Periodical postage paid at Madison, Wisconsin

Subscription Price:

\$17.97 per year

Published each month, except July, by the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance,
401 North Lawn Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin 53704-5033

Postmaster:

Send address changes to *The Wisconsin Taxpayer*;

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