

**From:** Coriell, Scott [Scott.Coriell@vermont.gov]  
**Sent:** Thursday, November 19, 2015 2:16 PM  
**To:** Coriell, Scott  
**Subject:** OpEd from Gov. Peter Shumlin

Please find below an op-ed from Gov. Peter Shumlin. Let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,

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## **Reversing the trend of rising incarceration rates**

By Gov. Peter Shumlin

For most of the last two decades, Vermont's prison inmate population has been rising. Between 1997 and 2008, it grew by 86 percent. Projections made in 2007 said that Vermont's inmate population would grow to 2,619 by November 2015. After years of work to reform Vermont's criminal justice system that trend has been reversed, and today Vermont has 1,734 inmates, 885 less than projected.

When I first ran for Governor I made reforming the criminal justice system a priority because it is the right thing to do. I also said doing so would save us money and allow us to invest in things early childhood education, which we know to reduce the likelihood that someone will land in jail later in life.

The math is simple: It costs a staggering \$62,000 per year to lock up an inmate in Vermont. Had the projections from 2007 proved correct, Vermont taxpayers would have been on the hook for another 885 inmates. By reversing the trend on incarceration rates, we are saving Vermont taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

Instead of continuing down the path of rising incarceration rates and spending massive amounts of money to lock people up, we are taking a different path. Next year, Vermont will become the first state in America to guarantee access to pre-k education to every three and four year old. That's progress and a much better use of taxpayer money.

How'd we reverse the trend of rising incarceration rates? By taking meaningful steps to create a more rational criminal justice system and working with leaders like Bennington County Senator Dick Sears, Chittenden County States Attorney TJ Donovan, and many others on the cutting edge of criminal justice reform.

Together, we launched a War on Recidivism to help inmates successfully transition back into their communities and reduce recidivism rates. After identifying opiate addiction as a one of the

most pressing challenges facing our state and the entire country, we're now offering treatment instead of jail to low-level, non-violent offenders suffering from addiction. To help Vermonters move on with their lives and become productive members of our communities, we also expanded Vermont's expungement law to help past offenders with good behavior clear their records and eliminated criminal penalties for the possession of small amounts of marijuana.

The state is also leading by example by "banning the box" on job applications. By removing questions about criminal records from the very first part of job applications for state employees we are helping to prevent applicants from being immediately screened out of a job because of a past criminal conviction.

Earlier this year I worked with my Pathways from Poverty Council and Chittenden County States Attorney TJ Donovan on a pilot Driver Restoration Day that helped hundreds of Vermonters get their licenses reinstated so they can drive to work and move forward with their lives.

And lastly, under the leadership of former Windsor County State's Attorney Robert Sand, we're working with criminal justice professionals throughout the state to develop innovative and effective sentencing practices, including the creation of DUI treatment dockets in Vermont, which increase substance abuse recovery rates, lower recidivism rates, and save on corrections and other costs.

Together we're creating a more rational criminal justice system in Vermont. And the result is a state that spends less money to lock people up and more money to provide a head start for our youngest and most promising citizens. That's the way it should be.