

NEW PRISONS FOR OLD MEN?

The number of young people (age 15 to 30) in Alabama prisons has been cut in half over the last 15 years. Meanwhile, the number of people over age 50 has doubled.

How is Alabama factoring that decline into current prison construction plans?



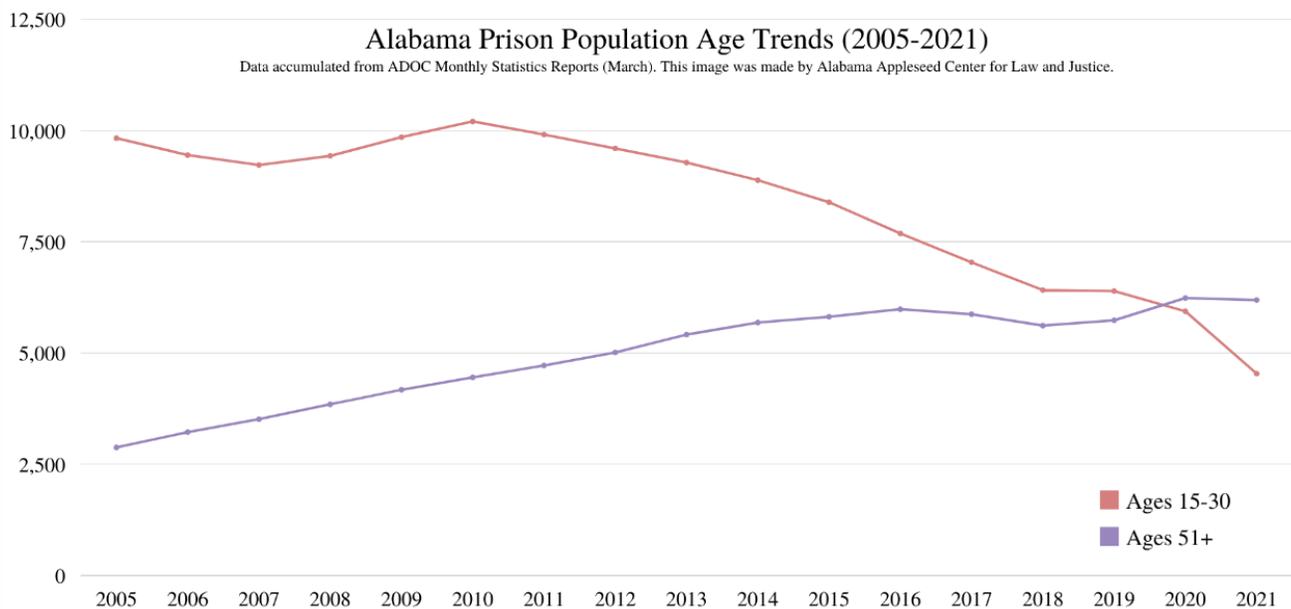
The Alabama Legislature passed significant sentencing reforms in 2006, 2013, and 2015, all with bi-partisan support. The new laws are working. Fewer young people are sent to prison, their sentences are shorter, and our communities are safer.

Yet many officials in Alabama are calling for the construction of massive new prisons and claiming that our state will need expanded capacity to incarcerate people in the decades to come. The numbers tell a different story.

**SINCE 2005,
THE NUMBER
OF YOUNG
PEOPLE IN
PRISON HAS
BEEN CUT IN
HALF.**

While the number of younger prisoners has plummeted, the number of older prisoners has doubled.

- In 2005, there were 9,827 prisoners ages 15 to 30, comprising 36% of all people in ADOC custody. In 2021, that number has been cut in half and is now 4,537 (18%).
- Alabama's crime rate declined by 17% from 2005 to 2019, the most recent year data is available from ALEA. Robbery, the most common violent crime, sunk by 48%.
- Ages 15 to 30 is the age group most likely to be arrested and incarcerated, and their numbers have fallen dramatically. **The declines in the incarceration of younger people and crime rates will enormously impact ADOC's future space needs.**



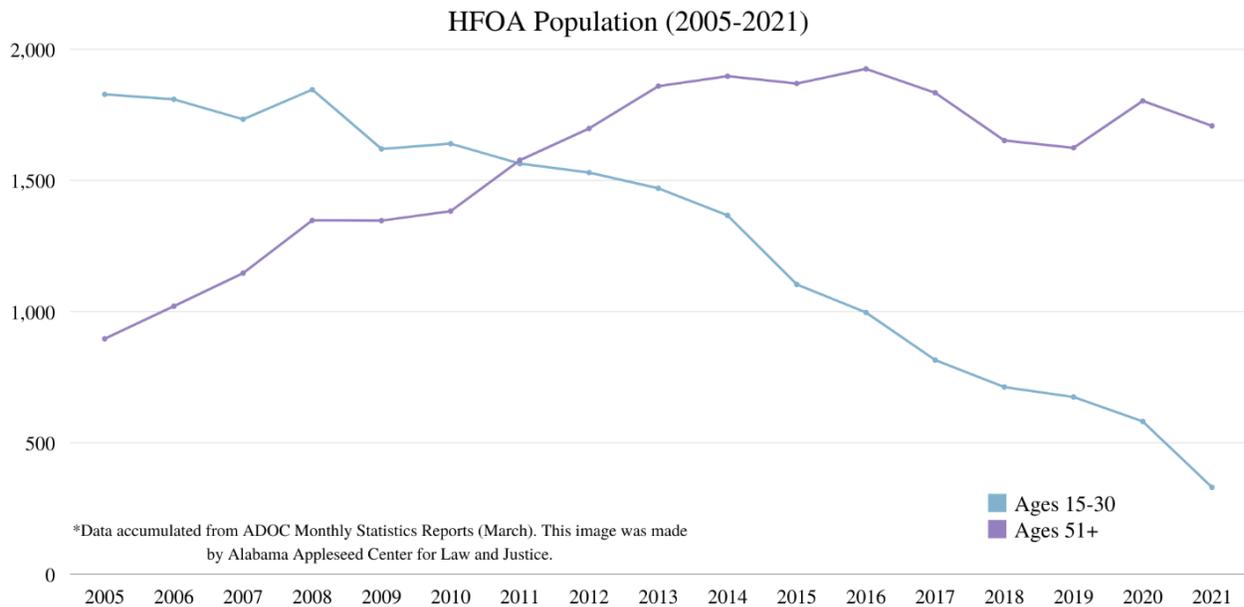
The number of people aged 15-30 in Alabama prisons was cut in half from 2005 to 2021. ALEA says crime fell by 17%

- In 2005, there were 2,879 prisoners ages 51 and older, comprising 11% of all people in ADOC custody. In 2021, that number has more than doubled and is now 6,191 (25%). Among older prisoners, 2,200 are over age 60.
- People over 50 are the least likely to re-offend and the most expensive to incarcerate as a result of unique health and safety needs. **The increase in the incarceration of older people will dramatically affect ADOC's future expenses.**

**ONE IN EVERY
FOUR PRISONERS
IN ALABAMA IS
OVER AGE 50.**

OLDER PEOPLE HAVE THE HARSHEST PUNISHMENTS

Among people serving enhanced sentences under the Habitual Felony Offender Act (HFOA), one in three are over the age of 50.



Older people have the harshest punishments.

Population declines will impact future needs. Do prison construction plans reflect these changes? If not, we will overbuild and waste money.

- Alabama's incarceration rate (419 per 100,000 residents) is at its lowest in 2 decades. Alabama has dropped from having the nation's 5th highest incarceration rate to 17th highest.
- Even counting the 4,000 people backed up in county jails as a result of COVID-delayed transfers, ADOC's total population is 25,250, down by more than 2,000 since mid-2020, and down by more than 7,100 since the population peak in 2012.
- If trends continue, ADOC's population will decline even more in the future because the cohort of youngest prisoners (ages 15 to 30) moving through the system is at a 20-year low.
- Has ADOC provided population projections for the next 3 decades to ensure that new prison capacity accurately reflects future needs?

Recommendations for the Legislature

Pass a “Second Look” bill permitting judges to review Life and Life Without Parole sentences of older people serving time under outdated laws. The reforms that worked well for younger people were not retroactive for older people, creating disparities in sentences. Judges should be able to reconsider these antiquated sentences and apply today's laws. Same crime, same time.

Reform geriatric and medical parole and medical furlough to provide opportunities for release for people over 60 who pose no danger to public safety. Medicaid and Medicare will pay their health care costs, not Alabama taxpayers. Use empty nursing homes to provide housing for the most infirm.

Require necessary repairs be made to existing prison infrastructure, as the U.S. Department of Justice has outlined. Ensure that there is working septic infrastructure, maintain clean kitchens, and install heating and cooling systems. Add space for education, programming, and family visits. Improve security through the use of technology and more cameras, as has been done at Tutwiler Prison for Women.

Spend less on prison construction and invest the savings in re-entry housing and services for people leaving prison. More than 7,000 people leave ADOC custody every year; most with little support. A \$10 million annual investment in re-entry infrastructure would stabilize the lives of thousands of justice-involved people and reduce recidivism.

**“PRISON HAS BECOME AN OLD FOLKS’ HOME
AND A MENTAL INSTITUTION,”**

according to Ronald McKeithen. He should know, having spent 37 years incarcerated for a convenience store robbery with no injuries. He was freed in 2020, and at age 59, Mr. McKeithen started a new job in a drug rehabilitation center.

