



# FLORIDA POLICY PROJECT

BEST PRACTICES, BETTER OUTCOMES

**Addressing the Elderly Prison  
Population in Florida:  
Reducing Correctional Costs and  
Improving Lives**

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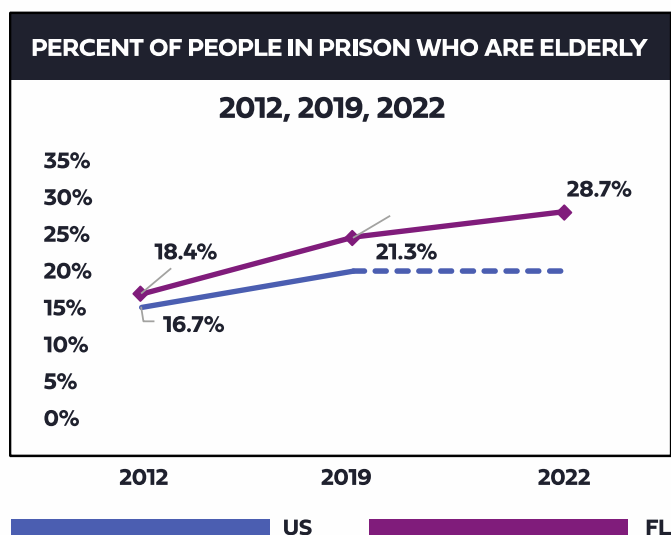
# ADDRESSING THE ELDERLY PRISON POPULATION IN FLORIDA:

REDUCING CORRECTIOINAL COSTS AND IMPROVING LIVES

- People who end up in prison often experience accelerated biological aging (1).
- Accelerated prisoner aging is the result of a constellation of life factors associated with engaging in a criminal lifestyle and a poor socioeconomic background (poor health care, drug use, poor nutrition, victimization, etc.).
- Florida statute 944.02 defines people in prison as elderly if they are 50 years of age or older.
- Florida’s elderly prison population is growing even faster than the rest of U.S. prisons.

- Housing elderly people in prison costs roughly twice as much as incarcerating younger adults (3).
- People 60 and over are much less likely to recidivate after release.

**FIGURE 1.**



- Premature aging of people in prison means people over 50 can cost the Department of Corrections significantly more to house and care for compared to younger people in prison.
- Facilities that house more people over 50 spend on average 5 times more on medical care and 14 times more on prescription drugs (2).

RECIDIVISM RATES BY RELEASE AGE				
TIME SINCE RELEASE (2018)				
	12 MONTHS	24 MONTHS	36 MONTHS	TOTAL
18-24	9.2%	9.9%	7.8%	26.9%
25-34	6.9%	7.6%	6.0%	20.5%
35-49	8.8%	7.2%	4.9%	20.9%
50-59	10.4%	6.2%	3.7%	20.3%
60+	9.0%	4.4%	2.4%	15.8%

Source: Florida Department of Corrections. 2022. "Florida Recidivism Report: Released from 2008 to 2020."

**Given the aging of people in Florida prisons, legislators should look at solutions to:**

1. Improve reentry for the increasing number of elderly people leaving prison and returning to Florida communities.
2. Explore ways to reduce the costly and low risk elderly population in Florida prisons.

The table that follows describes two promising approaches rooted in evidence-based practices and a description of geriatric release policies used by other states and the federal government. Implementing the programs described and passing legislation around geriatric release can reduce correctional costs and improve the lives of Floridians.

# ADDRESSING THE ELDERLY PRISON POPULATION IN FLORIDA:

REDUCING CORRECTIOINAL COSTS AND IMPROVING LIVES

PRACTICE	PROGRAM	POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	CURRENT APPROACH	RECOMMENDED ACTION
DIGITAL LITERACY (EDUCATION)	Technology Education	General education programs are associated with a 13% reduction in recidivism. Effects of technology education on elderly recidivism is currently unknown.	No known rigorously evaluated program currently offered in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation of digital literacy education for the elderly modeled after elderly technology education used in retirement communities and assisted living facilities.
	Long-Term Offender Program (LTOP)	Participant recidivism was only 2% but program discontinued before it was evaluated	No known rigorously evaluated program currently offered in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after Colorado's LTOP which provided reentry preparation for long-term and elderly inmates.
TRANSITIONAL SERVICES	<b>Elderly Transition Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicare/Medicaid Assistance</li> <li>• Social Security Assistance</li> <li>• Temporary and Long-Term Housing</li> </ul>	Evaluations of general transition service programs suggest reductions in recidivism by as much as 9% but no elderly transitional program has been rigorously evaluated.	No known rigorously evaluated program currently offered in FL. Some institutional assistance does exist for Medicare / Medicaid and SSI application pre-release but program availability is unknown.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after Osborne's ERI (New York) or the Senior Ex-Offender Program (California) which provide transitional reentry assistance for elderly people returning from prison.
GERIATRIC RELEASE	<b>Conditional Release into the Community based on Advanced Age and Sentence Length</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recidivism by people 60+ is significantly lower than younger people and continues to decline with age.</li> <li>• Reduce correctional cost.</li> </ul>		Some therapeutic communities (TCs) are in use in FL but there are no known rigorously evaluated programs currently offered in FL and fewer than 1300 inmates live in TCs in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after California's approach to therapeutic communities. Fund and evaluate innovative evidence-based solutions to substance abuse.
	<b>Elderly Offender Home Confinement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal BOP Pilot program under the Second Chance Act</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program evaluation is still underway but recidivism to date has been minimal.</li> <li>• May only be cost effective if used at scale.</li> </ul>	No known rigorously evaluated program currently offered in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after Federal Bureau of Prison's elderly home confinement program.

## Endnotes

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(1) Aday, R. 2003. Aging Prisoners: Crisis in American Corrections. Praeger

(2) U.S. Department of Justice. Office of the Inspector General. 2016. The Impact of an Aging Inmate Population on the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

(3) "At America's Expense: The Mass Incarceration of the Elderly," American Civil Liberties Union Report 2012.