

Report: After 2015 Reforms, Utah Could Reduce Prison Population

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SALT LAKE CITY – If Utah continues to reduce its prison population, taxpayers could save as much as \$250 million, according to [a new report](#) from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

About 6,500 people are currently incarcerated in Utah. The ACLU says the state could cut that number in half with reforms, such as reducing time served for drug offenses, robbery, fraud or property offenses.

Jason Groth, who coordinates the ACLU of Utah's [Smart Justice](#) program, says the state also could reexamine how people serve out sentences.

"We can look at different programs, like electronic home monitoring, instead of incarcerating people in jails, so people can stay in the community and work, take care of themselves, get treatment, pay restitution, and still contribute to society, while also being accountable for what they have been convicted of," says Groth.

The Utah report is part of the ACLU's "50-State Blueprint for Smart Justice," which looks at prison populations across the United States and makes state-by-state recommendations for reducing incarceration rates.

Groth describes Utah as a unique case because in 2015, the state passed a number of reforms aimed at reducing those populations, which have been largely successful.

The 2015 reforms downgraded certain crimes from felonies to misdemeanors and expanded some treatment programs. But Groth says thousands of people are imprisoned in Utah for non-violent offenses, and he says the state's prison system still disproportionately impacts black, Latino and Native American populations.

"I think that the Justice Reinvestment Initiative was a great starting point," he says, "but we've really got to start figuring out how we can improve from there, and I think there's a lot of room for change here in Utah."

The ACLU reports Utah's incarcerated population has ballooned more than 560 percent since 1980, far outpacing the state's population growth. As of 2016, the state was spending more than \$450 million of its general fund on corrections.

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