

Does Arkansas Need More Prison Beds?

The bed shortage is a product of policy, not changes in crime and public safety

decARcerate

August 25, 2026
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Policy, not crime drives demand for more prison beds

01

Criminal charges have gone down

'14 to '25 crime charges down **-17%**

02

Prison population grew anyway

'14 to '24 prison population grew **9%**

03

Inflated growth is due to longer sentencing

04

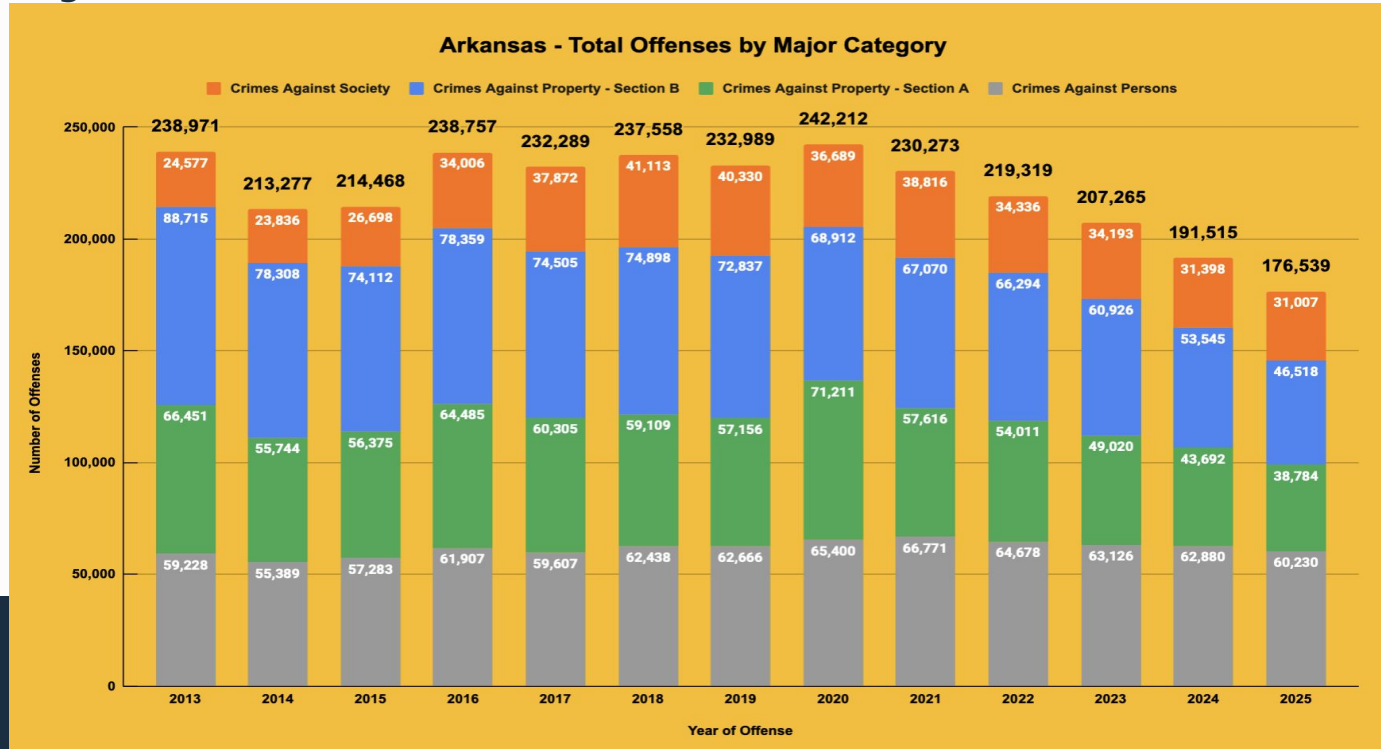
Prison release mechanism fell off

05

6 of 7 neighboring states have cut imprisonment by 18% to 38%, while AR cut by 1%

Criminal charges have gone down

- Between 2014 and 2025, criminal charges fell **-17%**. This is with a 12% increase in population growth.



If crime is not driving the growth of the prison population, what is?

People are staying longer for three policy reasons.

1. People are receiving longer sentences
2. Parole eligible: 83% are staying past their transfer eligibility (TE) date
3. Emergency Powers Act (EPA) stopped being utilized entirely.

EPA released ~2,300 people a year through 2020, and now releases none

Protect Arkansas Act is projected to add more than 2,800 beds
according to the state's own forecaster.

Arkansas sent about the same number of people to prison in 2024 as in 2014.
However, the number of people in prison rose by 21%.

Crime rates are not the determinant of Arkansas's inflated prison population.

Source: Arkansas Post-Prison Transfer Board (2024b). Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2023-2024.

Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prisoners series, 2014 through 2023.

JFA Associates and CGL, Ten-Year Adult Secure Population Projection 2025-2036, prepared for the Arkansas Department of Corrections, November 2025.

Wendy Ware, CGL, Long-Term Trends in the Arkansas Prison Population, Handout C to the Arkansas General Assembly, August 2025.

Escalating cost of holding past release date

Between 2009 and 2023, the share of releases occurring after transfer eligibility date rose from 52.9% to 83.1%, and the average time held beyond that date grew from 6.1 months to 10.1 months. The estimated annual cost of those excess days rose from \$40.2M to \$83M — an increase of 106.5% over the 14-year period.

Year	Released	% past TE	Held past TE	Excess mos.	CPD (adj.)	Cost
2009	6,800	52.9%	3,597	6.1	\$60.19	\$40.2M
2011	6,985	51.8%	3,618	6.1*	\$59.70	\$40.1M
2014	7,618	52.5%	3,999	7.6	\$63.26	\$58.5M
2017	9,555	52.5%	5,016	7.6*	\$62.54	\$72.5M
2020	7,436	48.3%	3,592	9.8	\$66.29	\$71.0M
2023	4,670	83.1%	3,881	10.1	\$69.59	\$83.0M

Source: The cost figures in this analysis are derived from two data sources: transfer eligibility data from CGL/JFA's August 2025 population projection presentation, and annual cost-per-day (CPD) figures compiled from ADC annual inmate cost reports submitted to the Arkansas Legislative Council. CPD is calculated by the ADC as total direct and indirect costs divided by average daily population, and is reported pursuant to A.C.A. §12-28-109.

Neighboring states have reduced prison population

Between 2014 and 2023, almost every comparable state reduced how many people it held in prison.

<u>People in prison per 100,000 residents</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>Change</u>
Alabama	633	394	−38%
Missouri	526	385	−27%
Louisiana	816	617	−24%
Oklahoma	700	545	−22%
Tennessee	437	341	−22%
Texas	584	477	−18%
Arkansas	599	596	−1%
Mississippi	597	652	+9%

Source: BJS has not yet published 2024 data, hence this analysis ending at 2023. ADC reports the prison population rose again in 2024, so the gap between Arkansas and its neighboring states may be wider than the table shows. Figures are people sentenced to prison under state jurisdiction per 100,000 residents.

Invest in what works

- **Diversions**

- Expansion of Specialty Courts
- Alternative sentencing pathways
- Invest in housing & healthcare to reduce court involvement

- **Programs in Prison**

- Plan for release/reentry from day one
- Increase access to classes needed for parole release
- Expand vocational and educational programs that build people up for success