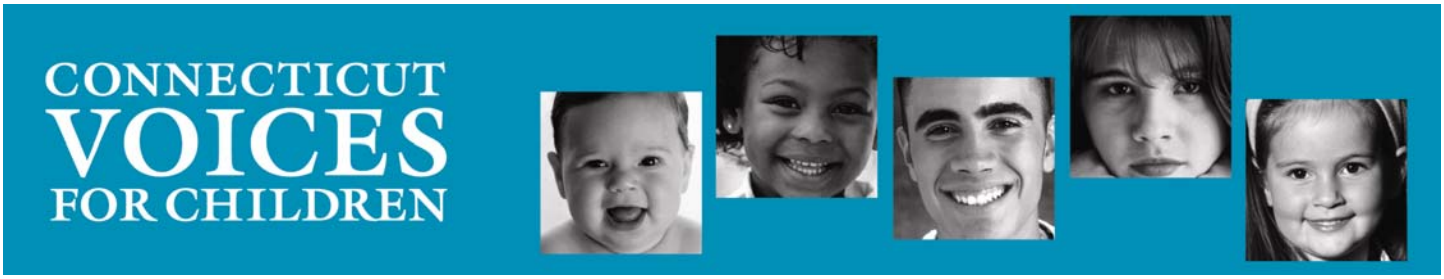

Bars Over Books: Connecticut's General Fund Spending on Corrections Outpaces Its Spending on Higher Education

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Summary

A recent study by the respected Pew Center on the States finds that Connecticut is one of just four states that spend a greater proportion of their General Fund budgets on corrections than they invest in higher education.[1] This study, based on budget data reported by each state to the National Association of State Budget Officers,[2] reported that the ratio of Connecticut's estimated FY 07 General Fund corrections spending to its higher education spending was 1.03.[3] That is, for every $1.00 spent on higher education, Connecticut spent $1.03 on corrections.

Notably, this has not always been the case. Twenty years ago (in FY 87), Connecticut's ratio was 0.35 (i.e., for each $1.00 spent on higher education, Connecticut spent only 35 cents on corrections).[4]

The Nation's, and Connecticut's, Rapid Increase in Incarceration

United States. Startlingly high, and increasing, numbers of Americans are behind bars. Although the nation's population has increased by just 24% in the last twenty years,[5] the total state and federal prison population has nearly tripled.[6] For the first time in our nation's history, more than one out of every hundred American adults are locked up. At the beginning of 2008, 2.3 million American adults were incarcerated, resulting in an incarceration rate of one person incarcerated for every 99.1 adults.[7]

Although only about five percent of the world population, the United States accounts for nearly one quarter of world's prison population and leads the world in both absolute and per capita rates of incarceration.[8] Indeed, while the United States has approximately one-quarter of China's population, our nation exceeds China in the number of persons incarcerated -- by about 800,000.[9] Further, the United States has about 750 inmates for every 100,000 residents. Next closest in its incarceration rate is the Russian Federation (at 628 inmates per 100,000 residents).[10]

Connecticut. In 2005, Connecticut had about 544 inmates per 100,000 residents.[11] This rate is by far the highest among the New England states, though in the second lowest quintile among all states.[12] Connecticut's incarceration rate also exceeds that of 25 of the 26 European countries with the largest inmate populations, with only the Russian Federation, whose territory extends into both Europe and Asia, incarcerating a greater share of its residents. By comparison, England and Wales have 148 inmates for every 100,000 residents, while Turkey has just 112, France 85, and Denmark and Italy 67.[13]

Connecticut's combined state and federal prison population also has grown quite quickly. Twenty years ago, the combined prison population stood at 7,511,[14] while today 20,784 are behind bars.[15] This 177% growth in incarceration in 20 years slightly outpaced the national rate of growth.

Growth in Connecticut's *state* prison population also has far outstripped growth in the number of students attending its public colleges and universities. Between 1993 and 2007, Connecticut's incarcerated population grew by 61%

(from 11,769 to 18,892 inmates),[16] while the number of full-time equivalent students attending its public college and universities grew by just 26% (from 63,565 to 79,927 students).[17]

Racial disparities. While the absolute number and rate of persons incarcerated in our state and nation is staggering in itself, the data are even more troubling for some specific demographic sub-groups.

> *Men.* Nationally, 1 in 54 of *all* men age 18 and older are in prison (about 2%), but 1 in 15 black adult men is incarcerated. One in 30 male young adults (aged 20 to 34) is incarcerated, compared to 1 in 9 black young adults.[18] Hispanic men also are incarcerated at higher rates than their white counterparts. One in 36 Hispanic adult men is in prison, compared to 1 in 106 white adult men.
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> *Women.* A significant racial imbalance in incarceration rates by race and ethnicity also exists among women. While 1 in 580 women age 18 and older are incarcerated, only 1 in 859 adult white women are in imprisoned, compared to 1 in 436 Hispanic women and 1 in 203 black women.[19]

The Soaring Costs of Incarceration

As a result of such high, and increasing, rates of incarceration, Connecticut spends an extraordinary, and increasing, sum on corrections. This sum is likely only to increase with recent changes in criminal law that increase the length of imprisonment for certain offenses.[20]

In FY 07, Connecticut spent an estimated $661 million in General Fund dollars on corrections, compared to $644 million on higher education.[21] That is, for every General Fund dollar that Connecticut invested in higher education, it spent $1.03 on corrections. This ratio exceeds nearly every other state. Indeed, only three states currently have higher ratios of corrections to higher education spending, as seen in Figure 1 below.[22]

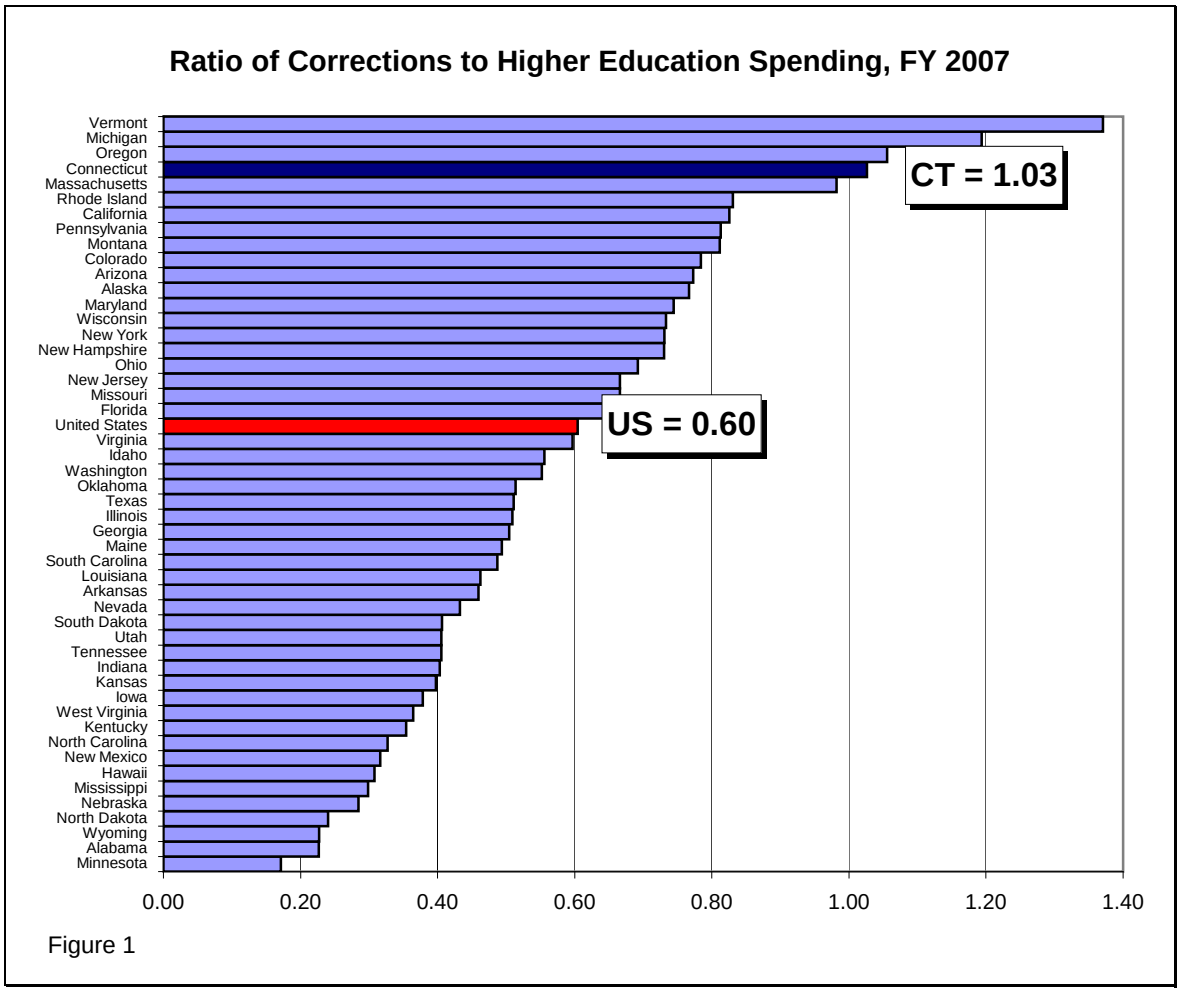
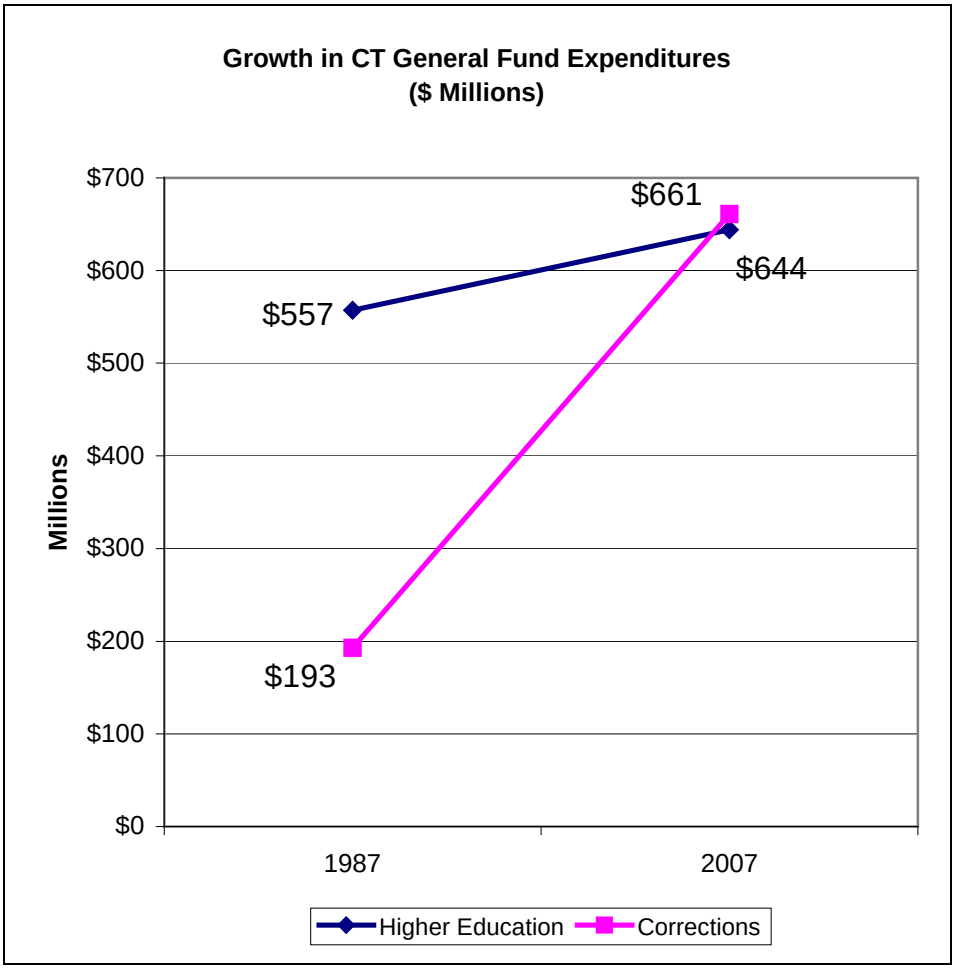


Figure 1

Also troubling are the vastly differing rates of growth in Connecticut's spending on corrections and higher education from the General Fund. Connecticut has increased its General Fund spending on corrections from $193 million in 1987 (in inflation-adjusted 2007 dollars) to $661 million in 2007. Over the same period, General Fund higher education spending increased from $557 million to $644 million. In other words, real (inflation-adjusted) corrections General Fund spending grew by 242% over the past twenty years (more than 12% per year), to overtake higher education spending which grew by only 16% (less than 1% per year), as shown in the chart below.[23]



Earlier Interventions, Planning, and Education Could Reduce Corrections Spending

There are multiple reasons why Connecticut's prison population and corrections' budget have soared over the last two decades, including changes in sentencing laws and inadequacies in the state's drug and alcohol treatment and mental health services systems. While it is important that Connecticut use state resources to have a high quality corrections system to protect public safety, it is also clear that many of the persons currently incarcerated do not pose a serious danger to others and could benefit more from community-based programs that could reduce recidivism than they do from incarceration. This also would be more cost-effective in the long run.

However, spending on our corrections system is largely reactive and represents an approach to state governance that unfortunately is endemic across multiple systems of Connecticut's state government. Instead of the state planning proactively and investing in children and youth through education, prevention programs, higher education opportunities and family supports, Connecticut instead pays huge sums to incarcerate and attempt to rehabilitate its residents. Proper planning and strategic investments in preventing bad outcomes, along with rational punishment for those convicted of crime, could reduce corrections spending. This could enable Connecticut to provide additional funds to expand higher education opportunities and educate young people instead of incarcerating them.

[1] J. Warren, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008* (The Pew Center on the States, February 28, 2008) at 16, available at: http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=35904. Ironically, Connecticut's dubious state ranking on corrections spending compared to higher education spending is *less* a consequence of what it spends on corrections than what is spends on higher education. Connecticut's spending on corrections (4.4% of General Fund spending) places it actually 7th *lowest* in the nation, and below the 50-state average of 6.8% of General Fund spending. By comparison, Connecticut's spending on higher education as a share of total General Fund spending (4.3%) is even further behind the 50-state average of 11.1% of General Fund spending. J. Warren at pp. 6, 23 (calculations by CT Voices).

[2] National Association of State Budget Officers, *2006 State Expenditure Report* (Fall 2007), pp. 6, 23, 58, available at: http://www.nasbo.org/Publications/PDFs/fy2006er.pdf. [hereinafter NASBO] This report defines "state higher education spending" to include "support of public university systems, community colleges, and vocational education institutions" and "corrections spending" to include the costs to "build and operate prison systems and may include spending on juvenile justice programs and alternatives to incarceration such as probation and parole." Connecticut reported to NASBO an estimated $661 million in General Fund corrections spending in FY 07. Excluded from Connecticut's reported corrections spending (but not from most other states' reports) were corrections-related health and pension benefits. Also excluded by Connecticut and 39 other states was spending on institutions for the criminally-insane. Connecticut reported to NASBO an estimated $644 million in FY 07 General Fund higher education spending. Total estimated FY 07 General Fund spending reported by Connecticut to NASBO was $14,949 million.

[3] The average ratio across the 50 states was 0.60 (i.e., 60 cents in corrections spending for every dollar of higher education spending). The only other states in which corrections spending exceeded higher education spending as a share of the General Fund budget were Oregon (ratio of 1.06), Michigan (1.19) and Vermont (1.37). J. Warren at 31, Table A-3.

[4] J. Warren at 31, Table A-3.

[5] Population Estimates Program, US. Census available http://www.census.gov/popest/archives/1990s/popclockest.txt, and http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=PEP_2007_EST&-mt_name=PEP_2007_EST_G2007_T001

[6] J. Warren, at 5.

[7] J. Warren, at 5

[8] A. Liptak, "Inmate Count in US Dwarfs Other Nations" (*New York Times*, April 23, 2008).

[9] J. Warren, at 5. The Chinese prison population count does not include those held in administrative detention, which includes political prisoners, and likely numbers in the hundreds of thousands. A. Liptak, "Inmate Count in US Dwarfs Other Nations" (*New York Times,* April 23, 2008).

[10] J. Warren, at 35, Table A-7 (International Comparisons).

[11] J. Warren, at 34, Table A-6 (State Incarceration Rates, 2005, By Quintile).

[12] J. Warren, at 34, Table A-6 (State Incarceration Rates, 2005, By Quintile). The corresponding rates in other New England states are (from lowest to highest): Maine (273 inmates per 100,000 residents); Rhode Island (313 per 100,000); Vermont (317 per 100,000); New Hampshire (319 per 100,000 and Massachusetts (356 per 100,000).

[13] J. Warren, at 35.

[14] J. Hill and P. Harrison, "Prisoners Under State or Federal Jurisdiction" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 2005) available: http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/data/corpop02.csv

[15] J. Warren, at 29

[16] CT Department of Correction, *Incarcerated Population by Status and Gender (as of July 1 Each Year).* Available at: www.ct.gov/doc/cwp/view.asp?a=1505&q=265598.

[17] CT Department of Higher Education, *Fall 2007 College and University Enrollment in Connecticut: Comprehensive Report,* Table 4 (total full time equivalent enrollment in Connecticut higher education institutions). Available at: www.ctdhe.org/info/pdfs/2008/2007FallEnrollmentReport.pdf. Note, growth in "full headcount" enrollment (includes full and part-time students) was just 8% (from 104,302 students in 1993 to 112,495 students in 2007). Id. at Table 3.

[18] J. Warren, at 6, citing analysis of "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2006" (United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2007). All demographic sub-group analyses rely on midyear 2006 (not 2008) data.

[19] J. Warren, at 34, Table A-6.

[20] Public Act 08-51, An Act Concerning Persistent Dangerous Felony Offenders and Providing Additional Resources to the Criminal Justice System, sets minimum, and in some cases increases maximum, penalties for persistent dangerous felony offenders.

[21] J. Warren, at 30, citing "State Expenditure Report FY 2006" (National Association of State Budget Officers, Fall 2007) at 58. The Pew Center analysis reports cross-state comparisons and ratios of spending between higher education and corrections as a function of General Fund expenditures only. By comparison, the NASBO State Expenditure Report also reports Connecticut's *total* spending on corrections and higher education. This total *includes* General Fund spending, but also includes federal funds, other state funds, and bond funds. Interestingly, the comparison of Connecticut's *total* spending in these two areas is quite different than its General Fund spending alone. In FY 07, an estimated 11.5% of *total* state spending was for higher education, compared to 2.9% on corrections. NASBO, pp. 6, 22, 58 (CT Voices' calculations) The estimated $2,767 million in total state spending on higher education in FY 07 consisted of $644 million in General Fund spending, $335 million in bond funds, $217 million in federal funds, and $1,571 million in "other state funds." NASBO, p. 23, Table 12. The estimated $690 million in total state spending on corrections consisted of $661 million in General Fund spending, $25 million in bond funds, $3 million in federal funds, and $1 million in "other state funds." NASBO, p. 58, Table 32. That is, the ratio of Connecticut's *total* spending on higher education as compared to corrections in 2007 was 4 to 1. NASBO defines "other state funds" to be "expenditures from revenue sources which are restricted by law for particular governmental functions or activities. For example, a gasoline

tax dedicated to a highway trust fund would appear in the 'other state funds' column." NASBO, p. 104. In Connecticut, tuition revenue, income from student fees and charges, the proceeds of university business enterprises and auxiliary activities, and gifts and donations are deposited in special operating funds (for the CT State University system, for example, the State University Operating Fund). Conn. Gen. Stat. §10a-99. In FY 08, $400.7 million of CSU's $584.5 million total budget was from this Fund, compared to just $158.6 million from the state's General Fund.

[22] J. Warren, at 16.

[23] National Association of State Budget Officers data compiled and analyzed by the Economic Policy Institute and shared with CT Voices for Children for this report.