REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE
Pursuant to P.A. 22 of 2025
Article 2, Section 315

Prison Population Projection Report

June 3, 2026

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Prison Population Projection Report
March 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Michigan prison population decreased by 391 prisoners during calendar year 2025 to a total of 32,387 prisoners at the end of the year (-1.2%). The prison-only population continues to hover at 1991 levels – a 30-year low first reached in March 2021 - and the total prisoner population at 1989 levels when Michigan had prisoners reacclimating to society while serving sentence in halfway houses (Community Residential Programs – CRP – were eliminated in 1998 by the Truth in Sentencing statutes).

The 2025 year-end prison population was 37.2% smaller than the record high of 51,554 prisoners reached in March of 2007 (19,167 prisoners smaller than the peak population).

During 2025, the net operating capacity of the prisons decreased by 323 beds (of which 160 were Level I and 163 were Level II) leaving the capacity of the system 95.2% occupied at the end of the year with 1,620 beds available at various security levels across 26 prison facilities.

The population projections issued in March of last year were 99.8% accurate at the end of 2025 (73 projected prisoners higher than the actual prisoner population).

FACTORS DRIVING PRISON POPULATION CHANGE

The decline in the prison population in 2025 was primarily driven by fewer felony court dispositions (down 0.7% from 2024) combined with a decrease in the prison commitment rate (down 0.4% from 2024), resulting in a corresponding decrease in prison intake (down 3.6% from 2024).

Prison intake fell for the second consecutive year, largely due to fewer new court commitments (down 5.1% from 2024) and a slight decline in parole violators with a new sentence (down 0.8% from 2024).

Additionally, an increase in movements to parole in 2025 (up 2.6% from 2024) contributed to the overall population decrease.

PRISON POPULATION PROJECTION METHODOLOGY

Michigan's prison population projections are generated by a computerized simulation model, developed originally by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD). It was then adapted for Michigan by research and planning staff in the Michigan Department of Corrections. The computerized simulation model mimics the movement of prisoners through the Corrections system and uses past practice and prior year trends to predict future patterns.

The projection model itself is simply an automated shell into which numerous probability distribution arrays must be fed (after creation outside the model by extensive statistical analyses), regarding how and when prisoners move through the various points in the corrections process (e.g., intake at reception, time to each subsequent parole hearing, likelihood of parole at each hearing, timing of release to parole, chances of return as a violator, and discharge from sentence). These arrays are broken down by the various population subgroups with particular characteristics (i.e., offense, sentence length, etc.).

Michigan's projection model incorporates finer resolution than the original NCCD model. For example, Michigan's model has up to 50 distinct maximum-term groups, each of which can have up to six minimum-term pairings. This level of detail allows particular attention to relatively short sentences of 2 years or less, which have the most influence on 3-to-5-year projection accuracy.

The projection model does not forecast the annual number of prison admissions; but once entered as values, the model does disaggregate admissions randomly based on past distributions. Then, the projection model simulates the flow of the existing prison population and new intake through the system, including feedback loops for parole violators with and without new sentences.

The source of the raw data for the projection is downloads from the MDOC data systems and the data are analyzed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Once the projection model shell is populated with probability distribution arrays, numerous iterations of the model are run, "fine tuning" against two or more years of historical, actual trace vectors for purposes of validating the rebuilt data.

After a successful result is obtained (which must track past trends accurately and must correspond to short-term expectations for the future informed by considerable independent analysis of recent trends), then the projections are issued by the Department.

Multiple projection runs can be combined – especially in times of particular uncertainty – to generate a confidence interval based on the monthly minimums and maximums for all of the runs, with the expectation that future population will more assuredly fall within the

confidence interval. The model can also be used for "what if" analyses, such as simulating the impact of proposed legislative sunset provisions or modifications to sentencing laws.

Exceptions to the model's track record of better than 99% short-term projection accuracy have sometimes occurred over the years, when criminal justice practices and trends deviated from the past or showed unstable or uncharacteristic patterns – in which case the problem has generally been inadequate history against which to validate and fine-tune the results.

Long-term projections are generally considered less reliable because of the difficulty associated with predicting multi-year prison intake volume as well as changes in laws and policies that may affect the underlying statistical distributions which drive the model. That is why the projections are updated at least once each year – to adjust for any new laws, policies, court rulings, operational practices or trends.

NEW PRISON POPULATION PROJECTION ASSUMPTIONS

The prison population projections in this report are a baseline forecast that assumes no new legislative or policy initiatives. Therefore, the assumptions underlying these projections pertain to the key factors that drive prison population, specifically prison intake, paroles, and parole revocations.

Prison Intake

Prison intake declined again in 2025, but monthly trends reveal a more nuanced picture. New court commitments leveled off by mid-2025 and have recently begun to trend upward. It is too early to know whether this represents a temporary fluctuation or the start of a longer-term shift.

Again this year, forecasting intake remains difficult. On one hand, prison intake recovered to its pre-pandemic trajectory of gradual decline, and felony court dispositions continue to trend downward.

On the other hand, intake levels remain near a four-decade low (excluding the COVID-19 period). Historically, each of the last four times intake reached a similar low point, it subsequently increased for at least two consecutive years. Additionally, the decline of the felony court dispositions to prison flattened in the latter half of 2025.

The prudent course is to assume prison intake will continue its recent increase at the same rate until 2027, when it reaches a peak similar to what was last seen in 2023. This projection update thus assumes annual prison admissions will increase 1.7% in 2026 and 5.9% in 2027, followed by a 0.9% decrease in 2028, and then stability thereafter.

Paroles

Although both the 2025 parole grant rate (down 0.8% from 2024) and the number of Parole Board decisions (down 4.2% from 2024) declined, total movements to parole still increased by 2.6% in 2025. Monthly trends show that paroles rose through early 2025 before beginning to decline. Since 2025 began with more paroles than early 2024, the overall total for 2025 finished above the prior year.

Assuming the 2025 parole grant rate continues through the projection period, the model shows continued growth in movements to parole through 2030, driven largely by 2021 and 2022 increased prison intakes that are now reaching parole eligibility.

Parole Revocations

Parole violator technical (PVT) returns to prison increased 16.3% in 2025 compared to 2024 - an anticipated increase following two years of increased movements to parole. Parole violators returned with new sentences (PVNS) remained flat for a third consecutive year in 2025, remaining at historic lows.

Parole revocations are related to the number of paroles that occur. The increase in paroles can be expected to produce an increase in parole revocations. This projection update thus assumes the number of PVTs and PVNS will increase through the remainder of the projection period.

Implications for the New Prison Population Forecast

Given the above discussion regarding assumptions, it is projected the prison population will remain flat in 2026, and then return to a decrease through 2030.

Again, keep in mind this baseline projection makes no assumptions about future changes in criminal justice statutes, policies or practices that would further affect the size of the prison population.

It should be remembered that the prison population projection is not expected to be precisely on-target from one month to the next, but rather will be expected to see the actual population alternately curving under and over the projection line periodically during the course of time, to even out the month-to-month fluctuations in favor of the longer-term trend.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
Actual and Projected Prison Population

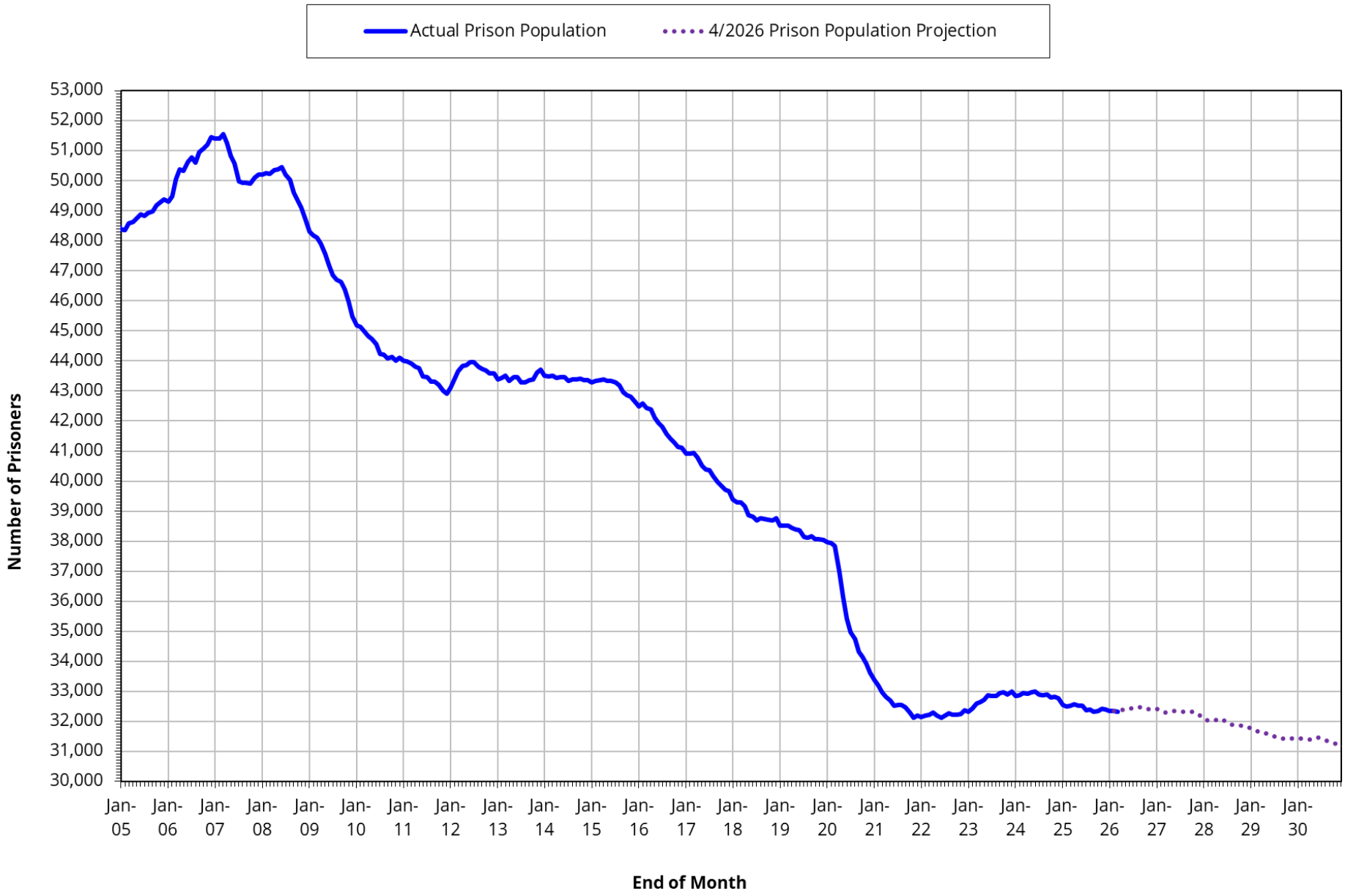

Table 1

Prison Population Projection
April 2026

End of Month	Projected Prisoner Population	Yearly Change
Mar-26	32,317	
Jun-26	32,449	
Sep-26	32,462	
Dec-26	32,412	25
Mar-27	32,304	
Jun-27	32,349	
Sep-27	32,286	
Dec-27	32,201	-211
Mar-28	32,050	
Jun-28	32,042	
Sep-28	31,860	
Dec-28	31,839	-362
Mar-29	31,654	
Jun-29	31,577	
Sep-29	31,433	
Dec-29	31,446	-393
Mar-30	31,403	
Jun-30	31,470	
Sep-30	31,331	
Dec-30	31,206	-240

MDOC Office of Research & Planning 4/16/2026

Table 2

Prison Population Projection
April 2026

End of Month	Projected Prisoner Population	Yearly Change
Jan-26	32,335	
Feb-26	32,351	
Mar-26	32,317	
Apr-26	32,374	
May-26	32,431	
Jun-26	32,449	
Jul-26	32,424	
Aug-26	32,471	
Sep-26	32,462	
Oct-26	32,478	
Nov-26	32,403	
Dec-26	32,412	25
Jan-27	32,425	
Feb-27	32,343	
Mar-27	32,304	
Apr-27	32,300	
May-27	32,345	
Jun-27	32,349	
Jul-27	32,316	
Aug-27	32,329	
Sep-27	32,286	
Oct-27	32,327	
Nov-27	32,225	
Dec-27	32,201	-211
Jan-28	32,145	
Feb-28	32,028	
Mar-28	32,050	
Apr-28	32,047	
May-28	32,090	
Jun-28	32,042	
Jul-28	31,942	
Aug-28	31,899	
Sep-28	31,860	
Oct-28	31,861	
Nov-28	31,856	
Dec-28	31,839	-362
Jan-29	31,746	
Feb-29	31,725	
Mar-29	31,654	
Apr-29	31,652	
May-29	31,606	
Jun-29	31,577	
Jul-29	31,492	
Aug-29	31,442	
Sep-29	31,433	
Oct-29	31,452	
Nov-29	31,413	
Dec-29	31,446	-393
Jan-30	31,449	
Feb-30	31,431	
Mar-30	31,403	
Apr-30	31,406	
May-30	31,451	
Jun-30	31,470	
Jul-30	31,413	
Aug-30	31,379	
Sep-30	31,331	
Oct-30	31,301	
Nov-30	31,226	
Dec-30	31,206	-240

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