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PRESS RELEASE

**Oregon Gets Smarter on Crime
New Laws Projected to Decrease Prison Population**

The Oregon Office of Economic Analysis issued its twice yearly prison forecast on Thursday, reflecting an expected decrease from the estimates projected just six months ago. Oregon's current prison population is nearly 14,000, but is projected to temporarily decline by January. The [report](#) cites the passage of [House Bill 3508](#) as the primary reason for the reduction. During the 2009 legislative session, legislators found safe and sensible ways to save money from reduced need for prison beds by choosing to partially delay implementation of Measure 57 and increasing earned time for non-violent offenders.

Oregon's prison population has been rising significantly since the passage of [Ballot Measure 11](#) in 1994, which created mandatory minimum sentences for certain person-to-person crimes. In 1990, there were less than 5,500 prisoners in Oregon. By 2003, the population had more than doubled, up to 11,700. More dramatically, the amount of tax dollars eaten up by the Department of Corrections has also skyrocketed. In the 1993-1995 biennium the DOC budget was \$377 million; the 2009-2011 DOC budget is \$1.4 *billion*.

Kevin Mannix, the author of Measure 11, pushed a new measure that would have created mandatory minimums for drug and property crimes, Measure 61, in 2008. Oregon voters rejected mandatory minimums and voted instead for Measure 57, which lengthened some sentences but promised to invest in drug and alcohol treatment.

Shannon Wight, Associate Director for Partnership for Safety and Justice, sees the declining prison forecast as a reflection of a legislature and public who are looking for smarter approaches to crime.

"Oregon started down the path of a smarter approach to crime in 2005 when the legislature passed a bill to address the methamphetamine epidemic through drug treatment and getting the ingredients for meth off our drug stores' shelves. Voters sent a clear signal through the defeat of Measure 61 in 2008 and passage of Measure 57 that they want an investment in treatment, not just jail beds."

"With the passage of House Bill 3508 the legislature again took a courageous step towards smarter approaches to crime. Oregon can save billions of dollars by slowing the growth of the prison population without sacrificing public safety in the process. In fact, we have already seen the benefits of investing in treatment and prevention rather than expensive and less effective incarceration," Wight says.

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The provisions in HB 3508 that contributed to the decreased prison population forecast will sunset after a few years, which is why the forecast also estimates that by 2019 our prison population will increase to over 16,500. *“Clearly, Oregon needs not just short term shifts in our approach to criminal justice but long term shifts as well, or we will be back in the position of closing schools to build prisons,”* says Wight.