Chapter 1 — Colorado's Adult Offender Population

This chapter provides a summary and an overview of Colorado's adult offender population as well as a comparison of its adult offender population with that of other states. Colorado's adult offender population includes the prison, parole, probation, and community corrections populations.

This chapter highlights the following:

- there are four major felony adult offender populations under supervision in Colorado: the probation, community corrections, parole, and prison populations. In total, Colorado's adult offender population was 67,053 in FY 2001-02, up 141.1 percent from FY 1988-89;

- since FY 1986-87, the number of adult offenders per 100,000 Colorado residents more than doubled. In FY 2000-01, 1.4 percent of the state's population were adult offenders under supervision versus only 0.7 percent in FY 1986-87;

- nearly two-thirds of adult offenders convicted of a felony in Colorado are on probation, while 24 percent are in prison; and

- as of December 31, 2000, Colorado's rate of correctional supervision per 100,000 state residents was 20.2 percent below the national average.

ADULT OFFENDER POPULATION OVERVIEW

The nearly 70,000 adult offenders being supervised in Colorado, either in prison, on parole, on probation, or in a community corrections facility, are profiled in this chapter. Colorado's adult offender population grew 5.0 percent from FY 2000-01 to FY 2001-02 from 63,832 offenders to 67,053 offenders. Since FY 1988-89, the total adult offender population has grown by 141.1 percent. Table 1.1 summarizes growth trends in the state's adult offender population.

The majority of Colorado's adult offender population (64.7 percent) is serving a probation sentence, followed by those serving a prison sentence (24.3 percent). Community corrections accounted for 4.9 percent and parolees for 6.0 percent of the offender population.

When we published our last report in January 2001, the fastest growing segments of the offender population for the ten years ending in FY 1998-99 were the probation population and the community corrections population, both up about 20 percent over the same period. The prison population ranked third in growth, increasing 108.2 percent. This report, the fastest-growing segment of the offender population since FY 1988-89 was the prison population, up 156.7 percent. The probation population grew 144.8 percent, and the community corrections and parole populations grew approximately 100 percent and 95 percent respectively. The main reason for the increase in the prison population growth during this period is the effect of mandatory parole. In 1993, the General Assembly adopted a law requiring all offenders released from the DOC to serve a period of mandatory parole upon release. The effects of that law have only recently been realized.

While it would seem that mandatory parole for all offenders would mean more offenders on parole, that has not necessarily been the case. While the parole population increased most years, the parole population actually dropped between FY 1998-99 and 1999-00 (1.0 percent) and dropped again between FY 2000-01 and FY 2001-02 (3.7 percent). These decreases perhaps reflect the parole board's reluctance to release certain offenders on parole, particularly violent offenders, before completing their prison sentence. Those offenders are staying in prison longer, to serve their entire sentence before being released to parole, and thus, increasing the prison population. Further, increased numbers of offenders released on parole have resulted in increased numbers of offenders whose parole is revoked to prison, further increasing the prison population.

Other possible reasons for the increase in the growth of the prison and parole populations include indeterminate sentencing for sex offenders. Under a law passed in 1998, sex offenders now serve indeterminate sentences on probation, in prison, or on parole for a period of up to the person's natural life. Increases in the number of offenders sentenced to prison for drug crimes may also account for the increase in the growth in the prison population. Nearly 23 percent of new prison commitments in FY 2000-01 were convicted of a drug offense. The next-largest category of DOC new commitments was for offenders convicted of attempt, conspiracy, or accessory to commit a non-violent crime at 11.3 percent.

Table 1.1 illustrates the change in growth patterns in the probation, community corrections, parole and prison populations.

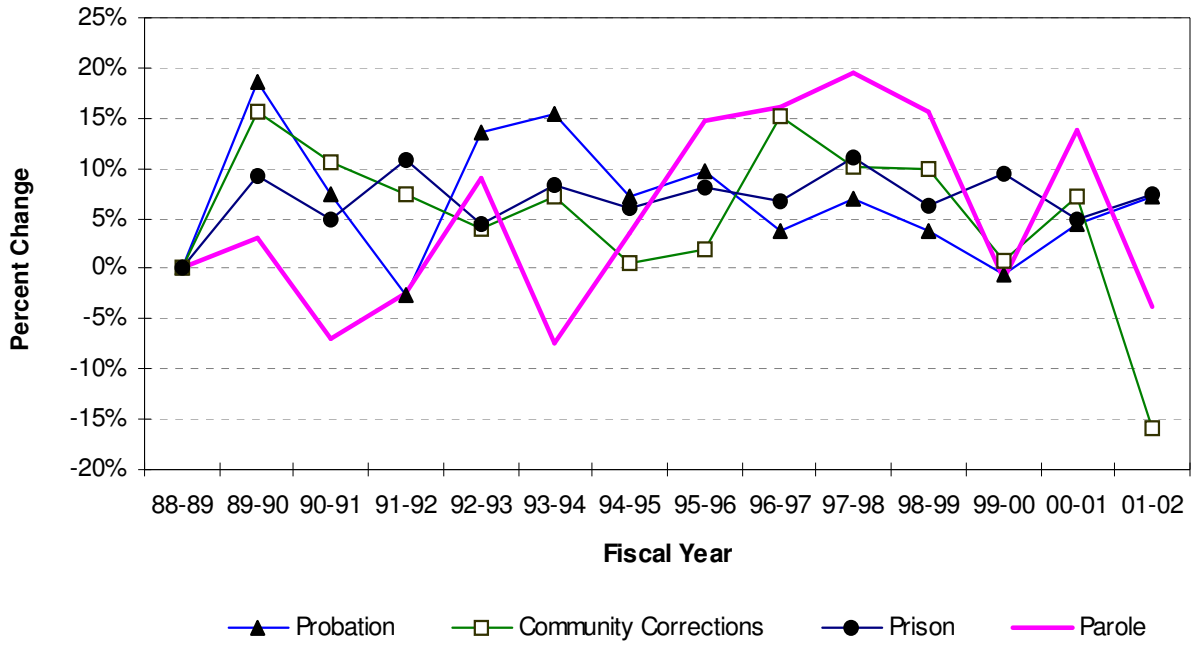
Table 1.1: Adult Offender Population Growth – FY 1988-89 to FY 2001-02

	Probation	Community Corrections	Prison	Parole	Total
FY 1988-89	17,728	1,653	6,360	2,073	27,814
Percent Change	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
FY 1989-90	21,023	1,913	6,952	2,137	32,025
Percent Change	18.6%	15.7%	9.3%	3.1%	15.1%
FY 1990-91	22,567	2,115	7,299	1,990	33,971
Percent Change	7.34%	10.6%	5.0%	(6.9)%	6.08%
FY 1991-92	21,966	2,271	8,093	1,943	34,273
Percent Change	(2.66)%	7.4%	10.9%	(2.4)%	0.9%
FY 1992-93	24,965	2,363	8,451	2,116	37,895
Percent Change	13.65%	4.1%	4.4%	8.9%	10.57%
FY 1993-94	28,836	2,533	9,164	1,958	42,491
Percent Change	15.5%	7.2%	8.4%	(7.5)%	12.1%
FY 1994-95	30,891	2,547	9,727	2,026	45,191
Percent Change	7.1%	0.6%	6.1%	3.5%	6.4%
FY 1995-96	33,881	2,599	10,511	2,322	49,313
Percent Change	9.7%	2.0%	8.1%	14.6%	9.1%
FY 1996-97	35,163	2,994	11,224	2,695	52,076
Percent Change	3.8%	15.2%	6.8%	16.1%	5.6%
FY 1997-98	37,602	3,301	12,470	3,219	56,592
Percent Change	6.9%	10.3%	11.1%	19.4%	8.7%
FY 1998-99	38,983	3,628	13,243	3,722	59,576
Percent Change	3.7%	9.9%	6.2%	15.6%	5.3%
FY 1999-00	38,785	3,660	14,485	3,685	60,615
Percent Change	(0.5)%	0.9%	9.4%	(1.0)%	1.7%
FY 2000-01	40,510	3,923	15,207	4,192	63,832
Percent Change	4.4%	7.2%	5.0%	13.8%	5.3%
FY 2001-02	43,392	3,301	16,323	4,037	67,053
Percent Change	7.1%	(15.9)%	7.3%	(3.7)%	5.0%
FY 1988-89 to FY 2001-02	25,664	1,648	9,963	1,964	39,239
Cumulative % Change	144.8%	99.7%	156.7%	94.7%	141.1%

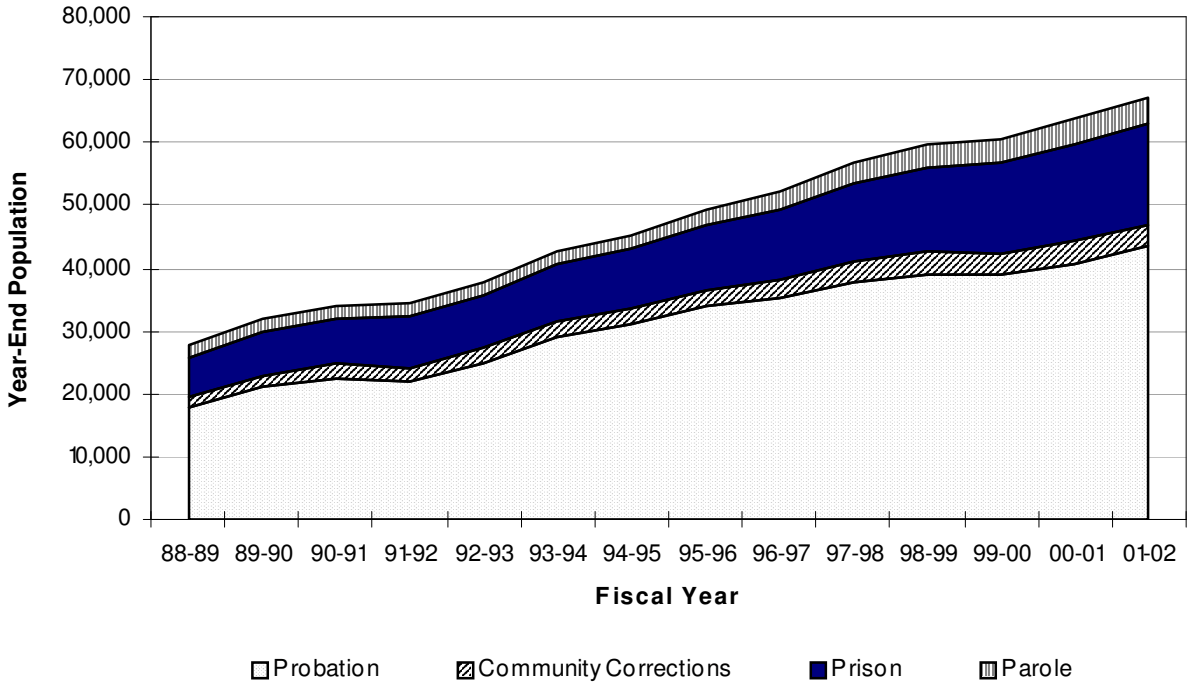
NA: Not Applicable.
Source: Division of Criminal Justice.

Graphs 1.1 and 1.2 provide a visual perspective of the growth in the offender population in Colorado. The first graph provides a comparison of the growth trends for each offender group. The second graph reflects the actual population of the offender groups.

Graph 1.1: Adult Offender Population – FY 1988-89 to FY 2001-02 Percentage Increase



Graph 1.2: Adult Offender Population – FY 1988-89 to FY 2001-02 Total Year-End Population



In FY 1986-87, there were 704 adult offenders under the state's supervision per 100,000 Colorado residents. Since that time, the number of adult offenders in Colorado incarcerated, or placed on probation, in a community corrections facility, and on parole more than doubled, to 1,441 adult offenders per 100,000 Colorado residents in FY 2000-01. In effect, 1.4 percent of the state's population were adult offenders under state supervision in FY 2000-01 versus 0.7 percent in FY 1986-87. The strongest growth in the adult offender population occurred between FY 1987-88 and FY 1989-90, when the impact of a 1985 law change that doubled the length of maximum sentences was fully realized. The parole population saw a similar increase in growth between FY 1995-96 and FY 2000-01 when the effects of the 1993 mandatory parole law began to manifest. Table 1.2 provides an overview of the various adult offender populations per 100,000 Colorado residents.

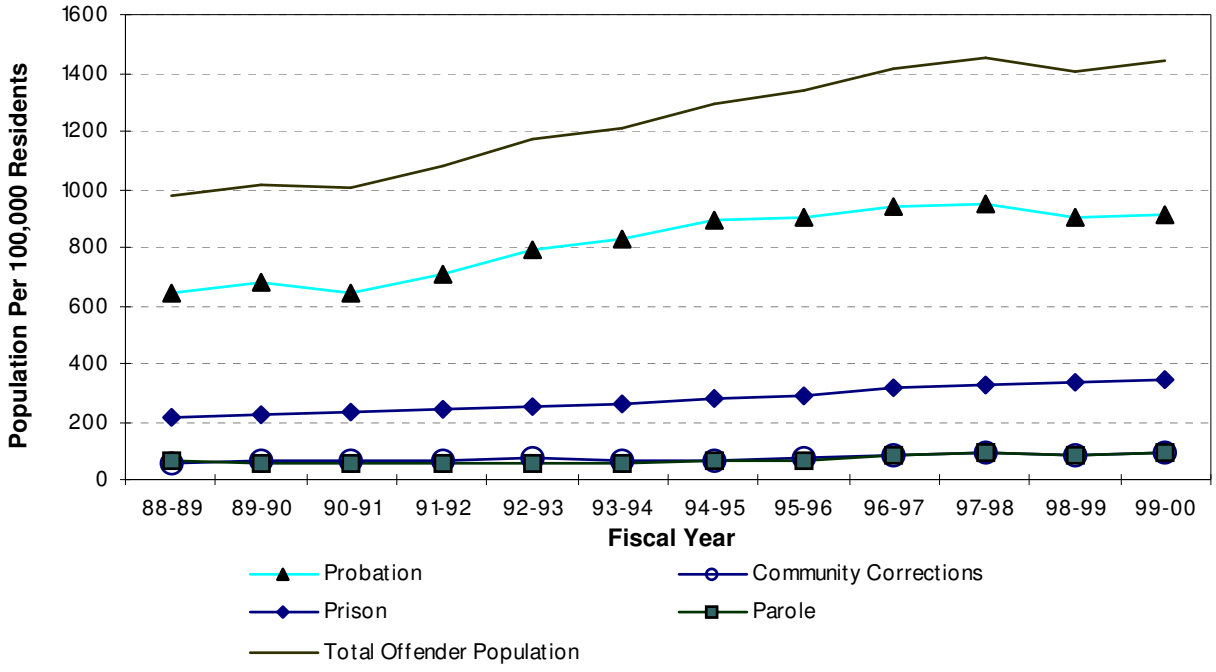
Table 1.2: Adult Offenders Under State Supervision per 100,000 Colorado Residents

	Probation	Community Corrections	Prison	Parole	Total
FY 1986-87	443.0	34.1	135.2	91.6	703.9
FY 1987-88	444.8	39.6	176.2	85.6	746.2
FY 1988-89	540.8	50.4	194.0	63.2	848.4
FY 1989-90	638.2	58.1	211.0	64.9	972.2
FY 1990-91	675.9	63.3	218.6	59.6	1,017.4
FY 1991-92	641.8	66.4	236.5	56.7	1,001.4
FY 1992-93	708.1	67.0	239.7	60.0	1,074.8
FY 1993-94	794.4	69.8	252.5	53.9	1,170.6
FY 1994-95	829.1	68.4	261.1	54.4	1,213.0
FY 1995-96	888.8	68.2	275.7	60.9	1,293.6
FY 1996-97	903.0	76.9	288.3	69.2	1,337.4
FY 1997-98	941.3	82.6	312.2	80.6	1,416.7
FY 1998-99	949.8	88.4	322.7	90.7	1,451.6
FY 1999-00	901.8	85.1	336.8	85.7	1,409.3
FY 2000-01	914.2	88.5	343.2	94.6	1,440.6

Source: Division of Criminal Justice/State Demographer's Office.

Graph 1.3 provides a visual overview of each component of the adult offender population per 100,000 residents. It illustrates how a greater proportion of Colorado residents were under the umbrella of the adult offender system in FY 2000-01 than in FY 1986-87. Since FY 1986-87, the Colorado population grew by 35.7 percent, whereas the adult offender population increased 178.0 percent.

Graph 1.3: Adult Offender Population per 100,000 Colorado Residents



COMPARISON OF RATES OF CORRECTIONAL SUPERVISION ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

Table 1.3 compares adult offender rates per 100,000 residents across the United States for state and federal corrections systems as of December 31, 2000, the most recent information available. The data are presented by state for the three major types of correctional supervision populations: prison, parole, and probation. The total rate of correctional supervision per 100,000 people is also displayed toward the right side of Table 1.3. Please note that this is a somewhat different measure than presented in the previous section, as it includes federal facilities, but excludes offenders in community corrections. We utilize a different measure in this section because it is the only source that provides a state-by-state comparison.

Table 1.3: Adults Under Correctional Supervision Across the United States*
December 31, 2000

Number Per 100,000 Residents									
State	Prison		Rank	Parole	Rank	Probation	Rank	TOTAL	RANK
Alabama	549		7	165	25	1,222	30	**1,936**	**33**
Alaska	341	**	33	116	32	1,091	35	**1,548**	**35**
Arizona	515		10	92	37	1,614	21	**2,221**	**23**
Arkansas	458		16	474	7	1,523	22	**2,455**	**19**
California	474		14	478	6	1,394	26	**2,346**	**21**
Colorado	**403**		**21**	**172**	**24**	**1,471**	**24**	**2,046**	**28**
Connecticut	398	**	23	73	43	2,148	13	**2,619**	**16**
Delaware	513	**	11	98	35	3,404	4	**4,015**	**5**
District of Columbia	971	**	1	1,244	1	2,639	8	**4,854**	**2**
Florida	462		15	49	46	2,390	10	**2,901**	**12**
Georgia	550		6	358	10	5,124	1	**6,032**	**1**
Hawaii	302	**	38	273	13	1,695	20	**2,270**	**22**
Idaho	430		17	156	27	3,794	2	**4,380**	**4**
Illinois	371		27	329	11	1,515	23	**2,215**	**24**
Indiana	335		34	109	33	2,390	9	**2,834**	**13**
Iowa	276		40	126	31	964	36	**1,366**	**40**
Kansas	312		36	194	21	810	41	**1,316**	**42**
Kentucky	373		26	161	26	676	46	**1,210**	**44**
Louisiana	801		2	704	4	1,103	34	**2,608**	**17**
Maine	129		50	3	51	800	43	**932**	**48**
Maryland	429		18	359	9	2,128	14	**2,916**	**11**
Massachusetts	252		42	76	42	933	38	**1,261**	**43**
Michigan	480		13	215	19	2,365	11	**3,060**	**9**
Minnesota	128		51	85	39	3,151	5	**3,364**	**7**
Mississippi	688		4	77	41	731	45	**1,496**	**38**
Missouri	494		12	297	12	1,199	32	**1,990**	**29**
Montana	348		31	92	38	899	39	**1,339**	**41**
Nebraska	228		44	38	48	1,704	19	**1,970**	**31**
Nevada	518		9	173	23	820	40	**1,511**	**37**
New Hampshire	185		48	102	34	392	51	**679**	**51**
New Jersey	362		28	235	16	2,064	15	**2,661**	**15**
New Mexico	279		39	127	30	802	42	**1,208**	**45**
New York	383		24	405	8	1,344	28	**2,132**	**26**
North Carolina	347		32	55	45	1,741	18	**2,143**	**25**
North Dakota	158		49	24	49	579	49	**761**	**49**
Ohio	406		20	216	17	2,302	12	**2,924**	**10**
Oklahoma	685		5	71	44	1,212	31	**1,968**	**32**
Oregon	316		35	693	5	1,794	17	**2,803**	**14**
Pennsylvania	307		37	876	2	1,293	29	**2,476**	**18**
Rhode Island	197	**	47	44	47	2,869	7	**3,110**	**8**
South Carolina	532		8	141	28	1,428	25	**2,101**	**27**
South Dakota	353		29	268	14	763	44	**1,384**	**39**
Tennessee	399		22	189	22	952	37	**1,540**	**36**
Texas	730		3	747	3	2,955	6	**4,432**	**3**
Utah	254		41	216	18	649	47	**1,119**	**47**
Vermont	218	**	45	196	20	2,017	16	**2,431**	**20**
Virginia	422		19	96	36	636	48	**1,154**	**46**
Washington	251		43	4	50	3,675	3	**3,930**	**6**
West Virginia	211		46	79	40	431	50	**721**	**50**
Wisconsin	378		25	236	15	1,359	27	**1,973**	**30**
Wyoming	349		30	141	29	1,128	33	**1,618**	**34**
Total State	**432**			**312**		**1,821**		**2,565**	
Federal Correctional Populations	**45**			**35**		**15**		**95**	
United States Total	**477**			**347**		**1,836**		**2,660**	

Source: Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2000

* Comprehensive data on adults in community corrections facilities were not available. For some states, this population may be included in other correctional populations.

** Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont have integrated jail-prison systems. Jail inmates are included in the prison population in these states.

According to this measure of offenders, Colorado's overall rate of correctional supervision was 2,046 people per 100,000 state residents on December 31, 2000; this was below the national average of 2,565 people per 100,000 Americans. By type of supervision, Colorado's rates of correctional supervision were below national averages. Colorado's prison incarceration rate was 6.7 percent below the national average; its probation supervision rate was 19.2 percent below the national average; and its parole supervision rate was 44.9 percent below the national average.

Colorado's prison incarceration rate was below the national average, ranking 21st among the states in prison incarceration. The national average prison incarceration rate was pushed higher by some large states with high rates of prison incarceration. Colorado ranked 24th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in its relative probation population, with 1,471 probationers per 100,000 residents. However, this was still below the national average of 1,821 state probationers per 100,000 Americans. Colorado's rank in probation supervision is the result of high rates of probation supervision in states such as Georgia, Idaho, Texas, Minnesota, and Washington, and low rates of supervision in some of the smaller states. Colorado ranked 24th in the relative parole population, up from 34th in the nation in 1995 and 29th in 1997. The increase is primarily due to the enactment of a mandatory period of parole for prison inmates in 1993.

Factors influencing correctional supervision. Correctional supervision rates are influenced by a number of factors, such as crime rates, laws governing sentence length, and decisions made about the appropriate correctional placement for an offender. For example, several areas with high crime rates (Florida, Texas, and the District of Columbia) have some of the highest proportions of their populations under correctional supervision, while some with very low crime rates (North Dakota, New Hampshire, Iowa, West Virginia, and Utah) have low overall rates of correctional supervision. The relative use of correctional placement varies by state as well. For example, Washington and Minnesota rank third and fifth highest in their rates of population under probation supervision, but rank 43rd and 51st, respectively, among the states (including Washington, D.C.) in their rates of prison incarceration. At the other extreme, Mississippi ranks fourth in terms of prison incarceration rates, but has a probation supervision rate 60 percent below the national average. Thus, prison, parole, jail, and probation populations are affected not only by the amount of crime taking place in a state, but also by the way in which a state chooses to handle its offender population.

Several states (Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont) run unified prison/local jail systems. Their prison/jail populations are reported in the prison column, raising their reported prison populations and rankings. Thus, prison incarceration rates for those six states are not directly comparable with rates in other states.