

Overview: Georgia's 2021 Fiscal Year Budget for Georgia Department of Corrections

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For Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, Gov. Brian Kemp proposed a \$1.16 billion budget for the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC), an agency charged with overseeing the state's prison system. Georgia's history of tough-on-crime policies impacted the growth of the GDC's prison population and increased expenditures by \$335.2 million between 1997 and 2007.¹

Following Gov. Deal's criminal justice reform efforts in 2012, a series of major legislative, programmatic and agency changes were implemented. These shifts were designed to reduce the length of imprisonment and mandatory minimum sentencing while also expanding probation and parole eligibility. At the end of 2019, the GDC reported a prison population totaling 55,556, only a modest decrease since 2012.^{2,3} Despite representing only 32.4 percent of Georgia's population, Black Georgians make up almost 60 percent of the inmates in GDC's custody.^{4,5} Georgia's legacy of slavery, segregation, Jim Crow and historic disinvestments in communities of color have all contributed to the disproportionate representation of the state's Black residents in incarceration.⁶

Following Governor Kemp's request that agencies submit budget reduction proposals for Amended Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021 of 4 and 6 percent respectively, the GDC has proposed reduced spending via freezing vacant positions, lowering the use of overtime by employees and decreasing funds to account for an increase in commissary prices.⁷ Overall, the GDC's budget for FY 2021 totals \$1,156,088,919, which reflects a 54.3 million dollar cut from FY 2020.⁸

By the Numbers

Amended 2020 Fiscal Year Budget

Total spending in the proposal for the Georgia Department of Corrections includes a decrease of \$47.3 million, or approximately 3.9 percent, from the current 2020 budget. Changes include:

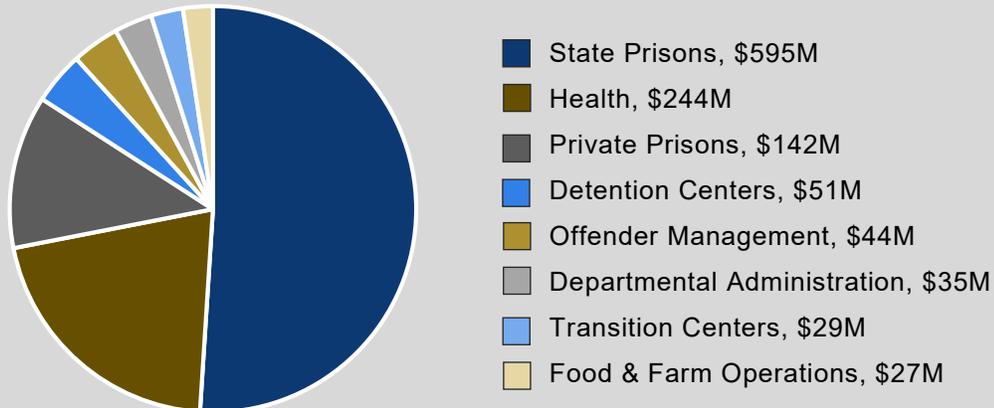
- \$14.4 million cut due to a hiring freeze on vacant positions or job eliminations
- \$6.5 million cut to reflect a reduction in overtime pay to employees
- \$1.6 million cut to GED testing and vocational certifications in transitional centers and county correctional institutions
- \$1.5 million cut due to increase in commissary pricing
- \$1.2 million cut to inmate transportation due to the implementation of virtual court systems in facilities

2021 Fiscal Year Budget

Total spending for the Georgia Department of Corrections in the FY 2021 budget is proposed to decrease by \$54.4 million, or approximately 4.5 percent, from the FY 2020 budget. Changes include:

- \$16.4 million cut due to a reduction in overtime
- \$13.7 million cut due to a hiring freeze on vacant positions or job eliminations
- \$3.5 million cut to reflect increase in commissary pricing
- \$3 million cut to inmate transportation due to the implementation of virtual court systems in facilities
- \$1.6 million cut to GED testing and vocational certifications in transitional centers and county correctional institutions

**Proposed FY 2021 Georgia Department of Corrections
Budget Summary**



Source: "Department of Corrections Program Budgets", *The Governor's Budget Report Amended Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021*, pg.146.

Proposed increases for FY2021 include:

- \$10.8 million increase for \$1,000 raises for full-time, regular employees earning \$40K or less within the Department of Corrections
- \$7.2 million increase to open Phase III of the Metro Reentry Facility that aims to help those soon be released transition back to the metropolitan Atlanta area
- \$2.5 million increase in funds to private prisons

Implications of the GDC Budget

The bulk of the departmental cuts are being felt directly by employees within the correctional system. Even if qualifying employees are allocated a \$1,000 annual raise, this will only amount to about an extra 48 cents an hour, or \$19 a week. When you couple the proposed pay raise with the \$16.4 million budget cut due to reduced overtime pay to employees, the GDC's workforce will likely be seeing less money in their pockets. Since the GDC will not be hiring for their vacant positions and will be eliminating some jobs entirely, employees could also feel the squeeze of the department's budget cuts in their increased workload.

The GDC's cuts will also affect people who are incarcerated as well as their loved ones. Prison commissaries have increasingly been used as a mechanism for state governments to shift the costs of incarceration away from the state and on to those in their custody.⁹ In Georgia, more than half of those who are incarcerated were employed either full-time or part-time before entering prison.¹⁰ Even a minor increase in commissary prices presents a substantial burden for families learning to live with less income than before.

Despite some of the deep cuts to the GDC budget, one line-item calls for increased spending: \$7.2 million has been added to the budget in support of opening Phase III of the Metro Re-entry Facility. This facility aims to provide returning citizens nearing release with resources, including mental health and risk reduction services, to assist them in their transition back to the metropolitan Atlanta community.¹¹

Endnotes

¹ Welsh, R. Z. (January 2008). Tough on Crime and the Budget, 2. Retrieved from https://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/20080111_ToughOnCrimeandTheBudget.pdf

² Georgia Department of Corrections. (January 1, 2020). Inmate Statistical Profile – All Active Inmates. Retrieved from http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/sites/all/themes/gdc/pdf/Profile_all_inmates_2019_12.pdf

³ Georgia Department of Corrections. (January 1, 2013). Inmate Statistical Profile – All Active Inmates, 6. Retrieved from http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/sites/all/files/pdf/Research/Monthly/Profile_all_inmates_2012_12.pdf

⁴ United States Census Bureau. (July 1, 2019). QuickFacts Georgia. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/GA>

⁵ Georgia Department of Corrections. (January 1, 2020). Inmate Statistical Profile – All Active Inmates. Retrieved from http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/sites/all/themes/gdc/pdf/Profile_all_inmates_2019_12.pdf

⁶ Delaney, R., Subramanian, R., Shames, A., & Turner, N. (October 2018). American History, Race, and Prison. Retrieved from <https://www.vera.org/reimagining-prison-web-report/american-history-race-and-prison>

⁷ “Department of Corrections Program Budgets”, The Governor’s Budget Report Amended Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021, 140-146. Retrieved from <https://opb.georgia.gov/document/governors-budget-reports/afy-2020-and-fy-2021-governors-budget-report/download>

⁸ “Department of Corrections Program Budgets”, The Governor’s Budget Report Amended Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021, 140-146.

⁹ Raher, Stephen. (May 2018). The Prison Policy Initiative. *The Company Store: A Deeper Look at Prison Commissaries*. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/commissary.html>

¹⁰ Georgia Department of Corrections. (January 1, 2020). Inmate Statistical Profile – All Active Inmates, 14. Retrieved from http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/sites/all/themes/gdc/pdf/Profile_all_inmates_2019_12.pdf

¹¹ Georgia Department of Corrections. Metro Reentry Facility. Retrieved from <http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/Facilities/metro-reentry-facility>