

## What Works

Effective Recidivism Reduction and  
Risk-Focused Prevention Programs

A Compendium of Evidence-Based  
Options for Preventing New and  
Persistent Criminal Behavior

Prepared for the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice

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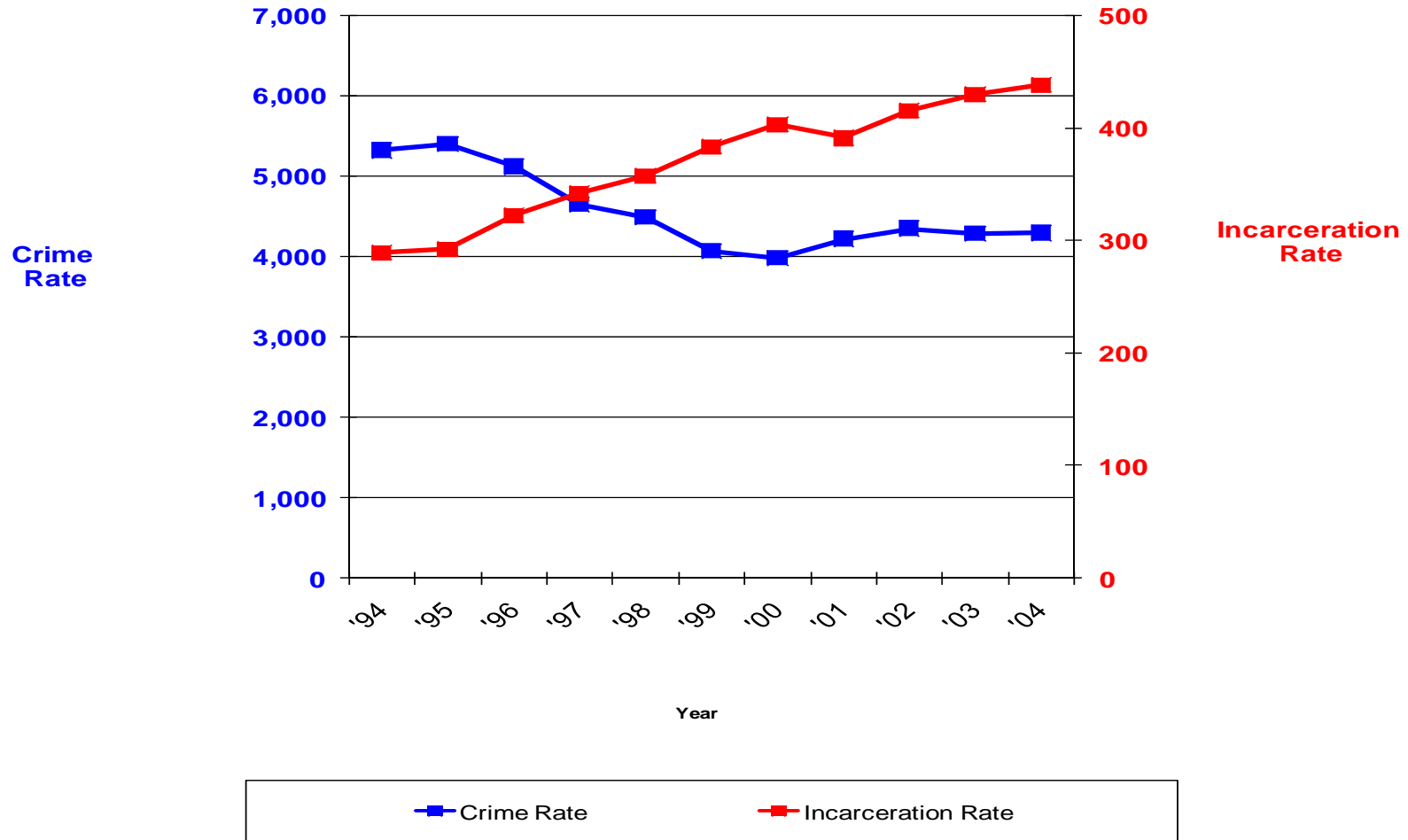
# Correctional and Sentencing Reform for Drug Offenders

Research Findings on Selected Key Issues

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# Colorado Crime Rate and Incarceration Rate per 100,000 Population



# Incapacitation Effect on Individual Offending

- Incapacitation certainly prevents some number of crimes from occurring
  - Estimating the number is difficult because data sources are inherently flawed
- On average, each additional prisoner leads to a reduction of about 15 crimes per year; most are property crimes and most are not reported to the police
- 15 crime average has little relevance for current policy debate because there is no average offender
  - Disproportionate rates of offending

# Selective Incapacitation

- No immediate deterrent effect; eventual deterrent effect only on instrumental crime
- Eventual incapacitation effect on violent, property, but not drug crime
- Inefficient
  - May be unsustainable

# Incarceration of Drug Offenders

- Not a cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars
  - Cost-benefit analyses consistently find a negative return on investment

Benefit-Cost Ratios Derived from the Incarceration of Drug Offenders		Benefit-Cost Ratios Derived from Substance Abuse Treatment		
WSIPP (2003)	Lengyel (2006)	Flynn et al. (1999)	Salome et al. (2003)	Ettner et al (2005)
Drug offenders incarcerated in Washington state in 2001	Drug offenders released from prison in New York state in 2005	DATOS treatment clients 1991-1993	Treatment clients in Chicago Target Cities Project 1995-1999	Treatment clients in 13 California counties 2000-2001
0.37	0.29	1.33-3.26	4.26	7.26

# Incarceration of Drug Offenders

- No deterrent effect on drug use
- No deterrent effect on drug trade
  - Replacement effect
- May even lead to an increase in crime

# Impact of Incarceration on Crime Rate

- Research has produced widely disparate results  
Drop in crime rate associated with 10% increase in the incarceration rate
    - High end: Devine, Sheley and Smith (1988) -22%
    - Marvell and Moody (1997, 1998) -9.3%
    - Low end: Kovandzic and Vieraitis (2006) no decline
- 
- Levitt (1996) -3.8% violent; -2.6% property
  - Spelman (2005) -4.4% violent; -3.6% property

# Impact of Incarceration on Crime Drop

- Again, widely disparate results
- Percentage of crime drop attributable to incarceration
  - High end: Levitt (2004) 33%
  - Rosenfeld (2007) 23%
  - Low end: Zimring (2007) suggests about 10%

# Conclusions

- Relationship between incarceration and crime is complex
  - Uneven across time and place
- 10% higher incarceration rate associated with 2-4% reduction in crime rate
  - Cost to achieve similar drop will be greater
- Even if high-end estimates are correct, more than  $2/3^{\text{rds}}$  of crime drop is due to factors other than incarceration
  - Dollar spent on prisons yields a crime reduction benefit that is 20% less than a dollar spent on policing (Levitt, 2004)

# Incarceration and Crime

## Other Factors

- Diminishing returns
- Incarceration has little positive impact on recidivism or desistance from crime
  - May have significant criminogenic effect
- Impact at neighborhood level
- Impact on children of incarcerated parents