

# **RECIDIVISM AMONG INMATES RELEASED FROM THE BILLERICA HOUSE OF CORRECTION**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT TO THE MIDDLESEX SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

### **NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY**

NATASHA A. FROST, PH.D.  
CARLOS MONTEIRO  
GARRETT YURZA WARFIELD  
DESMOND RYAN

With additional research assistance from:  
ALISON OLIFF

Report Submitted: Monday May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In May 2008, the Center for Criminal Justice Policy Research at Northeastern University was awarded a grant from the Middlesex Sheriff's Office (MSO) to conduct a study of recidivism among inmates released from the Middlesex House of Correction at Billerica. Assistant Professor Natasha A. Frost, Ph.D., served as the Principal Investigator for the project, with research assistance provided by two Northeastern University doctoral students (Carlos Monteiro and Garrett Warfield) and two undergraduate students (Desmond Ryan and Alison Oliff).

The MSO project involved (1) developing profiles of all inmates released from the facility annually between 1994 and 2007 (initially submitted as an interim report in January 2009); (2) conducting a comprehensive recidivism study that would establish recidivism rates for samples of inmates released from the facility in 1994, 2004, and 2007; and (3) delivering a platform for ongoing recidivism research.

The Middlesex Sheriff's Office provided electronic records for all inmates released from the Billerica House of Correction (BHOC) between 1994 and 2007. An interim report using data for all releases from the BHOC summarized release patterns annually (for every year between 1994 and 2007) and examined release trends over time (between 1994 and 2007). This interim report is included as a part of this final report as well.

Data from calendar-years 1994, 2004, and 2007 were used to conduct a more comprehensive recidivism study. Collection of release data across three points in time allowed for the study of time-to-recidivism using both one-year and three-year windows for recidivism and allowed for the study of changes in recidivism rates across the two release cohorts (spaced ten years apart). These years (1994 and 2004) were selected to allow for a three year time-to-recidivism window. Three-year windows for recidivism are standard and customary for this type of study and are used in national and state studies of inmate recidivism. Although most released inmates who reoffend will do so in the first year following release, it can take some time to process offenders through the criminal justice system and therefore a three-year window for recidivism is more reliable (particularly when recidivism is measured as reconviction or reincarceration as it is in the present study). Due to some fairly substantial structural and programmatic changes at the facility, we also conducted a one-year recidivism analysis for inmates released more recently in 2007.

This executive summary includes key findings that are described in greater detail in the body of the report.

The report itself is divided into a number of sections and opens with a general introduction to issues related to prisoner reentry and recidivism. In this opening section of the report, we summarize key findings from earlier national recidivism studies conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and state recidivism studies conducted by state agencies and

research organizations. We then describe the Billerica House of Correction (BHOC) including descriptions of (1) the recent renovation and modernization project, (2) the processes most related to programming and to prisoner reentry, and (3) the programs in place at the BHOC when the study launched. A description of the overall methodology for the study is followed by a description of the sample in terms of demographic and justice system relevant characteristics.

The core findings are then described with an emphasis on four major areas:

- (1) program participation and completion;
- (2) recidivism – measured as both reconviction and reincarceration – at one- and three-year from release;
- (3) program participation, program completion, and recidivism;
- (4) recidivism among specific subsets of released inmates.

A supplemental section describes a smaller project focused on the LS-CMI assessment instrument and program participation/completion. Key findings from each of the four primary results sections are included in this executive summary.

## **PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND COMPLETION**

### **Program Participation**

Generally, only inmates sentenced to at least 90 days are eligible for programming at the House of Correction because the most intensive programs offered at the BHOC are 90 day programs (the SAM program offered in 2004 and the SIR program offered in 2007 were the core programs and both were 90 day programs).

#### **Among inmates sentenced to more than 90 days in 2004:**

- 42% spent at least one day in a program intensive unit
- 38% were classified to treatment
- 28% were both classified to treatment and spent at least one day in a program intensive unit

#### **Among inmates sentenced to more than 90 days in 2007:**

- 54% spent at least one day in a program intensive unit
- 34% were classified to treatment
- 30% were both classified to treatment and spent at least one day in a program intensive unit

***Inmates released in 2007 were much more likely to participate in programs than those released in 2004 (54% in 2007 versus 42% in 2004) suggesting that the 2006 renovation and modernization project at the Billerica House of Correction increased access to programming units.***

## **Program Completion**

The most intensive treatment programs offered at the BHOC are 90 day programs (the SAM program in 2004 and the SIR program in 2007 were both 90 day programs). Therefore, only those sentenced to more than 90 days can realistically complete programming as it has been defined in this study.

### **Among inmates sentenced to more than 90 days in 2004:**

- 29% spent at least ninety days in a program intensive unit
- 38% were classified to treatment
- 19% were both classified to treatment and spent at least ninety days in a program intensive unit

### **Among inmates sentenced to more than 90 days in 2007:**

- 34% spent at least ninety days in a program intensive unit
- 34% were classified to treatment
- 24% were both classified to treatment and spent at least ninety days in a program intensive unit

***Inmates released in 2007 were much more likely to complete programs than those released in 2004 (34% in 2007 versus 29% in 2004) suggesting that the 2006 renovation and modernization project at the Billerica House of Correction not only increased access to programming units, but also increased the likelihood of completion.***

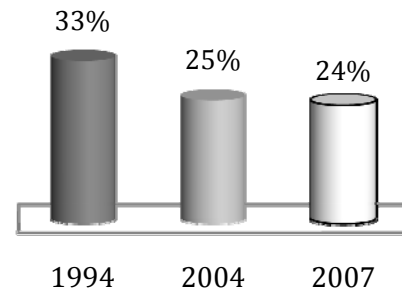
## RECIDIVISM

### Reconvictions

#### Reconvictions within One Year of Release

Reconvictions following release from the Billerica House of Correction have been declining over time. Among those released in 1994, 33% were reconvicted within one year of release. By 2004, the percentage of released inmates who had been reconvicted had fallen by 8 percentage points to 25%. The percentage reconvicted fell further between 2004 and 2007 so that by 2007, only 24% of inmates released from the Billerica House of Correction had been reconvicted within one year of release.

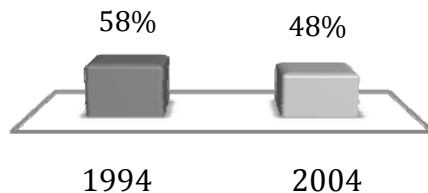
#### Reconvicted within One Year of Release



*Between 1994 and 2007, reconvictions within one year of release fell by almost 10 percentage points from 33% in 1994 to just 24% in 2007.*

#### Reconvictions within Three Years of Release

#### Reconvicted within Three Years of Release



Although the percentage of inmates reconvicted within three years of release was larger than the percent reconvicted within one year of release, as with the one-year recidivism analysis, reconviction rates of inmates released from the BHOC fell quite substantially in the 10 years between 1994 and 2004. While 58% of inmates released in 1994 had been reconvicted within three years of release, by 2004 the percent reconvicted within three years had fallen by ten percentage points to 48%.

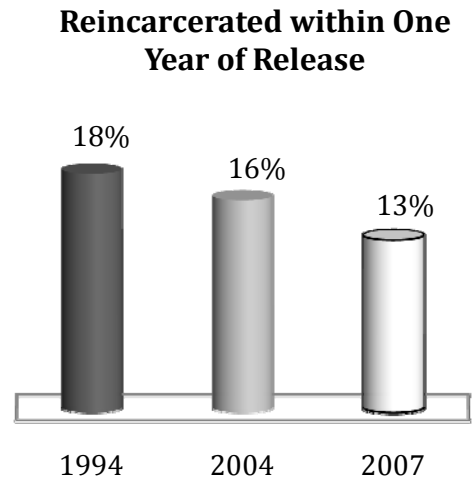
*In the decade between 1994 and 2004, reconvictions within three years of release fell by 10 percentage points.*

*58% of those released in 1994 and 48% of those released in 2007 were reconvicted within three years of release.*

## Reincarceration

### Reincarceration within One Year of Release

Reincarcerations following release from the Billerica House of Correction have been declining over time. Among those released in 1994, 18% were reincarcerated within one year of release. By 2007, only 13% of inmates released from the Billerica House of Correction were reincarcerated within one year of release. In other words, just over 1 in 10 inmates released in 2007 were reincarcerated within the first year of release.



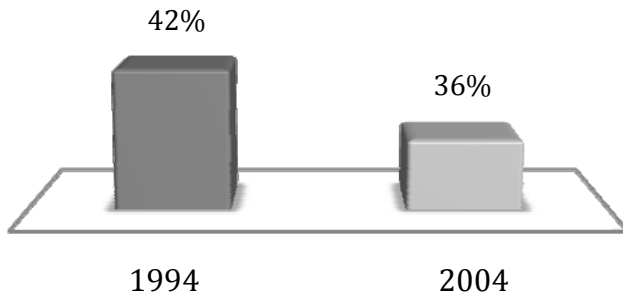
*Between 1994 and 2007, convictions within one year of release fell by 5 percentage points from 18% in 1994 to just 13% in 2007.*

### Reconviction and Reincarceration Status One Year from Release

	<b>1994 Releases</b>	<b>2004 Releases</b>	<b>2007 Releases</b>
<b>No Recidivism</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Recidivism</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<i>Reconvicted, but not Reincarcerated</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>11%</i>
<i>Reconvicted and Reincarcerated</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>13%</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Reincarcerated within Three Years of Release

### Reincarcerated within Three Years of Release



As with the one-year recidivism analysis, reincarceration rates for inmates released from the BHOC fell quite substantially in the 10 years between 1994 and 2004. While 42% of inmates released in 1994 had been reincarcerated within three years of release, by 2004 the percent reincarcerated within three years had fallen by six percentage points to 36%.

*In the decade between 1994 and 2004, reincarcerations within three years of release fell by 6 percentage points.*

*42% of those released in 1994 and 36% of those released in 2004 were reincarcerated within three years of release.*

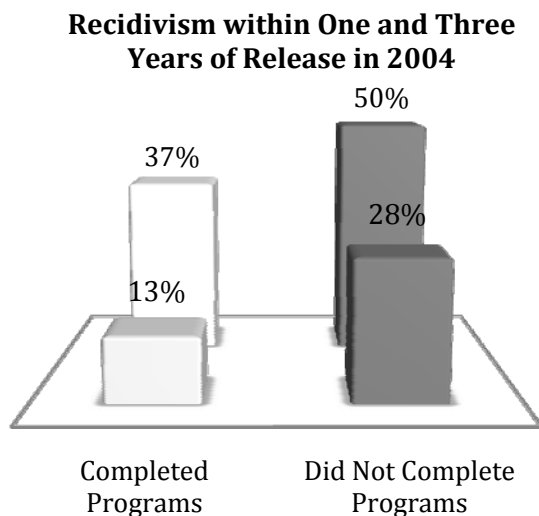
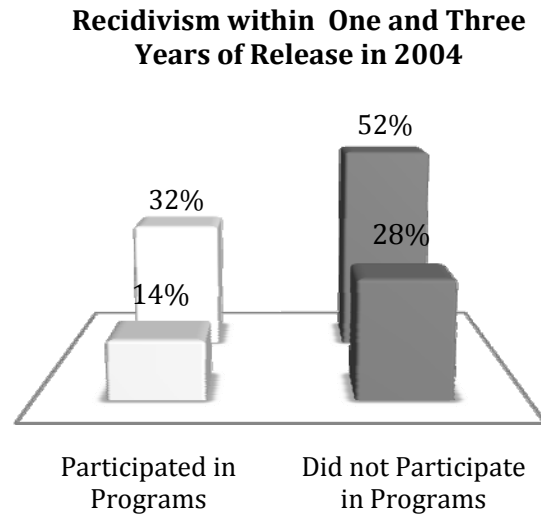
## Reconviction and Reincarceration Status Three Years from Release

	1994 Releases	2004 Releases
<b>No Recidivism</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Recidivism</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<i>Reconvicted, but not Reincarcerated</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>12%</i>
<i>Reconvicted and Reincarcerated</i>	<i>42%</i>	<i>36%</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## PROGRAM PARTICIPATION, PROGRAM COMPLETION, AND RECIDIVISM

Recidivism rates among those who participated in programming were lower than the recidivism rates among those who did not.

Those who had participated in programs prior to their release in 2004 had a much lower recidivism rate than those who did not participate in programs. 14% of those who participated in programs had recidivated within one year of release (compared to 28% of those who had not). Although the three-year recidivism rates were higher, the gap in recidivism between those who had participated in programs (32% reconvicted) and those who had not (52% reconvicted) remained. The pattern held for 2007 releases, but the differences were not quite as large.



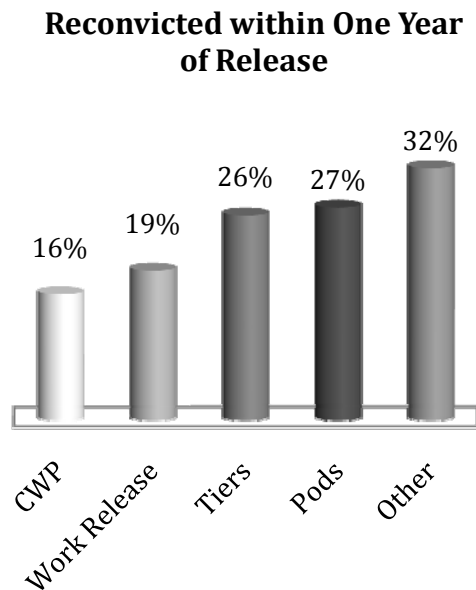
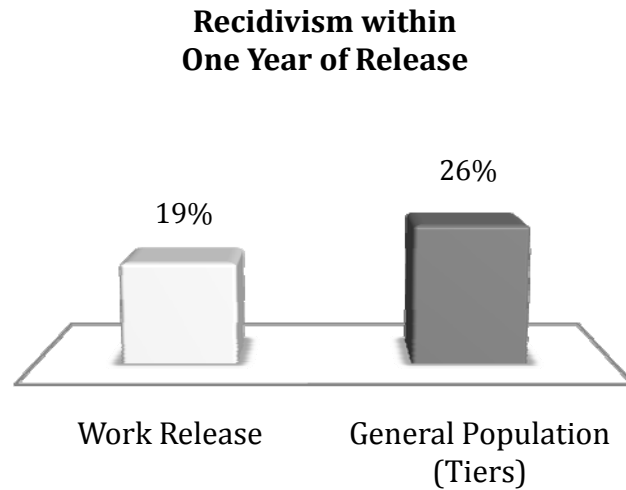
Those who had completed programming prior to their release in 2004 had a much lower recidivism rate than those who had not completed programming. 13% of those who had completed programming had recidivated within one year of release (compared to 28% of those who had not). Although the three-year recidivism rates were higher, the gap in recidivism between those who had completed programming (37% reconvicted) and those who had not (50% reconvicted) remained.

The percentages for program participation and program completion cannot be compared to one another because the base numbers are different... the number participating in programs is much bigger than the number completing programs.

## RECIDIVISM AMONG SUBSETS OF INMATES

### Work Release vs. General Population

Those released from general population areas of the facility (specifically from the tiers) in 2007 had higher rates of recidivism than those released from the work release program (which is the probably the most progressive program at Billerica). 19% of those released from the work release program were reconvicted or reincarcerated within one year of release. By comparison, 26% of those released from the general population tiers were reconvicted or reincarcerated within one year of release.



Generally speaking those released from Billerica's work programs (the community work and work release programs) had lower rates of recidivism than those released from other types of custody. Those released from the pods and the tiers had essentially the same rate of recidivism (note that a release from a pod does not mean that the person participated in programming). Some are released before they can even be classified to other areas of the facility. Those released from other areas (the health services unit and other facilities following transfers) performed notably worse than other populations. The community work program inmates actually had the lowest overall rates of recidivism, followed by those in the work release program.

## **Billerica Recidivism in Context**

A Massachusetts Department of Corrections study assessed three-year recidivism rates in a manner comparable to national studies and to the current study. In the MDOC study, 39% of state prisoners released in 1999 were reincarcerated within three years of release, with 20% of those inmates reincarcerated within one year of release (Hoover, 2005). The 20% reincarceration rate for 1999 MDOC releases was lower than the 24% one year reincarceration rate reported in a similar study of 1994 MDOC releases (Dolan and Matthews, 1998).

The earlier MDOC study of 1994 releases (Dolan and Matthews, 1998) is directly comparable to our study of the 1994 BHOC release cohort. The MDOC one-year reincarceration rate of 24% was substantially higher than the 18% one-year reincarceration rate among Billerica releases in 1994.

**Recidivism among BHOC releases is lower than recidivism found among inmates released from the Massachusetts Department of Corrections**

The 2005 MDOC study was conducted using 1999 releases – 1999 is obviously right in between the years used in the current study (1994 and 2004) for the three year recidivism analysis. The 36% three-year reincarceration rate for inmates released from the Billerica House of Correction in 2004 is lower than the 39% three year rate for those released from MDOC in 1999. The study of 1999 MDOC releases, published in 2005, is unfortunately the most recent publicly available Massachusetts Department of Correction recidivism analysis.

A recent recidivism analysis conducted by Massachusetts State Parole (2008) found that those released from state prisons had lower reincarceration rates than those released from houses of correction. The State Parole study used a follow-up period of 1.7 years for 2006 releases making it difficult to directly compare their findings to this study. Nonetheless, the State Parole study reports an overall reincarceration rate of 35% for inmates released from custody with no parole supervision. When parsed between state and county releases, the reincarceration for state releases (20%) was substantially lower than the reincarceration rate for house of correction releases (37%).

Although it is difficult to draw too many conclusions from a comparison between the State Parole study and the current study due to differences in measures and time-periods, the 37% 1.7 year reincarceration rate for 2006 HOC releases is substantially higher than the 15% Billerica one- year reincarceration rate for 2004 releases, but was also slightly higher than the Billerica three-year reincarceration rate (36%) for 2004 releases.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As the team in charge of the research for this project, most of our recommendations are designed to make future recidivism research less labor intensive and less expensive. Much of the data collected and used over the course of this project had been collected for administrative purposes. Understandably, these data were not always in a format conducive to research. Some fairly simple modifications to the Prison Tracking system would facilitate future research. Recognizing that the MSO and BHOC staff might not be in a position to make all of these changes at once, we have listed them in order of priority so that the changes to the system could be made in increments.

1. ***Modify the release type field to more specifically indicate the type of release.*** A fairly substantial number of those who were coded as “end of sentence” releases were not actually released to the streets, but rather they were released to other authorities or released to another sentence. Because these distinctions were noted in a free-form text field, it was impossible to sample so that only those released to the streets were included. Perhaps the end of sentence option could have more specific indicators such as end of sentence to: streets, another sentence, WMS, authorities, etc... Ideally just one field would allow a person to determine whether an inmate had actually been released.
2. ***Create a programming screen that would allow program participation and completion to be tracked.*** Throughout this report, we used proxies for program participation and completion because there was nothing in the prison tracking data that would allow one to know for sure whether somebody had participated in or completed treatment. We had to assume that an assignment to a particular unit was indicative of program participation and having spent a certain amount of time on the unit was indicative of program completion.
3. ***More clearly distinguish jail and parole admissions from sentenced admissions.*** Jail is not one of the commitment types in the prison tracking system (jail admissions can only be identified by a ‘J’ at the end of the inmate’s institutional number). Parole commitments (which can be identified by an ‘a, b, or c’ at the end of the inmate’s institutional number) are not consistently identified as such in the MSO Commitment Type field.
4. ***Minimize the use of free-form text fields in the prison tracking system.*** A number of the text fields currently in use could be converted to dropdown menus to minimize confusion and data entry errors. All free-form text fields should be converted except for those that require the person entering data enter substantive notes of some sort. Codes for arresting agencies, offense types, and other fields that currently require text could be converted.