

# Colorado Division of Criminal Justice Interim Prison Population and Parole Caseload Forecast June 2024

*Pursuant to 24-33.5-503(1)(m), C.R.S.*

June 2024

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**Background**

The Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ), pursuant to 24-33.5-503(m), C.R.S., is mandated to prepare correctional population projections for the Legislative Council and the General Assembly. These reports are generated two times each year: each winter there is a comprehensive report of the adult prison population forecast and each summer there is an interim report to reflect recent trends in admissions and releases, new legislation, and policy changes. This interim report presents the midyear update of forecasts for the Colorado adult prison and parole populations across the upcoming seven fiscal years.

**Introduction**

The prison population had already begun a period of decline starting in mid-FY 2019, which was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent actions taken to contain the spread of the virus starting in April of 2020. The steep rate of decline continued through the following 12 months into FY 2021, before leveling and returning to a period of growth beginning in early FY 2022 and continuing to date.

As expected, this growth coincided with increases in admissions to prison and decreases in releases. Growth in new commitments to prison, which increased 30.7% in FY 2022, slowed to 1.8% in FY 2023 and is now expected to remain very stable through FY 2024. However, parole returns of all types increased 15.4% in FY 2023 and are expected to increase another 6.8% by then end of FY 2024. Overall, the increase in total admissions slowed from 5.1% in FY 2023 to an expected 1.9% in FY 2024.

Total discharges have also increased, by 10.3% in FY 2023 and an expected 6.4% in FY 2024. However, the numbers of admissions have consistently exceeded the number of discharges since FY 2022. This pattern ensures continuing growth in the prison population.

**Current inmate population forecast**

If the growth pattern observed in early June continues, the prison population is predicted to reach approximately 17,495 by the end of FY 2024, realizing an annual growth rate of 2.6%. This is very slightly higher than the 2.4% increase expected at the time of the December 2023 forecast, representing a difference of 31 individuals.

However, the female prison population is expected to increase 5.0% across FY 2024, doubling the growth previously projected. This increase was the main source of error in the December 2023 prison forecast by the end of FY 2024.

Though the degree of error in the overall population was very slight, recent patterns in admissions and releases prompted some adjustments in the forecast. Based on available data, new court commitments are expected to have been overestimated by 2.3%, while parole returns are expected to have been underestimated by 14.2% at the time of the December 2023 forecast. These combined errors resulted in a 1.9% overestimation of overall prison admissions.

Additionally, while increasing releases were expected by year-end, the actual number of releases occurring in FY24 surpassed the expectation. By year-end overall releases are anticipated to exceed the December 2023 forecast by 1.4%.

Overall, the inmate population is expected to increase 18.0% by the end of FY 2030, reaching 20,123 inmates. The male prison population is expected to reach 18,348, a 17.4% increase, while the number of women in prison is expected to increase 23.9%, reaching 1,779.

The Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) projected total and gender-specific quarterly growth in the prison population for Colorado State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024 through FY 2030 is displayed in Table 1. Projected annual growth is displayed in Table 2.

**Table 1. DCJ June 2024 interim quarterly prison population forecast**

SFY	End of month	Total population	Quarterly growth	Male	Quarterly growth	Female	Quarterly growth
2023	June 2023*	17,054	0.36%	15,618	8.41%	1,436	1.13%
2024	September 2023*	17,254	1.17%	15,779	1.03%	1,475	2.72%
	December 2023	17,272	0.10%	15,827	0.30%	1,445	-2.03%
	March 2024	17,373	0.58%	15,933	0.67%	1,440	-0.35%
2025	June 2024	17,495	0.70%	15,987	0.34%	1,508	4.72%
	September 2024	17,660	0.94%	16,170	1.14%	1,491	-1.15%
	December 2024	17,808	0.83%	16,300	0.81%	1,507	1.12%
	March 2025	17,970	0.91%	16,445	0.89%	1,525	1.19%
2026	June 2025	18,072	0.57%	16,534	0.54%	1,538	0.84%
	September 2025	18,244	0.95%	16,691	0.95%	1,553	0.99%
	December 2025	18,356	0.62%	16,789	0.59%	1,567	0.88%
	March 2026	18,501	0.79%	16,917	0.76%	1,583	1.05%
2027	June 2026	18,622	0.66%	17,037	0.71%	1,585	0.09%
	September 2026	18,718	0.52%	17,112	0.44%	1,607	1.37%
	December 2026	18,833	0.61%	17,212	0.59%	1,621	0.87%
	March 2027	18,967	0.71%	17,331	0.69%	1,636	0.96%
2028	June 2027	19,099	0.70%	17,459	0.74%	1,640	0.24%
	September 2026	19,219	0.63%	17,553	0.54%	1,666	1.58%
	December 2026	19,289	0.36%	17,613	0.34%	1,676	0.61%
	March 2027	19,380	0.47%	17,692	0.45%	1,688	0.71%
2029	June 2027	19,444	0.33%	17,756	0.36%	1,688	-0.01%
	September 2028	19,531	0.45%	17,821	0.37%	1,709	1.26%
	December 2028	19,612	0.42%	17,892	0.40%	1,721	0.66%
	March 2029	19,711	0.50%	17,978	0.48%	1,733	0.73%
2030	June 2029	19,823	0.56%	18,086	0.60%	1,737	0.22%
	September 2029	19,906	0.42%	18,148	0.34%	1,758	1.23%
	December 2029	19,985	0.40%	18,228	0.44%	1,757	-0.05%
	March 2030	20,045	0.30%	18,279	0.28%	1,767	0.52%
	June 2030	20,123	0.39%	18,343	0.35%	1,779	0.73%

*Note: Figures reflect the end-of-quarter population. The percent change reflects the degree of increase or decrease from the end of the prior quarter.*

*\* Actual counts provided by Colorado Department of Corrections Monthly Population and Capacity Reports.*

**Table 2. DCJ June 2024 interim annual prison population forecast**

SFY	Total population	Annual growth	Male	Annual growth	Female	Annual growth
2023*	17,054	4.24%	15,618	3.89%	1,436	8.13%
2024	17,495	2.59%	15,987	2.37%	1,508	5.01%
2025	18,072	3.29%	16,534	3.42%	1,538	2.00%
2026	18,622	3.05%	17,037	3.05%	1,585	3.04%
2027	19,099	2.56%	17,459	2.47%	1,640	3.48%
2028	19,444	1.81%	17,756	1.70%	1,688	2.92%
2029	19,823	1.95%	18,086	1.86%	1,737	2.91%
2030	20,123	1.51%	18,343	1.43%	1,779	2.44%

Note: the annual growth reflects the degree of increase or decrease from the end of the prior fiscal year

\* Actual counts provided by Colorado Department of Corrections Monthly Population and Capacity Reports

### **Prison admissions and releases**

As previously stated, new court commitments are expected to have been overestimated by 2.3% at the time of the December 2023 forecast. Additionally, parole returns are expected to have been underestimated by 14.2%. These combined errors nearly offset each other and resulted in a 1.9% overestimation of overall prison admissions.

New commitments represent the largest proportion of prison admissions, and generally remain in prison longer than other admission types. Therefore, increases in this group are particularly significant in estimating future growth and developing prison forecasts. New commitments, while remaining very stable in FY 2024, are expected to increase by 2.4% per year in the following 2 years.

Overall parole returns, including returns for technical violations as well as new crimes, were expected to decline 6.5% in FY 2024 at the time of the December 2023 forecast. However, such admissions are on track to increase by 6.8% by year-end. This rate of growth is expected to slow in upcoming years, averaging 1.6% per year through FY 2030.

Technical returns in particular have been on an upward trajectory since January 2024, recently returning to the levels seen prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when such admissions declined by 57.8% in a single month.

Additionally, while growth in prison releases was expected by year-end, the actual number of releases occurring in FY 2024 exceeded the expectation. By year-end overall releases are anticipated to exceed the December 2023 forecast by 1.4%. This discrepancy is expected to increase to 2.6% in FY 2025, and average 2.2% over the following 5 years.

These increases in expectations for both admissions and releases over those expected at the time of the December 2023 forecast balance one another out, such that the overall projected growth in the prison population varies by less than half a percentage point each year.

The projected numbers of annual prison admissions for fiscal years 2024 through 2030 are displayed in Table 3, while the current projected prison release figures are presented below in Table 4.

**Table 3. DCJ June 2024 interim prison population forecast: prison admissions by type**

SFY	New court commitments	Technical violation returns	Parole returns with a new crime	Other	Total admissions
2023*	4,795	940	828	10	6,573
2024	4,795	1,100	788	16	6,699
2025	4,910	1,126	796	15	6,846
2026	5,029	1,120	817	18	6,983
2027	5,132	1,150	812	15	7,109
2028	5,204	1,181	832	12	7,230
2029	5,276	1,209	846	16	7,346
2030	5,355	1,221	860	13	7,448

\* Actual count provided by Colorado Department of Corrections Monthly Population and Capacity Reports

**Table 4. DCJ June 2024 interim prison population forecast: prison releases by type**

SFY	Parole releases: Mandatory	Parole releases: Discretionary	Parole releases: Total	Sentence Discharges	Other	Total Releases
2023*	2,002	3,115	5,117	667	99	5,883
2024	1,306	4,128	5,434	730	94	6,257
2025	1,135	4,297	5,432	738	100	6,271
2026	1,115	4,469	5,583	747	104	6,434
2027	1,125	4,647	5,772	755	107	6,634
2028	1,145	4,845	5,990	786	110	6,886
2029	1,213	4,848	6,061	807	100	6,968
2030	1,277	4,947	6,224	810	115	7,149

\* Actual count provided by Colorado Department of Corrections Monthly Population and Capacity Reports

### **Parole caseload**

In spite of the underestimation in overall parole releases at the time of the December 2023 forecast, the projected parole caseload was 2.8% higher than that currently expected by the end of FY 2024. The caseload is expected to increase by 0.7% by the end of the current fiscal year, significantly lower than the 3.5% growth previously expected.

The ratio of the inmate population to the parole caseload is a factor in estimating the size of the caseload. The proportion of the total jurisdictional population averaged approximately 35% across the four years prior to March of 2020. Over the following 12 months, this proportion steadily increased to 44%, before slowly declining throughout FY 2022 and early FY 2023, returning to the levels observed



prior to March of 2020. Some growth was indicated in early FY 2023, but this quickly dropped off and this proportion has remained at the levels seen prior to the pandemic throughout FY 2024.

It is also notable that the absconder population, which doubled shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, shows no signs of returning to the levels seen prior to April 2020. This population represents 12.5% of the total parole caseload, averaging 1,181 per month in the first 11 months of FY 2024. The enactment of HB 20-1019, which limited conditions under which one could be charged with felony escape, may be contributing to maintaining the size of the absconder population, along with staff shortages in policing and parole. The exclusion of this population from the domestic caseload serves to reduce the size of the caseload.

The current parole caseload forecast has been moderated from that developed in December 2023, and is displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5. DCJ June 2024 interim domestic parole caseload projection**

SFY	Caseload	Percent change
2023*	7,300	-7.15%
2024	7,352	0.71%
2025	7,574	3.02%
2026	7,915	4.50%
2027	8,053	1.75%
2028	8,332	3.46%
2029	8,425	1.11%
2030	8,726	3.57%

\* Actual data provided by Colorado Department of Corrections Monthly Population and Capacity Reports.

