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U.S. Justice Department Says Local Jail Populations Decline Nationally

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By Mike Klein, Editor

[Georgia Public Policy Foundation](#) ^[1]

County and city jail populations have declined nationally for two consecutive years, according to just published data from the U.S. Justice Department, but newer state data shows the Atlanta Fulton County jail is once again busting at the seams and operating beyond its capacity.

The federal government's annual survey reported 2009 to 2010 local jail population changes were just the second decline since the report began in 1982. The survey tracks almost three-quarter million men and women who are incarcerated somewhere other than state or federal penitentiaries. Five Georgia county jail systems were named in the report.

The DOJ Bureau of Justice Statistics reported local jail inmates were 748,728 on June 30, 2010, down 2.4% and 18,706 inmates from one year earlier. Six jails accounted for half the decline: Los Angeles, Orange and Fresno county jails, all in California; along with Maricopa County, (Phoenix) Arizona; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and, Harris County (Houston), Texas.

Fulton County, which includes Atlanta city boundaries, illustrates the complex challenge when tracking inmate populations. The federal report showed a significant decline at Fulton's jail which is under a federal court order to alleviate overcrowding by transferring inmates to other jails. The DOJ said Fulton had 2,271 inmates last June 30 compared to 3,026 one year earlier.

A different Fulton picture emerges from Georgia Bureau of Investigation data contained in the state's monthly county jail report published April 7. Fulton had 2,948 inmates on that date less than three weeks ago, well above its 2,688 capacity. [Click here](#) ^[2] to read the state report. Most (1,986) were jailed awaiting trial but Fulton's jail also held some 134 state inmates.

Nationally, local jail populations are still dramatically up during the past ten years. Comparable inmate totals are 621,149 in June, 2000 and 748,728 ten years later. The population peaked at 785,586 in June 2008. The incarceration rate in June 2010 was 242 inmates for every 100,000 U.S. residents, the lowest rate since 2003. [Click here](#) ^[3] to read the complete federal report.

The study also reported average daily inmate populations. Los Angeles County had the nation's largest average daily population with 18,036 inmates followed by New York City jails (13,049), Harris County (Houston), Texas (10,242), and Cook County (Chicago), Illinois (9,383).

Male inmates dominate jail populations (656,350 to 92,638 women) and whites were the largest demographic (331,600) with black/African Americans second (283,200) and Hispanics/Latinos third (118,100). Department of Justice officials said inmate racial demographics have remained fairly stable for ten years.

The federal report said the number of persons incarcerated in local jails on June 30, 2010, was only a small percentage of total calendar year admissions. Local jails admitted an estimated 12.9 million persons during the year that ended June 30, 2010.

In addition to Fulton four other metropolitan Atlanta county jail systems were among the nation's 50 largest local jail populations last year. Gwinnett held 3,233 persons on June 30 with a 3,198 daily average for twelve months. Cobb held 2,373, nearly identical to its 2,369 daily average.

DeKalb County held 3,516 inmates last June 30, a 212-inmate increase over 2009. DeKalb's average daily inmate population has grown three consecutive years from 2,906 three years ago to 3,404 in 2009 and 3,560 last year. Clayton County jail held 1,966 persons last June 30, down 25 from one year earlier, but Clayton's 2,080 average daily population was up 10% in one year.

Georgia Bureau of Investigation data released on April 7 said local jails statewide held 41,833 prisoners. A comparison of available ten-year data shows local jail populations have grown from 27,025 in January 2001 to 40,648 in January of this year. The change is a 50% increase.

Georgia took a different corrections step forward on this past Friday afternoon when Governor Nathan Deal signed legislation to create the Special Council on Criminal Justice Reform. The 13-member council will focus on alternative strategies to adult confinement in state facilities. The final report is due on November 1 for General Assembly consideration in January.

Georgia has 60,000 adults incarcerated in state facilities and 160,000 on probation or parole. One-in-13 adult Georgians is under adult corrections system jurisdiction, the worst rate in the nation. Georgia has the nation's ninth largest total population but the fourth largest state inmate count. Next year Georgia will spend \$1 billion of its \$18.3 billion budget on adult corrections.

The Georgia Public Policy Foundation is a member of the national Right on Crime initiative. [Click here](#) ^[4] to learn more about Right on Crime which has partners in 22 states.

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[1] Georgia Public Policy Foundation: <http://forum.georgiapolicy.org/>

[2] Click here: <http://www.dca.ga.gov/development/research/programs/documents/JAILREPORTAPR11.pdf>

[3] Click here: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/jim10st.pdf>

[4] Click here: <http://www.rightoncrime.com/>

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