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Females and African-Americans in Iowa Prisons

Over the past 15 years, both females and minorities experienced a disproportionate increase in incarceration in Iowa prisons, as compared to white males. The rates are particularly alarming for African-Americans, in that while the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that they comprised just 2.5% of the state's population as of 2006, they constituted over 25% of Iowa's prison population as of June 30, 2008.

While males experienced an 81.7% increase in incarceration over the past 15 years, the imprisonment rate for females rose by 190.5% over the same period. The increase for non-whites was substantial as well: The incarceration of Caucasians rose by 75.9% over the past 15 years, while incarceration for non-whites rose by 126% during that period.

Indeed, the actual number of male Caucasians in prison – from a June 30 peak of 5,547 in 2004 - fell each subsequent year to 5,192 as of June 30, 2008. One factor in the decrease could be the drop in methamphetamine manufacturing convictions as a result of the state restricting the availability of a key meth ingredient in 2005.

The Department of Corrections has recently taken a number of targeted measures to address the growing gender and racial disparity, including:

- Proposed “One-Stop Reentry Centers” in selected neighborhoods in Des Moines and Waterloo where high concentrations of African-American and other non-white offenders live.
- Adopted new strategies in staff hiring to achieve a more diverse workforce.
- Received a technical assistance and training grant to implement a “female offender case management model.”
- With the assistance of a consultant, developing a grant proposal to increase substance abuse treatment services at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women and provide additional reentry services when these female offenders return to the community.

It is through the analysis of data that the Iowa Department of Corrections is able to more readily identify the challenges we face, and also develop responses that further our mission: reducing the number of victims among the public, employees and offenders.