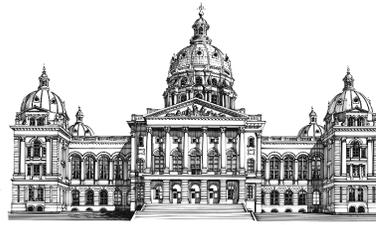

Iowa Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319
July 12, 1994

Prison Safety

ISSUE

Are prisons becoming less safe for inmates and employees?

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Corrections (DOC)

CODE AUTHORITY

Chapter 904, Code of Iowa

BACKGROUND

Concern has been expressed that prisons are becoming more dangerous because of overcrowding and a perceived increase in dangerous inmates. Earlier this year, 4 correctional officers and 4 staff persons at the Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison were injured on 2 separate occasions. During the 1994 Legislative Session, the General Assembly authorized the building of a 750-bed medium security prison at Clarinda and directed the DOC to issue a Request for Proposal for additional facilities at Newton.

CURRENT SITUATION

Prison Population

As of June 24, 1994, there were 5,071 inmates in a prison system designed for 3,603. This is 1,468 (40.7%) inmates in excess of the design capacity. Since 1988, the number of inmates has increased by 2,125 (72.5%) while the number of correctional officers has increased by 103 (11.5%). The ratio of inmates per correctional officer can be considered a workload indicator. The ratio or workload has increased from 3.3 to 5.1 (54.6%) inmates per correctional officer since 1988 (Table 1, Attachment A). An increased ratio of inmates per correctional officer would suggest a diminished ability to control those inmates resulting in decreased safety.

Assaults on Staff and Inmates

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Given the prison population growth, it would be expected that the number of assaults by inmates would increase. (An assault can range from a fear-inducing, verbal threat to physical contact and injury.) Data available since FY 1985 shows that assaults by inmates on prison staff and on inmates have generally declined (Table 2, Attachment A). Assaults on staff fluctuated from a high of 506 in FY 1985, to a low of 224 in FY 1993. There were 240 assaults on inmates in FY 1985 which increased to a high of 351 assaults in FY 1988 and then declined to an estimated 227 in FY 1994. In FY 1991, there were 130 prison beds added to the system, and in FY 1992, another 438 beds were added. The assaults on inmates dropped by approximately one-third in FY 1991, and the assaults on staff declined in FY 1992 by approximately the same amount. The overall pattern shows a decline in assaults, and suggests prisons may not be becoming less safe.

Types of Crimes

Table 3 (Attachment B) shows prison admissions by lead offense categories, that is, the reasons offenders are sent to prison. (The data was grouped in 3-year intervals to reduce the annual fluctuations.) In the past, the majority of the inmates committed property offenses, but recently other types of crime have grown more rapidly. Comparing the first and last reporting periods, drug offenses increased 638.4%, other offenses (dominated by drunken driving and traffic offenses) 106.2%, violent offenses 80.9%, and property offenses 58.0%.

Table 4 (Attachment B) shows the prison admissions for violent crimes. Sexual abuse and assault are the most frequently committed violent crimes and the most rapidly growing crimes leading to incarceration. Admissions for assault increased 163.5%, and admissions for sexual abuse increased 286.8% over the reporting period. Murder and manslaughter increased 40.7%. Robbery and kidnapping decreased.

The changes in types of lead offenses suggest that persons coming into the prison system tend to exhibit more violent behaviors and are more likely to react violently in prison.

Security Level Requirements

When inmates arrive in the correctional system, they are evaluated and assigned a custody score. The custody score considers such factors as proclivity toward violence, likelihood for escape, adjustment to prison life, and the need to control the inmates' behavior. The higher the custody score, the greater the need for security. Minimum security scores range from 0 to 5, medium security from 6 to 10, and maximum security 11 and higher. In assigning an inmate to a facility, other factors (such as, space availability, personal enemies, etc.) may be considered.

Table 5 (Attachment C) shows the inmates requiring medium security custody are the most rapidly growing segment of the inmate population, increasing by 111.6% between July 1987, and April 1994, to a total of 2,586 inmates. Only 85 (12.3%) more inmates scored at the maximum security level in 1994 than in 1987. The average custody score has decreased from 7.7 to 7.2. This would suggest that as a whole, the inmate population is less dangerous.

Tables 6 through 13 (Attachment C) examine the custody scores for the primary facilities at the 8 prisons, the farms and other attached facilities are not included. The following observations can be made:

- The Iowa State Penitentiary at Ft. Madison is relatively stable with a slight decline in those scoring at the maximum security level and more with medium level scores.
- The Men's Reformatory at Anamosa has taken on more inmates requiring higher levels of security. The average custody score has increased from 7.3 to 8.8. In 1987, there were

135 inmates scoring at the maximum security level. In 1994, there were 308 inmates scoring in the maximum security range, an increase of 127.9%.

- The Medium Security Unit at Mt. Pleasant has reduced the number of minimum and maximum security inmates and increased the number of medium security scoring inmates. As a result the average custody score has increased from 5.8 to 6.4.
- The Medical Classification Center at Oakdale and the Correctional Institution for Women at Mitchellville have experienced growth in all security level scores.
- The Correctional Treatment Unit at Clarinda has experienced the greatest growth for medium security inmates with minimum security inmates having decreased in recent years.
- The North Central Correctional Facility at Rockwell City and the Riverview Release Center at Newton have experienced the most growth for minimum security inmates.

Conclusion

The results are mixed concerning how safe prisons are for inmates and staff. It appears the more people with a propensity for violence are going to prison, but the number of assaults is declining. Custody scores suggest that Anamosa is developing a more dangerous, higher scoring inmate population, while Rockwell City and Newton accumulate more of the less dangerous inmates.

ALTERNATIVES

In accordance with the Justice Systems Appropriations Bill (HF 2350), the DOC will be building a 750-bed medium-security prison at Clarinda and will be issuing a Request for Proposal for additional beds at Newton. While the primary growth has been in medium and minimum security inmates, in terms of prison safety, it appears the DOC may also need additional maximum security beds, particularly to alleviate the growth of maximum-security scoring inmates at Anamosa. The DOC's Five-Year Plan included the addition of a 250-bed super-maximum security facility but did not include regular maximum security additions.

According to HF 2350, the DOC will not revert funds remaining at the end of the fiscal year, but instead will carry these funds forward to hire additional correctional officers. The added staffing should reduce the workload or help stem its growth. This should increase the control over inmates and improve prison safety.

BUDGET IMPACT

The new 750-bed, medium-security prison at Clarinda is estimated to cost \$21.0 million for construction. Annual costs for operations and the lease purchase payment will total \$12.9 million. If the DOC receives authorization to build the 250-bed super-maximum security facility proposed in the Five-Year Plan, it would cost \$34.3 million to construct. Annual costs for operations and lease purchase payments are estimated at \$10.3 million. A regular 250-bed maximum security prison would cost an estimated \$18.7 million to construct with an annual operations plus lease purchase payment cost of \$6.9 million.

In regard to adding correctional officers, the average cost for salary and benefits is approximately \$37,000. For each \$1.0 million that is retained instead of reverting, the DOC can add 27 correctional officers.

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Table 1
Inmate Population, Correctional Officers (FTE Positions), and the Ratio of Inmates Per Correctional Officer

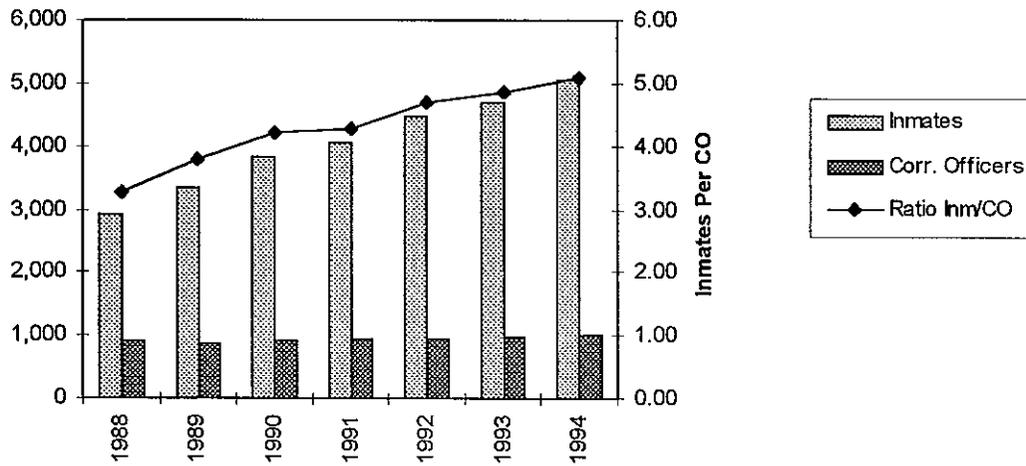


Table 2
Prison Assaults FY 1985 to FY 1994

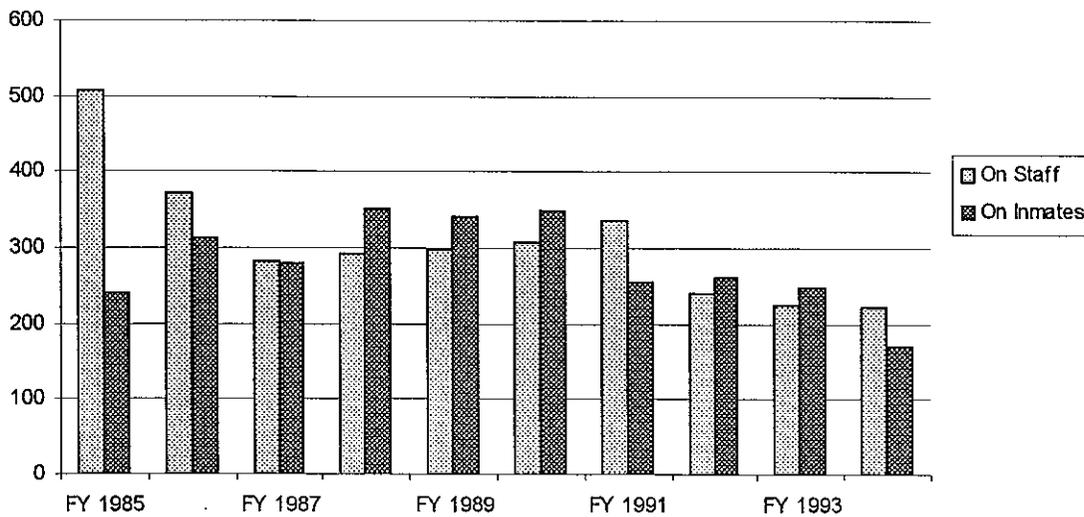


Table 3
Prison Admissions by Type of Lead Offense

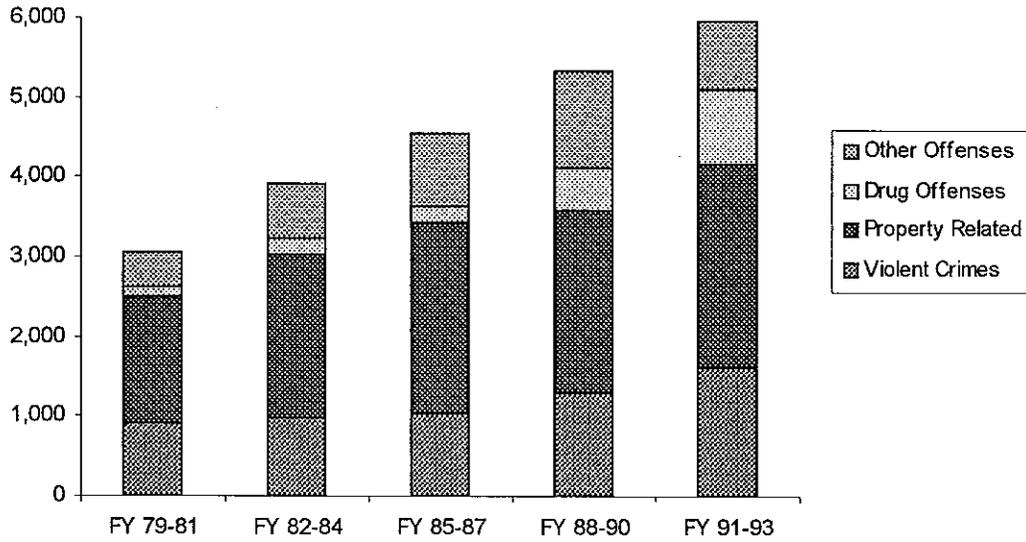
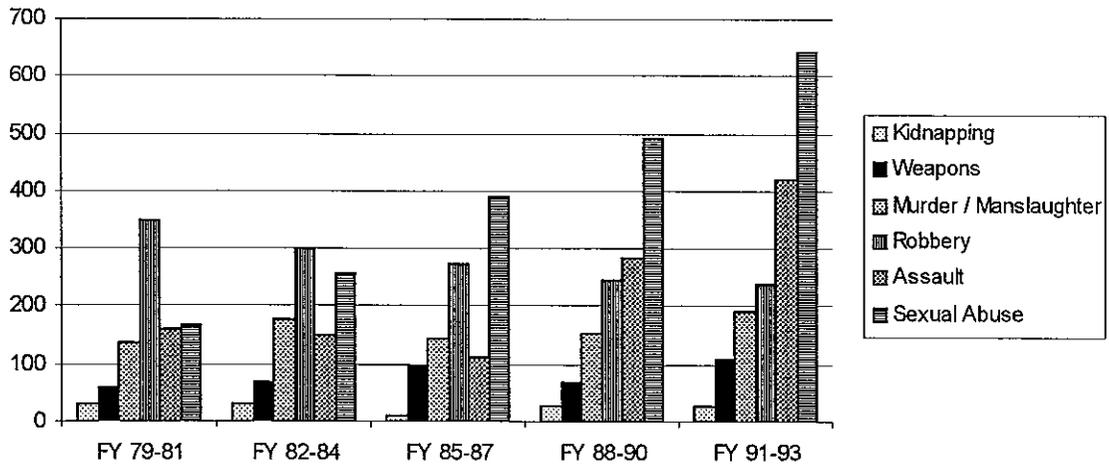
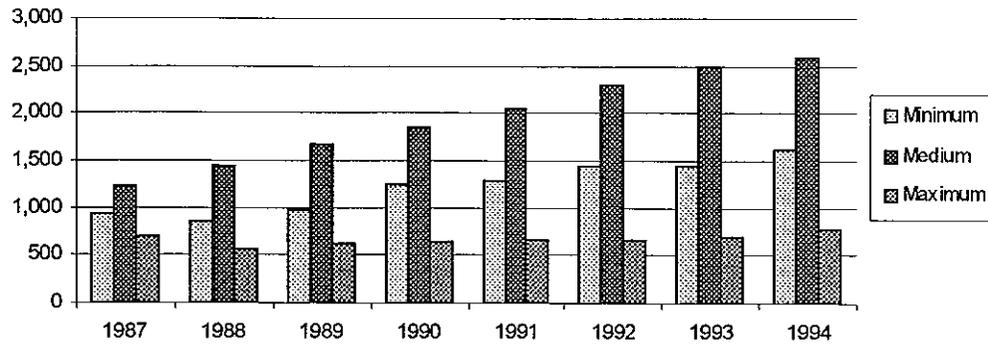


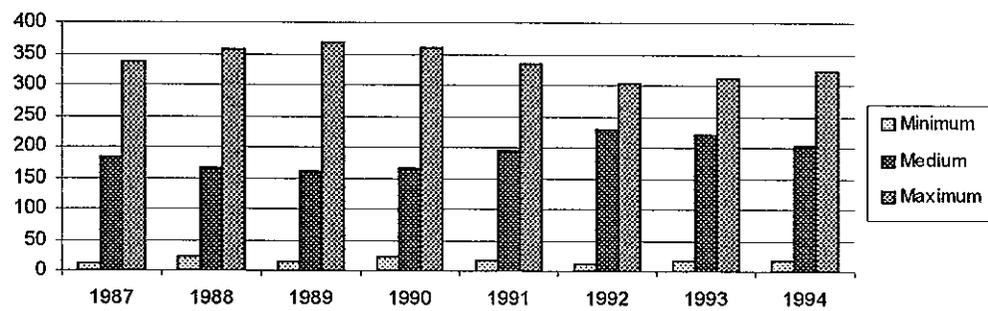
Table 4
Prison Admissions for Violent Crimes



**Table 5
Prison Population by Custody Level - All Iowa Prisons**



**Table 6
Iowa State Penitentiary (Ft. Madison) Population by Custody Level**



**Table 7
Iowa Mens Reformatory (Anamosa) Population by Custody Level**

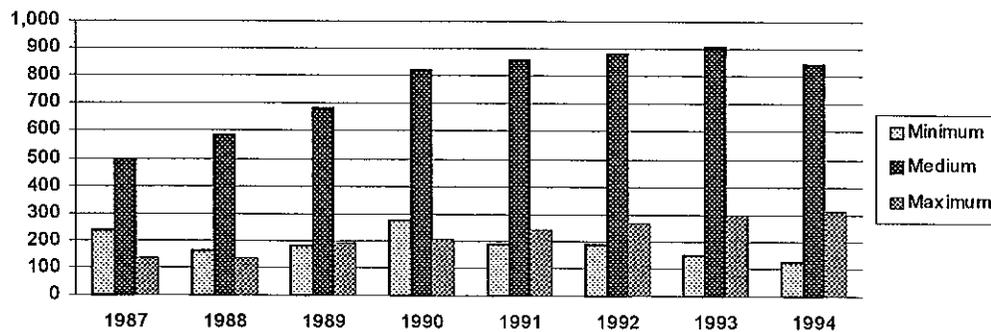


Table 8
Medium Security Unit (Mt. Pleasant)
Population by Custody Level

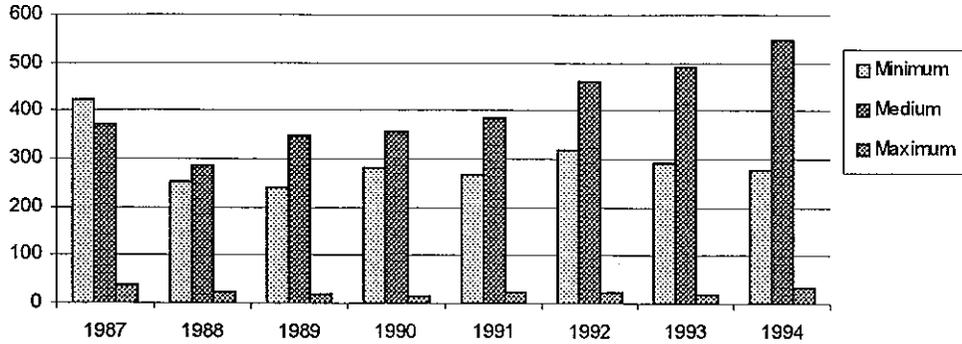


Table 9
Medical Classification Center (Oakdale)
Population by Custody Level

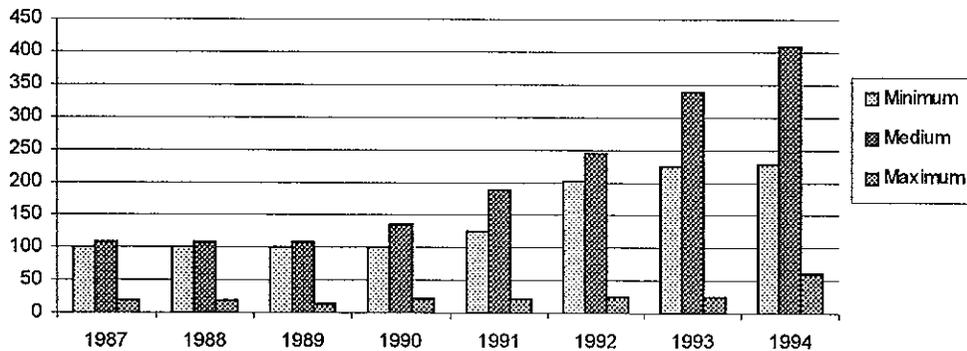


Table 10
Correctional Treatment Unit (Clarinda)
Population by Custody Level

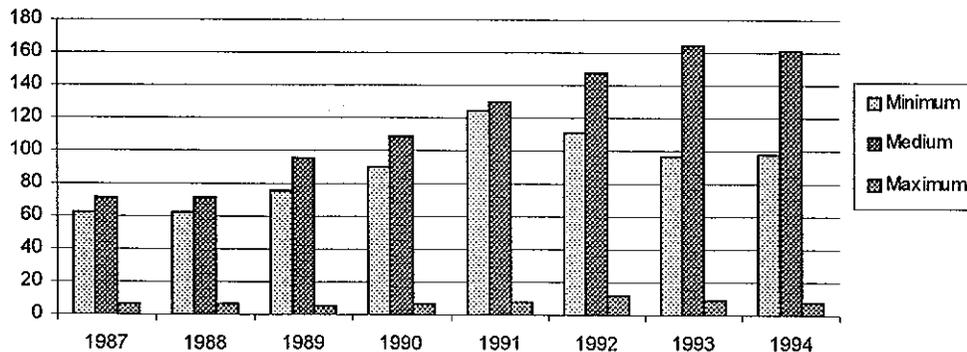


Table 11
Riverview Release Center (Newton) Population
by Custody Level

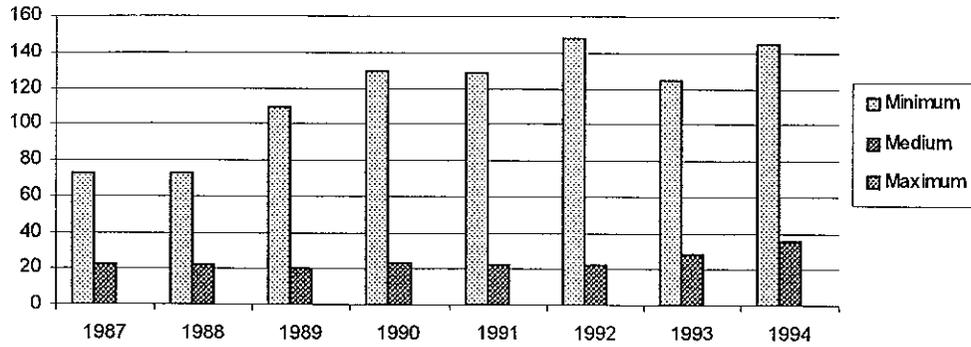


Table 12
North Central Correctional Facility (Rockwell
City) Population by Custody Level

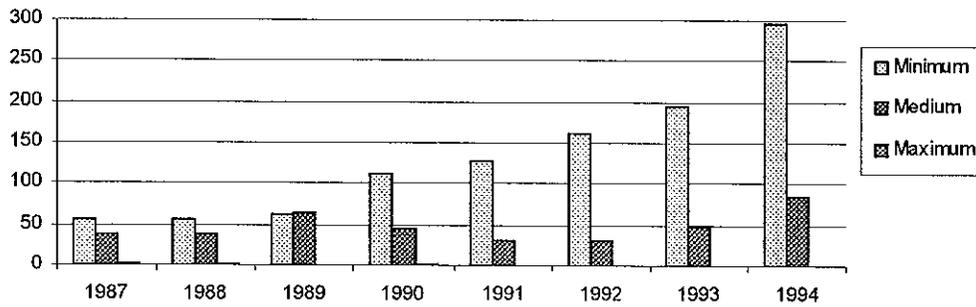


Table 13
Correctional Institution for Women
(Mitchellville) Population by Custody Level

