



RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FOR REFORM

RACIAL/ETHNIC DISPARITY IN IMPRISONMENT IN MASSACHUSETTS

Racial and ethnic disparities in the use of incarceration have been a growing concern in recent decades as prison populations have escalated. While the causes of these disparities are complex, there is increasing evidence of the impact of high incarceration rates on families and communities in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In its comprehensive assessment of the impact of incarceration, the National Research Council concluded that “there is little question that incarceration has become another strand in the complex combination of negative conditions that characterize high-poverty communities in U.S. cities.”¹

The data analysis below is part of a larger project examining racial disparities in incarceration in all 50 states. Using 2014 data from the Massachusetts Department of Correction and the U.S. Bureau of the Census we have calculated the rate of incarceration for the three racial/ethnic groups of white, black, and Hispanic, per 100,000 in the population for each group. (Note that the race data are for non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks.) The disparity ratio is then a measure of the relative likelihood of incarceration.

As can be seen, African Americans, incarcerated at a rate of 655 per 100,000 in Massachusetts are incarcerated at nearly eight times the rate of whites (82 per 100,000), while Hispanics, incarcerated at a rate of 401 per 100,000 are incarcerated at a rate that is 4.9 times greater than whites. In both of these measures, the disparities are considerably larger than the national averages for these groups.

Massachusetts Rates of Incarceration Compared to Nation

	White (Rate per 100,000)	Black (Rate per 100,000)	Hispanic (Rate per 100,000)	Black: White	Hispanic: White
Massachusetts	82	655	401	7.9:1	4.9:1
National	281	1627	362	5.8:1	1.3:1

Sources: Carson, E. Ann (2015). *Prisoners in 2014*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics; Massachusetts Department of Correction (2015). *Prison Population Trends 2014*. Concord, MA: DOC; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division (June 2014). *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States, States, and Counties: April 1 2010 to July 1, 2013*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

¹ National Research Council (2013). *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Correlates*. Washington, DC: National Academies, page 6.