

FEDERAL PRISON SYSTEM  
Current Locations

# DC PRISON POPULATION SURVEY

DISTRICT TASK FORCE ON  
JAILS & JUSTICE



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The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens



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# INTRODUCTION

## Overview and Research Objectives

The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens conducted a survey of the DC prison population to inform the District Task Force on Jails & Justice as it makes recommendations to the city of DC. This survey is part of a broader effort to gather feedback from the DC community and individuals impacted by the criminal justice system in particular.

The survey was designed to gather feedback in two key areas: concerns related to reentry and options for transfer to DC. These areas relate to four recommendations made by the Task Force in its [Phase I report](#).

### Recommendation 5:

The District should increase support for the successful reentry of people returning to D.C. from prison and jail by investing in: housing, education, training, and employment, behavioral health treatment and social and emotional support, and providing protections in law from discrimination in housing, employment, education, and other areas based on criminal record.

### Recommendation 9:

All people convicted of D.C. Code offenses, including those incarcerated in the federal BOP, should serve their sentences under local control, beginning with a plan to allow vulnerable populations to serve the last 6-12 months of their sentences here.

### Recommendation 12:

Upon completing a plan for community investment, decarceration, and local control, the District should renovate or build facilities to support its new goals for prevention, intervention, secure detention, and reentry.

### Recommendation 16.a:

Any secure detention facility should include space for people convicted of D.C. Code offenses who, under the current system, are in the custody of the BOP.

These recommendations are further described in the implementation plans developed by the Task Force committees in Phase II. The survey also contains several demographic and categorical questions to help survey researchers determine variance in opinion between subpopulations.

The target survey population was all individuals in federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) custody who were sentenced by the DC Superior Court for convictions under local DC law.<sup>1</sup> This population includes individuals sentenced at that court who are not DC residents because those individuals will also be affected by the decisions under consideration by the District, such as transfer of people in the BOP to a DC facility.

**Research Objective:**

To collect data that can reasonably demonstrate support or lack of support for the proposed recommendations and implementation plans among the affected population. Specifically:

- To what extent does the affected population support building a DC prison? With what reasoning?
- To what extent does the affected population support spending the final 6 months of their sentence in a DC jail? With what reasoning?
- What concerns are widespread about reentry?

## **Sample Description**

The survey was voluntary and based on opportunity, producing a sample of convenience. The survey was open for 10 days in November 2020. 452 individuals completed the survey, comprising approximately 16% of the total population<sup>2</sup>.

The racial and gender make-up of the survey sample is similar to the whole population dataset provided to the Task Force in July by the BOP. The average age of respondents skewed older than the average age of the whole population. See Appendix A for sample demographic tables. Two thirds of respondents stated that they had been the victim of a crime. 71% reported that they had a family member who had been incarcerated.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was not available in private facilities. Private facilities house about 6% of the total imprisoned population from DC as of October 24, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Based on an October 24, 2020 population snapshot, there were 2,892 DC Code offenders serving sentences in the BOP.

# RESULTS

## Reentry

Respondents were given 13 topics and asked to rate their level of concern about each when it comes to returning to the community. Levels included a lot of concern, some concern, a little concern, and none. The top three concerns were, in order of prevalence:



Healthcare



Employment



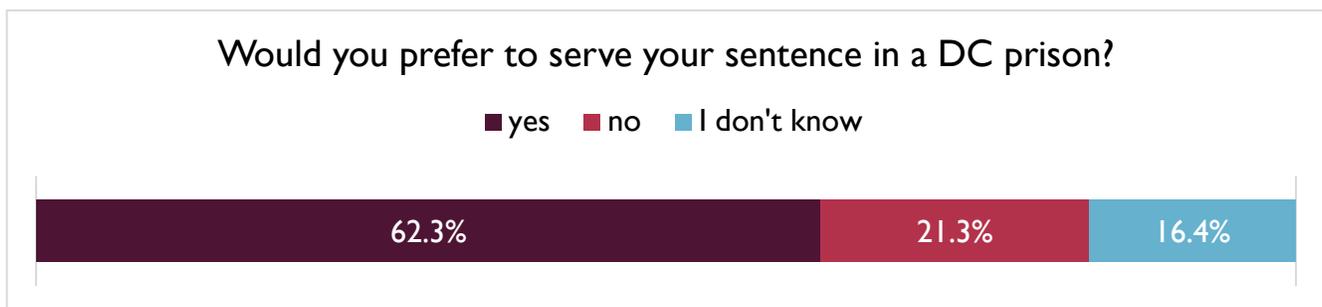
Community trust  
and support

Over 70% of respondents indicated “some” or “a lot” of worry about these topics. About two thirds of respondents rated the following additional topics as cause for “some” or “a lot” of concern:

- Learning new technology
- Restoring relationships with loved ones
- Access to education or training
- Access to benefits
- Housing

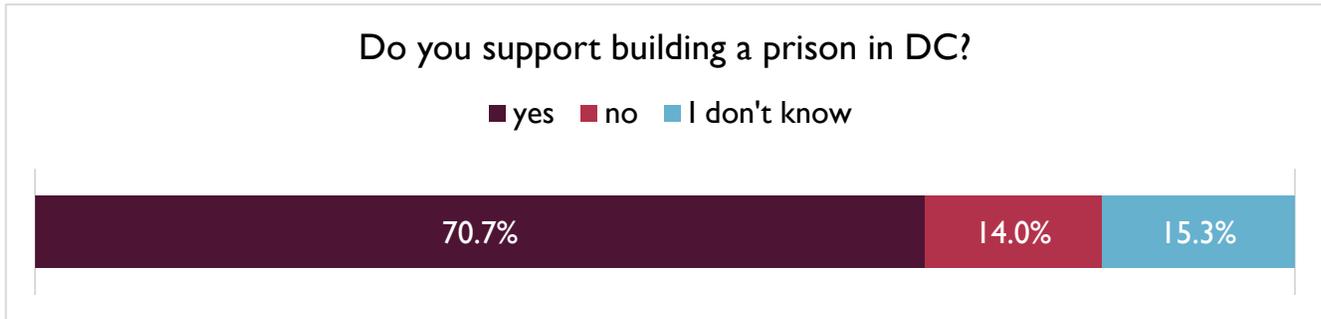
Nearly half of those who will be released in five years or less are worried about getting mental health treatment “some” or “a lot”. One third of that group are worried about getting substance use treatment “some” or “a lot”.

## Transfer to a New DC Prison:



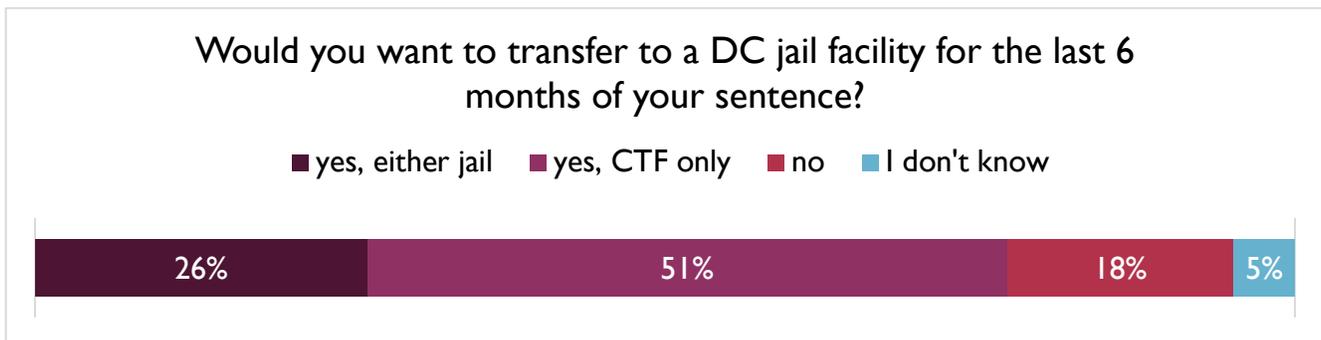
The majority of respondents reported that they would prefer to serve their sentences at a DC prison, with 16% responding that they did not know. Respondents raised similar concerns about the proposal in the open text responses, regardless of their answer to this question.

## Support for Building a DC Prison:

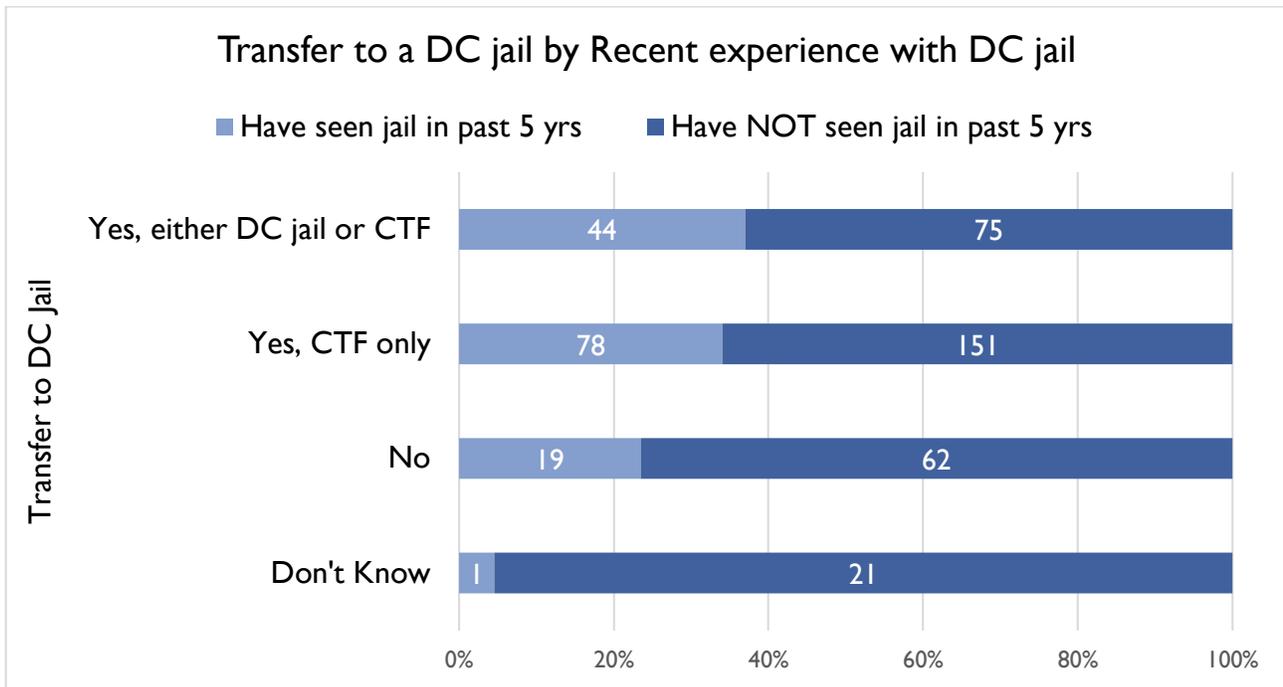


Support for building a new prison in DC received more support than desire to transfer there. A similar number responded “I don’t know” to this question, but far fewer disagreed. Some respondents indicated that DC deserved to have its own facility, and that doing so would support the mission of statehood. Others were concerned that an additional prison would beget more incarceration.

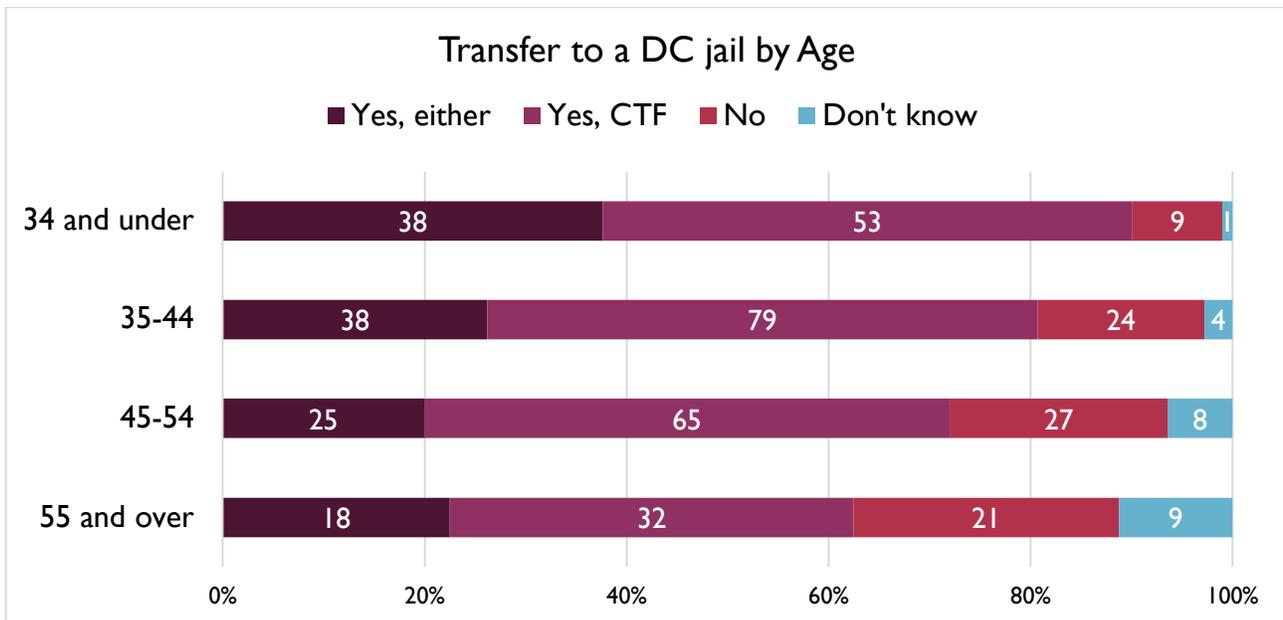
## Transfer to a DC Jail Facility for the Last 6 Months of Sentence:



Transfer to a DC jail facility for the last 6 months of one’s sentence was the most popular transfer/build question with 77% supporting transfer. Two thirds of those in favor supported transfer to the Correctional Treatment Facility only. We can see that there are fewer “no” responses than the prison transfer question, but the big difference here is the drop in “don’t knows”. This relative level of certainty could be attributed to the hypothetical nature of a DC prison versus the known jail entity. That said, respondents frequently mentioned a concern that a new DC facility would end up like the notorious Lorton Prison.



Additionally, respondents who had been to the jail in the last five years were significantly less likely to respond “no” or “don’t know” to transferring there. This might reflect their age and the number of years they have served as well. As shown in the chart below, younger respondents were more likely to support transfer.

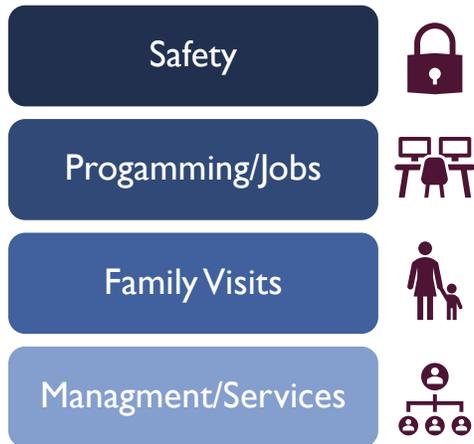


Interestingly, the group supporting transfer to a new prison does not overlap entirely with the group supporting transfer to a jail facility. 18% of respondents supported one but not the other.

## Open Text Responses:

Respondents were asked what concerns they had about transferring to a new DC prison or a DC jail facility. The most common response regarding transfer to DC prison or jail was “I have no concerns”.

The top four concerns related to a new DC prison were:



Other frequently mentioned topics:

- No new jails/prisons
- Facility staff
- Reentry
- Lorton Prison
- Rehabilitation
- Housing and security levels
- Good time credits

The main concerns among those who do not want to transfer to a new prison were: safety, management and services, and that a new prison would be like Lorton Prison.

Respondents offered much stronger opinions about transferring to a DC jail facility, both in favor and against the proposal. The top concerns on this topic included: safety, reentry, inferior environment, family proximity, and programming.

Of those that noted family proximity, quite a few were concerned that contact visits would not be allowed in the jail facility whereas they are in the BOP. Many are concerned about being around youth and the pretrial population, with some concerned that they will damage their progress or even be put in a position where they get time added to their sentence for disciplinary infractions. There was a lot of interest in being housed among the older, more mature population and those focused on

the future. Concerns about the environment included these issues as well as concerns about the physical facility (cleanliness and functionality) and expected restrictions in the facility such as freedom of movement and access to recreation time outdoors.

*Would it actually be helping me to readjust to the society that I have been away from for so many years?*

Some hoped that programming would be better in jail and would help prepare them for release. Others were concerned that they would have difficulty accessing the programming that they need. Several wrote that they would rather stay put, or that they believed transferring should be optional. Among those who indicated they would not want to transfer, the top concerns were safety and an inferior physical and social environment compared to the BOP.

## Limitations

The primary limitation in this analysis is that the sample is not random, rather it is a sample of convenience. Individuals who completed the survey may be more or less likely to support transfer to DC, or report different concerns, than those who were not able to complete the survey, or chose not to do so. There are a number of reasons that individuals may not have had the opportunity to complete the survey:

- The survey was distributed to individuals in BOP-run facilities only, excluding all 11 private facilities that house about 6% of the DC population.
- Individuals had to have access to TRULINCS during the days the survey was posted in order to have an opportunity to fill it out. TRULINCS access can be revoked by BOP authorities. Some facilities may have had limited access due to pandemic restrictions on movement. Some individuals may have a visual impairment or other disability preventing them from participating.
- Completion of the survey required moderate English language reading proficiency. The survey was not offered in any other language.

Another limitation is in subgroup analysis. A number of responses related to years an individual had already served and years they had remaining on their sentences were logically impossible. These instances indicated misinterpretation of survey questions. Due to this lack of clarity, we are unable to confidently draw conclusions from patterns in the responses based on this information.

Finally, there were not enough respondents identifying as women or gender non-conforming/non-binary to analyze on the basis of gender (n=12, n=2) which may have yielded important insights for those subgroups.

# METHODOLOGY

## Survey Methods

- Primarily multiple choice with two text response questions (See [Appendix](#))
- Questions related to Phase I community engagement
- Transfer questions provided specific options for feedback based on proposed committee recommendations

## Data Collection Method

- Electronic distribution and collection via BOP internal communication program TRULINCS
- Collaboration with BOP Office of Research
- Confidential

## Data Analysis

- Comparison of sample to dataset from July 4, 2020
- Coding of qualitative data
- Analyzing relationships between responses and between subgroups<sup>3</sup>
- Analyzing relationships between qualitative and quantitative data

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<sup>3</sup> Chi-square calculations were used to measure significance. This type of analysis was determined to be appropriate despite non-random sampling because willingness to respond is not strictly related to the variables of interest.

## CONCLUSION

The response to this survey exceeded the researchers' expectations both in number of participants and completeness of responses. The response alone speaks strongly for the continued use of electronic surveys through the BOP Office of Research. Future surveys could include a paper mailing to private facilities to account for the lack of electronic distribution to this population.

The survey results demonstrate broad support for transfer to DC among the 452 respondents. The concerns of these supporters, as well as those who oppose and don't know, should be seriously examined as the District prepares to consider a new facility. We know that the top concern across transfer options is physical safety. We also know that a significant minority of the survey population does not want to transfer to DC, inspiring the question: should transfer be optional?

The survey also provides insight into the primary reentry concerns of respondents. We learned that half of those who will be released in the next five years are worried about getting mental health treatment, and one third are worried about getting substance use treatment. This information speaks powerfully for the need to ensure access to high quality treatment for these returning citizens in the near term. We also learned that gaining community trust and support is a top concern among the respondents. What policies and practices can support this goal?

Further research could include an exploration of specific programming needs of this population, including stratification by special population as defined by the Task Force recommendations. Based on the response rate to this survey, future surveys could have success using a random sample.

# APPENDIX

## Sample Demographics

N=452

<b>Age Range</b>	Count	Percent
18-24	13	2.9%
25-34	89	19.7%
35-44	145	32.1%
45-54	125	27.7%
55-64	67	14.8%
over 65	13	2.9%

<b>Gender</b>	Count	Percent
Man	438	96.9%
Woman	12	2.7%
GNC/NB	2	0.4%

<b>Race Identity</b>	Count	Percent
Black or African American	378	83.6%
White	5	1.1%
Latinx	9	2.0%
Asian	3	0.7%
Native American	1	0.2%
Pacific Islander	1	0.2%
Middle Eastern/North African	1	0.2%
Multiracial	9	2.0%
Other	38	8.4%
Prefer not to say	7	1.5%

## Survey Questions

1. What is your age range?
  - 18-24
  - 25-34
  - 35-44
  - 45-44
  - 55-64
  - over 64
2. What is your gender?
  - Man
  - Woman
  - Gender non-conforming/Non-binary
  - Prefer not to say
3. How do you identify?
  - Black or African American
  - White
  - Latinx
  - Asian
  - Native American
  - Pacific Islander
  - Middle Eastern/North African
  - Multiracial
  - Other
  - Prefer not to say
4. How many years have you been incarcerated during your current sentence?
  - Less than 1
  - 1-2
  - 3-5
  - 6-10
  - 11-20
  - More than 20
5. If you were sentenced on or before August 4, 2000, when will you be eligible for parole?
  - I have been denied parole at least 1 time
  - My eligibility date has passed but I have not gone before the parole board yet
  - My eligibility date is in less than 2 years
  - My eligibility date is in 2 – 5 years
  - My eligibility date is in 6 – 10 years
  - My eligibility date is in more than 10 years
  - This does not apply to me, I was sentenced AFTER August 4, 2000
6. If you were sentenced after August 4, 2000, how many years are left on your current sentence?
  - Less than 1
  - 1-2
  - 3-5
  - 6-10
  - 11-20
  - More than 20
  - This does not apply to me, I was sentenced on or BEFORE August 4, 2000
7. Have you been to the DC Jail (CDF) or Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF) in the last five years?  
[Including awaiting trial, serving a sentence, as a visitor, and other]
  - Yes
  - No

8. Do you have a family member who has been incarcerated?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

9. Have you ever been a victim of a crime?

- Yes
- No

10. When you think about returning to the community, how much do you worry about:

Finding a job	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Finding housing	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Getting health care	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Getting substance use treatment	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Getting mental health treatment	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Avoiding re-arrest	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Getting access to education or training	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Getting access to benefits like Social Security or SNAP (food stamps)	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Complying with the terms of my release	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Restoring relationships with my family and loved ones	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Transportation to get around DC	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Learning new technology	A Lot	Some	A Little	None
Getting community trust and support	A Lot	Some	A Little	None

11. If there was a prison in DC, run by the DC Department of Corrections (DOC), would you prefer to serve your full sentence there?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

12. DC could build a prison so that DC residents serve their full sentences in the city. Which do you support:

- I support building a new prison in DC
- I do not support building a new prison in DC
- I don't know

13. Right now, DOC runs two jail facilities. Would you want to transfer to the DC Jail or Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF) to serve the last 6 months of your sentence?

- Yes, either DC Jail or CTF
- Yes, DC Jail only
- Yes, CTF only
- No
- I don't know

14. What concerns, if any, would you have about DC building a new prison for people currently housed in BOP facilities?

[Text box]

15. What concerns, if any, would you have about transferring to a DC jail facility to serve the last six months of your sentence?

[Text box]