

# How Ready Is Providence?

## CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

October 2008

### Why is it important?

Since 2000, the United States prison population has grown an average of 1.9% each year, bringing the 2006 sentenced prison population to over 1.5 million.<sup>1</sup> The Justice Policy Center of the Urban Institute estimates that about half of those in prison are parents and that at least 2 million children nationwide currently have a parent behind bars. Surveys indicate that many of these children are young – approximately 20% are under the age of five.<sup>2</sup> Most children with incarcerated parents live in poverty before, during, and after their parents'

incarceration. Children of color are disproportionately affected, and parental substance abuse frequently plays a role in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Research showing the impact of parental incarceration on children is limited. Still, the existing literature supports the notion that the consequences can be profound. As shown in Table 1, children often display inappropriate, disruptive, or anti-social behavior. Their academic performance frequently deteriorates. Children placed with unsuitable caregivers are at risk for abuse and neglect. Not surprisingly, older chil-

Table 1

*Continued on next page*

Possible Developmental Effects on Children of Parental Crime, Arrest, and Incarceration			
Developmental Stage	Developmental Characteristics	Developmental Tasks	Effects
Infancy (0-2 years)	Limited perception, mobility Total dependency	Development of trust and attachment	Impaired parent-child bonding
Early childhood (2-6 years)	Increased perception and mobility Improved memory Greater exposure to environment Ability to imagine	Development of sense of autonomy, independence, and initiative	Inappropriate separation anxiety Impaired socioemotional developmental Acute traumatic stress reactions and survivor guilt
Middle childhood (7-10 years)	Increased independence from caregivers Ability to reason Importance of peers	Sense of industry Ability to work productively	Developmental regressions Poor self-concept Acute traumatic stress reactions Impaired ability to overcome future trauma
Early adolescence (11-14 years)	Organization of behavior in pursuit of goals Increased abstract thinking Puberty Increased aggression	Ability to work productively with others Control expression of emotions	Rejection of limits on behavior Trauma-reactive behaviors
Late adolescence (15-18 years)	Emotional crisis and confusion Adult sexual development and sexuality Formal abstract thinking Increased independence	Development of cohesive identity Resolution of conflicts with family and society Ability to engage in adult work and relationships	Premature termination of dependency relationship with parent Intergenerational crime and incarceration

Source: Adapted from Katherine Gabel and Denise Johnson, *Children of Incarcerated Parents* (New York: Lexington Books, 1997). As summarized in "Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Reentry."

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## Why is it important?

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dren often engage in substance abuse and criminal behavior themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Concerned that too little is being done to support children of incarcerated parents, child advocates call for greater collaboration between the child welfare and criminal justice systems. “At this time, the two systems lack formal channels of contact and have not developed methods for information-sharing or coordination of systems,” writes Cynthia Seymour, author of *Children with Parents in Prison: Child Welfare Policy, Program and Practice Issues*. “Professionals in both systems acknowledge that increased collaboration between the two systems would certainly enhance outcomes for children and families.”<sup>5</sup>

## A Note on this Analysis

To determine the number of children impacted by incarceration in Rhode Island, the Department of Corrections (DOC) asks sentenced offenders serving time in prison and those held while awaiting trial to report whether they have children, and, if so, how many they have. Though the information is self-reported and not verified, it represents the best available data on children of incarcerated parents and can give an indication of how many children are affected by incarceration.<sup>6</sup>

Data analysis in the 2004 *How Ready Is Providence?* report included children of parents both serving a sentence and awaiting trial. Data from the DOC are reported at a single point-in-time – looking at inmates in prison or jail on a given date. Inmates awaiting trial are constantly fluctuating, changing dramatically on a daily basis. Those inmates and the children they represent are therefore unreliable and inconsistent to track over time.<sup>7</sup> Though the impact of a parent’s arrest on children should not be underestimated, that impact is exacerbated by conviction and sentencing, as families face longer-term separation and the consequences and stigmas attached to conviction for a crime.

The analyses presented in this update will focus on those children whose parents have been sentenced.<sup>8</sup>

## What is happening now?

### In Rhode Island

From 2004 to 2007, the total inmate population in Rhode Island increased 4% while the sentenced population increased by 16%. This includes a 12% increase from 2006 to 2007 alone. By April 2007, over 3,400 people were serving a sentence within the state’s corrections system,<sup>9</sup> and by fall of the same year the prison population climbed to 4,000 inmates for the first time.<sup>10</sup>

The majority of inmates in the state are men, and roughly half report having children. In September 2007, 1,678 sentenced inmates reported having children, including 132 mothers and 1,546 fathers. Most women were convicted of non-violent offenses, with a median sentence of one year. Men, on the other hand, were most likely to be convicted of violent or drug-related

offenses, and the median length of sentence for males was three years.<sup>11</sup>

Between 2004 and 2007, the number of children reported by sentenced inmates in Rhode Island increased by 25%, with sentenced parents reporting more than 4,000 children in 2007.<sup>12</sup> Of the children reported with an in-state address, nearly 70% lived in one of the core cities (Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket), making children in those cities four times more likely to be impacted by parental incarceration than children in the rest of the state.<sup>13</sup>

### In Providence

Children in Providence are the most likely in Rhode Island to have a parent behind bars. Between 2004 and 2007, the total number of children in Providence with a parent serving a sentence increased by 24%, rising to 1,300 by April 2007. This is an increase of 255 children since 2004 and represents a rate increase of 5.6 per 1,000 children. Realistically it means that an estimated 1 in every 35 children in the city has a parent currently serving a sentence.<sup>14</sup>

As Rhode Island’s largest city, Providence is disproportionately represented in both the prison population and in the number of children with an incarcerated parent. Based on the most recent estimates from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Providence is home to 16% of the state’s general population and ap-

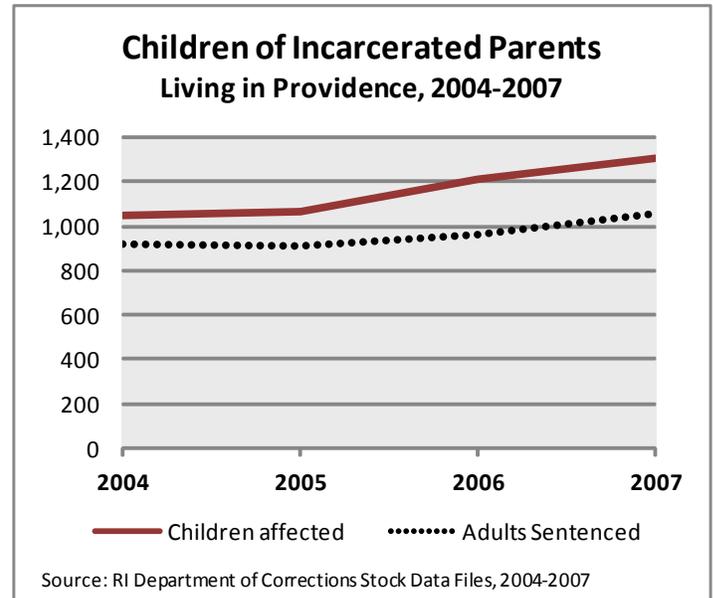
proximately 19% of the child population.<sup>15</sup> However, in the fall of 2007, 40% of Rhode Island parents serving a sentence reported a Providence address and their children accounted for 42% of all children in the state affected by parental incarceration.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, some neighborhoods within the city are more affected than Providence as a whole. In 2007, roughly 1 in 25 children in Mount Hope, Lower South Providence and Olneyville had a parent serving a sentence. That rate was even higher in Upper South Providence, where over 3% of the adult population was serving a sentence. Nearly 150 children, close to 1 in 10 children in that neighborhood, had an incarcerated parent.<sup>17</sup>

Since 2004, the rate of children impacted by parental incarceration increased in 14 neighborhoods around the city (see endnote 18 for a full list). Manton, Silver Lake, Upper South Providence, and Wanskuck experienced the most significant increases, with rates of increase ranging from 15 children per 1,000 in Silver Lake to 24 children per 1,000 in Upper South Providence. The total number of children affected doubled in Elmhurst, Silver Lake, and Hartford, and even tripled to over 115 children in Wanskuck. Six neighborhoods did see a small decline in the number of children with an incarcerated parent (Federal Hill, Mount Pleasant, Reservoir, Smith Hill, South Elmwood, and Washington Park).<sup>18</sup>

An even greater number of children are affected every day by incarceration than the available data would suggest. In April 2007, Rhode Island inmates in custody awaiting trial reported 575 children, 298 of which were from Providence.

Figure 1



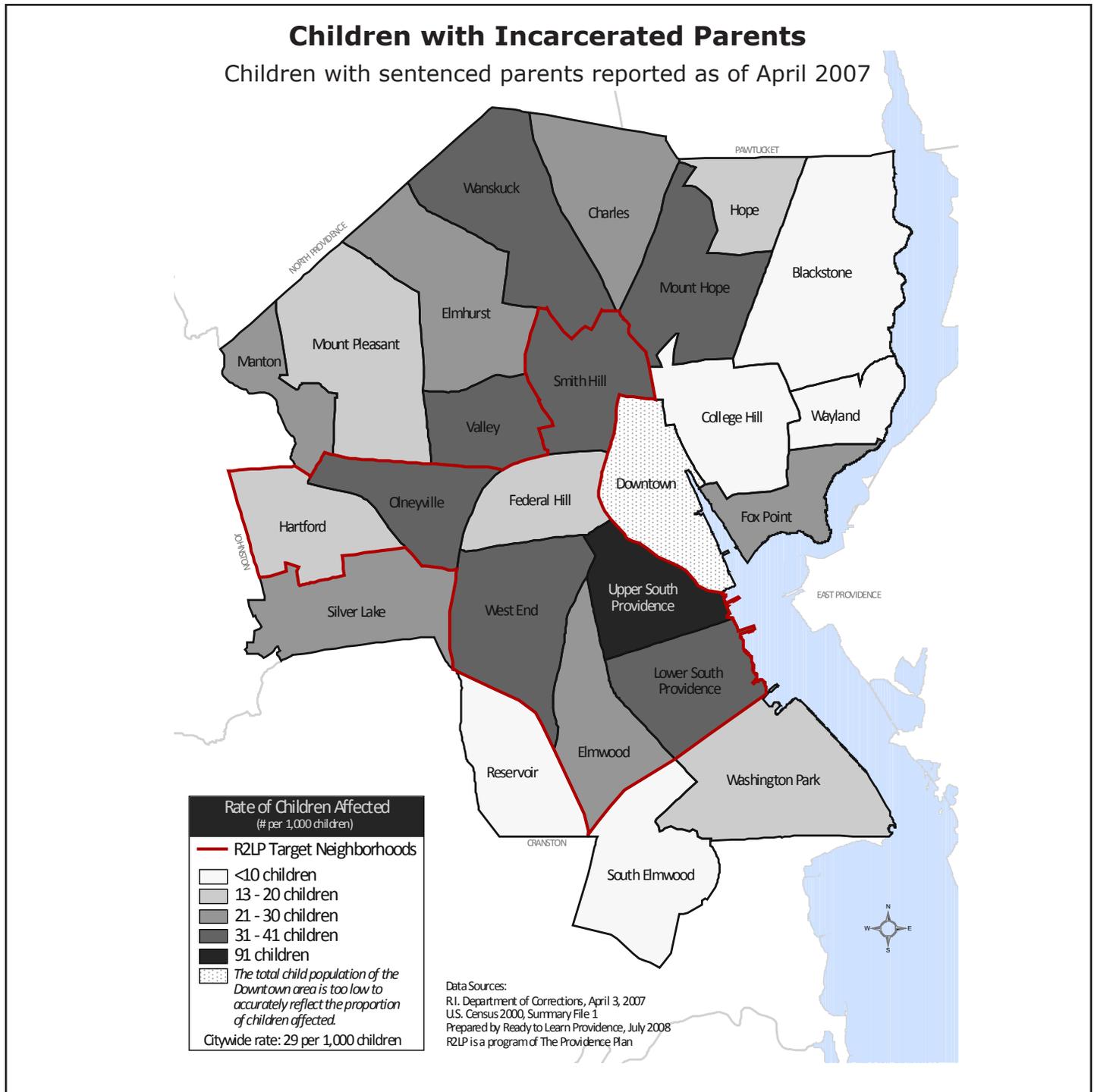
Pending the outcome of trial, the length of time these inmates will remain in custody, and thus the potential impact of their incarceration on their children, is not known. Another 848 inmates statewide did not answer the question pertaining to number of children. The number of children they may be leaving behind cannot be determined. The data also do not take into account other adults in a child's life who may be in prison – grandparents, older siblings, and other caregivers. Additionally, there are many more parents who are not currently in prison but who are on probation or parole.<sup>19</sup>

### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup>Sabol, W. J., Couture, H., & Harrison, P. M. (2007). *Prisoners in 2006* (Publication No. NCJ 182335). Retrieved April 21, 2008 from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/p06.htm>. <sup>2</sup>La Vigne, N. G., Davies, E., & Brazzell, D. (2008, February). *Broken bonds: Understanding and addressing the needs of children with incarcerated parents*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center. <sup>3</sup>Seymour, C. (1998). Children with parents in prison: Child welfare policy, program, and practice issues. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program*, 77. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America. <sup>4</sup>Travis, J., Cincotta McBride, E., & Solomon, A. L. (2005, June). *Families left behind: The hidden costs of incarceration and reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center. Adapted from Gabel, K. & Johnson, D. (1997). *Children of incarcerated parents*. New York: Lexington Books. <sup>5</sup>Seymour, C. (1998). *Children with parents in prison: Child welfare policy, program, and practice issues*. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program*, 77. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America. <sup>6</sup>Individuals may have reported more or fewer children than they actually have. Children may be of any age, and they may live at an address that is different from the reported address. <sup>7</sup>Based on RI DOC stock file data for mid-year 2004-2006 and April 2007. The number of inmates awaiting trial (and consequently the children they report) varies widely by year (e.g. children among those awaiting trial dropped from 1,138 in 2006 to 575 in 2007). <sup>8</sup>ProvPlan and R2LP analysis of sentenced inmates includes those on home confinement, in mental health facilities, and those serving time in RI from another state. RIDOC analyses usually excluded these groups. <sup>9</sup>ProvPlan and R2LP analysis of RIDOC stock file data, 2004-2007. As of April 3, 2007, the RI prison population includes 432 inmates with an unknown address and 240 with an out-of-state address. <sup>10</sup>Edgar, R. (2008, March 21). Racial disparity clear in prisons. *The Providence Journal*. Retrieved April 24, 2008 from [http://www.projo.com/news/content/PRISN\\_PANEL\\_03-21-08\\_OF9F704\\_v91.3812f2d.html](http://www.projo.com/news/content/PRISN_PANEL_03-21-08_OF9F704_v91.3812f2d.html). <sup>11</sup>Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents. *2008 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* (pp. 94-95). Providence, RI: Author. <sup>12</sup>ProvPlan and R2LP analysis of RIDOC stock file data, 2004-2007. 848 inmates did not respond to the question, thus the number of children was assumed to be zero. <sup>13</sup>Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. (2008). Children of Incarcerated Parents. *2008 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* (pp. 94-95). Providence, RI: Author. <sup>14</sup>ProvPlan and R2LP analysis of RIDOC stock file data, 2004-2007. On April 3, 2007, 1,305 children were reported by Providence residents serving a sentence. <sup>15</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2006). *American Community Survey*. Available from the U.S. Bureau of the Census website, <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html>. <sup>16</sup>As of September 30, 2007, 3,072 children were reported by 1,387 sentenced inmates with a Rhode Island address. Of those children, 1,300 were reported by 561 Providence residents. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. (2008). Children of incarcerated Parents. *2008 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* (pp. 94-95). Providence, RI: Author.

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Figure 2



**(Endnotes continued)**

<sup>17</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *United States Census 2000 Summary File 1* [Data file]. Available from the U.S. Bureau of the Census website, <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>. Statistics for those in RIDOC custody (awaiting trial or sentenced) are from ProvPlan's analysis of RIDOC stock file data, 2004-2007 as of April 3, 2007. Of 1,375 adults from Providence, 93% (1,282) were geocoded to neighborhoods. Of these, 1,052 (82%) were sentenced and 230 (18%) were awaiting trial.<sup>18</sup>Comparisons are based on geocoded RIDOC stock file data of children reported by sentenced inmates on June 30, 2004 and April 3, 2007. The rate of children affected increased in: Charles, Elmhurst, Elmwood, Hartford, Hope, Lower South Providence, Manton, Mount Hope, Olneyville, Silver Lake, Upper South Providence, Valley, Wanskuck, and West End. Blackstone and Wayland did not experience any change and Downtown, College Hill, and Fox Point were excluded from this analysis due to low child populations.<sup>19</sup>The number of children for individuals on probation or parole is not available.