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## **New Report Finds War on Drugs a Key Factor in Colorado's Growing Prison Population — and Its Prison Budget, Which Is Nearing \$1 Billion for First Time in History**

*There were more than twice as many felony drug filings in Colorado last year compared to 2012, and three out of four were for simple possession; women are being disproportionately impacted and represent a growing percentage of the state's inmate population*

*Statements below from Colorado House Judiciary Chair Pete Lee and CCJRC Executive Director Christie Donner*

DENVER — The war on drugs is a key factor in Colorado's growing prison population and, in turn, its growing budget, according to a report released Monday by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC). It also appears to be having a disproportionate impact on women. **The full report is available online at <https://tinyurl.com/ycpef786>.**

The analysis of state court and prison data found there were more than twice as many drug felony case filings in Colorado in 2017 (15,323) compared to 2012 (7,424), and the vast majority of drug felony filings (75%) are for simple possession. As a result, there are more people being sentenced to prison for drug possession, especially women. The report, which also includes a breakdown for each of Colorado's 22 judicial districts, shows that five districts saw drug felony filings increase by 165% or more in 2017 compared to 2012.

"Despite reform efforts, the war on drugs continues to play an outsized role in fueling Colorado's prison population and, in turn, its prison budget," said CCJRC Executive Director Christie Donner. "No one thinks the status quo is stemming the flow of either illegal drugs or drug addiction, and yet it not only persists but is getting worse, particularly for women."

The number of people sentenced to prison grew 12% last year — 9% among men and an unprecedented 29% among women. From 2015 to 2016, the number sentenced to prison specifically for drug possession increased 17% overall and 24% among women. Another driver of the increase in the prison population was an increase in revocations from probation of individuals whose most serious crime of conviction was drug possession, which is again, disproportionately impacting women.

The report also highlights the shortfall of Senate Bill 13-250, legislation enacted in 2013 that was intended to comprehensively reform state drug laws in order to reserve prison beds for high-level dealers while prioritizing treatment and community supervision for individuals charged with possession. "Five years later, it is clear that it did not go far enough," the report concludes.

"Five years ago, the General Assembly came together and agreed that it was time to stop incarcerating people for simple drug possession and reserve our state's limited prison space for violent offenders and high-level dealers," said House Judiciary Chair Pete Lee. "The 2013 drug sentencing reform legislation was well-intentioned, but it clearly has not had that effect. The Legislature should revisit the state's drug sentencing structure, come up with some new ideas for reaching that original goal, and redouble efforts to steer people struggling with addiction into treatment rather than prisons."

The report comes just as the Colorado General Assembly is considering funding requests from the Department of Corrections to reopen two closed prisons, which could add more than \$30 million to a prison budget that is rapidly nearing \$1 billion for the first time in history. Because Colorado's prison population is projected to grow for the next several years, the DOC has asked the Legislature for \$18.8 million to reopen Colorado State Penitentiary II in Cañon City and \$12.3 million to reopen the Huerfano County Correctional Facility, in addition to its base request of \$922 million for FY 2018-19.

The DOC's figure setting with the Joint Budget Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, at which time lawmakers will decide whether to include the reopenings in the 2018-19 Long Appropriations Bill.

"Colorado does not need more prisons," Donner said. "It needs a more sensible drug policy that treats drug use as a public health issue instead of a criminal justice issue."

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*The Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition is a non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating the overuse of the criminal justice system and advancing community health and safety. For more information, visit <https://www.ccjrc.org>.*