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PRESS RELEASE

Pew Quantifies the Collateral Costs of Incarceration on the Economic Mobility of Former Inmates, Their Families, and Their Children

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Economic Mobility Project

Incarceration reduces former inmates' earnings by 40 percent and limits their future economic mobility, according to a new Pew report, *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*. This is a growing challenge now that 1 in every 28 children in America has a parent behind bars, up from 1 in 125 just 25 years ago.

"People who break the law need to be held accountable and pay their debt to society," said Adam Gelb, director of the Public Safety Performance Project of the Pew Center on the States. "At the same time, the collateral costs of locking up 2.3 million people are piling higher and higher. Corrections is the second fastest growing state budget category, and state leaders from both parties are now finding that there are research-based strategies for low-risk offenders that can reduce crime at far less cost than prison."

The report authored by Pew's Economic Policy Group and the Pew Center on the States shows that:

- Before being incarcerated, two-thirds of male inmates were employed and more than half were the primary source of financial support for their children.
- After release, former male inmates work nine fewer weeks annually and take home 40 percent less in annual earnings, making \$23,500 instead of \$39,100. That amounts to an expected earnings loss of nearly \$179,000 through age 48 for men who have been incarcerated.
- Of former inmates who were in the bottom of the earnings distribution in 1986, two-thirds remained there in 2006, twice the number of non-incarcerated men.

“Pew’s past research shows a variety of factors influence economic mobility both within a person’s lifetime and across generations. This report finds that incarceration is a powerful determinant of mobility for both former inmates and their children,” said Scott Winship, research manager of the Economic Mobility Project of Pew’s Economic Policy Group.

Incarceration’s long-term economic repercussions are felt by increasing numbers of families and communities now that 2.3 million Americans are behind bars, equaling 1 in 100 adults. Up from 500,000 in 1980, this marks more than a 300 percent increase in the United States’ incarcerated population.

Collateral Costs details the concentration of incarceration among men, the young, the uneducated and African Americans. One in 87 working-aged white men is in prison or jail compared with 1 in 36 Hispanic men and 1 in 12 African American men. Today, more African American men aged 20 to 34 without a high school diploma or GED are behind bars (37 percent) than are employed (26 percent).

The report also shows more than 2.7 million minor children now have a parent behind bars, or 1 in every 28. For African American children the number is 1 in 9, a rate that has more than quadrupled in the past 25 years.

According to the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, improving employment

prospects can decrease the chances that ex-offenders will return to prison or jail. In previous reports, Pew identified policies that research shows can reduce recidivism and minimize the intergenerational impact of incarceration by boosting the chances that ex-offenders will successfully rejoin the community and the labor market. Those solutions include:

- Reconnecting former inmates to the labor market through education and training, job search and placement support, and follow-up services;
- Making work pay by capping the percent of an offenders' income subject to deductions for court-ordered fines and fees;
- Funding incentives for corrections agencies and programs that succeed in reducing crime and increasing employment;
- Offering earned-time credits to offenders who complete educational, vocational, or rehabilitation programs behind bars; and
- Using swift and certain sanctions to deter probation and parole violations and reduce the cost of incarceration. For example, Hawaii's successful HOPE probation program uses short but immediate jail stays to punish drug use and other probation violations, imposing them on weekends so working offenders don't lose their jobs.

All original research for this report was conducted for Pew by Bruce Western, professor of sociology, Harvard Kennedy School, and Becky Pettit, associate professor of sociology, University of Washington. Incarceration totals and rates are from federal Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) data on penal populations from 1980 to 2008, and correctional surveys were used to allocate aggregate totals across age, race, gender and education groups. Earnings and income mobility analyses were conducted using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) 1979 cohort.

For the complete report and more information, please visit www.pewstates.org.

The Pew Economic Policy Group is a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts and promotes policies and practices that strengthen the U.S. economy. The Pew Center on the States is a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts that identifies and advances effective solutions to critical issues facing states. Pew is a nonprofit organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life.

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