



# BARBALUNGA FOR SHERIFF

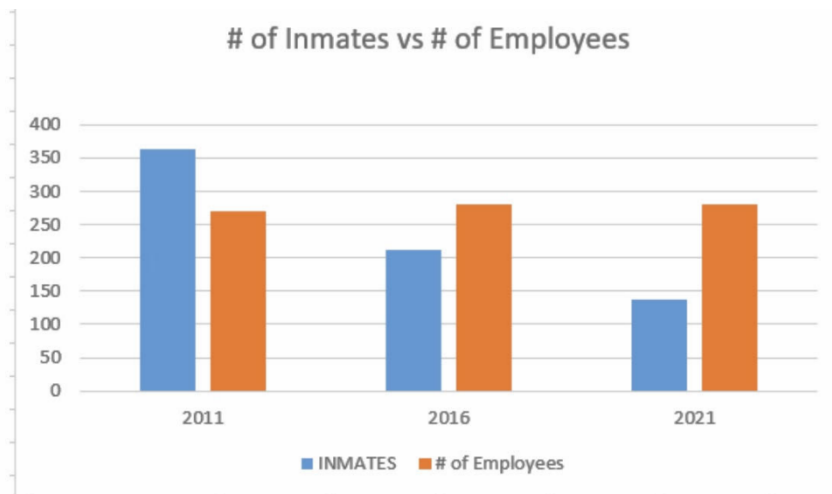
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## Jail Budget Needs Rebalancing

**Inmate Population Falls, Staff Salaries Rise**

BERKSHIRE COUNTY—Alf Barbalunga says the budget of the Berkshire County Jail & House of Correction has become “administratively bloated,” as inmate count has plummeted, while staffing costs have soared. The Berkshire Sheriff’s Department appropriation (not counting retained revenue) has risen from \$14.258 million in fiscal 2013, to \$18.783 million in fiscal 2022---a 32% appropriation increase. The funding for wages and salaries has spiked from \$11.4 million in 2013 to \$15.584 million in 2022. The sheriff has added at least \$4.5 million in wages and salaries since he took office.



In 2011, there were more than 350 inmates in the Berkshire County Jail (nearly 400 according to the Sheriff’s website). According to the Dept. of Corrections Daily Count Sheet, by the week of July 11, 2022, the inmate count had dropped to 162 (71 in the House of Correction, and 91 in the Jail.) For the same week in June of 2018, the inmate count was 216. In the last 6 years,

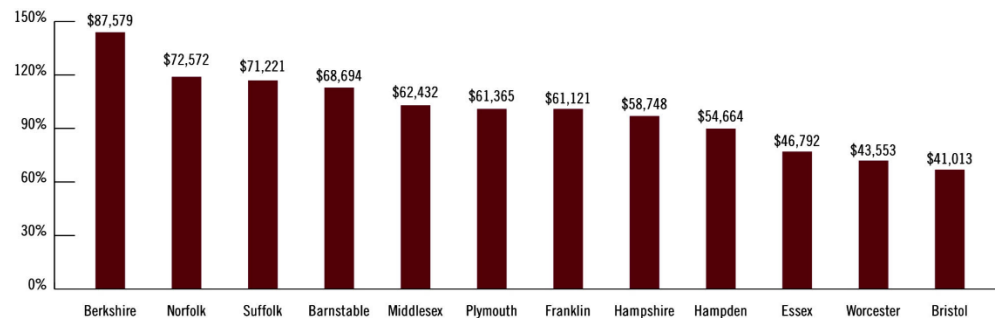
the inmate count has fallen by -25%, and compared to 2011, the inmate count has fallen by more than 50%. Compared to when he took office, Tom Bowler’s inmate population today is less than half of what it was twelve years ago. Yet the number of employees has actually increased. From 2011 to 2016, the sheriff’s appropriation grew by +22%, while the Berkshire County Jail had the largest percentage drop in inmate population in the state at -42%. (For comparison, Hampden had a -10% decline, Hampshire a -18% decline, and Franklin’s inmate population increased +50%.)

In 2017, MassInc published [Getting Tough on Spending](#), an analysis of corrections budgets between 2011 to 2016. Key findings from this study show that despite a significant decline in the total number of individuals held in correctional facilities in recent years, spending on prisons and jails continued to rise, especially in Berkshire County. Though the state’s prisons

and jails held nearly 2,900 fewer individuals, their budget growth outpaced inflation over this period by \$72 million; and, growth in correctional spending was largely driven by rising employee wages and new hiring.

As corrections budgets grew and inmate population declined, the average per inmate cost of incarceration rose sharply. The MassINC study reports that the Berkshire County Sheriff’s Department had the **highest total expenditure per inmate in the State, in**

Figure 5: Total expenditure per inmate, FY 2016



Sources: MassINC’s analysis of Massachusetts Office of the Comptroller data request and Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets

**2016, at \$87,579 per inmate,** while Berkshire County itself had the lowest median household income in the State. By comparison, in 2016, the cost of a year’s tuition at Harvard University, including tuition, health services, student services fee, plus room and board, was \$60,659.

Additionally, while correctional facilities saw opportunities for greater cost savings as inmate populations were declining, *spending categories associated with recidivism reduction did not increase significantly.* “Unfortunately,” Barbalunga explains, “these recidivism services only represent a small fraction of total correctional expenditures.” Spending on *program services* for incarcerated individuals dropped from 3% of total DOC expenditure in FY 2011 to 2.7% in FY 2016. For county sheriffs, recidivism spending remained constant at just 2% of total expenditure. MassINC concluded there was a “need for budget-makers to take a more active role helping correctional administrators overcome the inertia that makes it difficult to reallocate dollars within their agencies.” The study found that “there is significant opportunity to reallocate correctional resources to reduce recidivism and the associated costs to taxpayers.”

Michael Widmer, the former president of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation who co-authored the MassINC report, said he was surprised that spending was going up as inmate populations were declining, but, he said, he was astounded that the employee-per-inmate ratio at county facilities was 1:2. “It’s a staggering number,” Widmer told MassINC, and today, it’s only gotten worse. The 2022 jail correctional guard-to-inmate ratio in Berkshire County, as of July 11, 2022, is 1 guard for every 1.6 inmates (not including senior corrections officers); and, even more shocking, total employee-per-inmate ratio is 1.7:1 – that’s 1.7 employees per every inmate. With those staffing ratios, Barbalunga estimates, “We can make some meaningful changes in where our focus should go--keeping inmates from returning to jail.”

In the 12 years Tom Bowler has been in office, the inmate population has dropped continually--the largest percentage drop in inmate population in the state. Yet total full and part-time employees listed on the payroll grew from 271 in 2011 to 303 in 2021, nearly 5%, according to [cthrupayroll.mass.gov](http://cthrupayroll.mass.gov). By fiscal 2022, wages and salaries had reached \$15.584 million, or 83% of the Sheriff's appropriation.

"More payroll to serve significantly fewer inmates just doesn't add up," Barbalunga says. "We can rebalance our spending to reduce inmate recidivism and be more accountable to taxpayers at the same time." A study performed in 2016 by the [Public Consulting Group](#) found that Massachusetts could save \$170 million annually by bringing staffing ratios at county correctional facilities in line with agencies in other jurisdictions. The PCG study added: "Staffing costs drive the vast majority of sheriffs' budgets and addressing variances in these ratios across the 14 sheriff's departments represents an opportunity to create a more balanced funding structure that maintains a high level of service to the community, provides a higher level of services to the inmate population, and creates a safer work environment for jail staff...In reviewing the ratio of staff to supervisors in each of the facilities, we found that many sheriffs have a higher number of high ranking supervisors."

"Because Berkshire County has the highest per-inmate budget appropriation, we can provide sensible budgetary stewardship," Barbalunga adds, "by ending the continuous staffing increases and the compensation acceleration in the Sheriff's Executive Leadership Team. Our expenditures should be rebalanced primarily on preparing our men and women for post-release success by addressing substance abuse issues, furthering educational advancements, and designing and filling employment placement programs."

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