

GEORGIA'S FORGOTTEN WOMEN

HOW GEORGIA'S CRIMINAL LEGAL
SYSTEM HARMS WOMEN AND GIRLS



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PREPARED FOR: ROARYOU

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ABOUT ROAR YOU

Reflections of a Reformed You (ROAR You) is a non-profit criminal justice organization based out of Atlanta, Georgia. Helping incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women break the cycle of recidivism by equipping them with the tools, skills, and resources needed to lead productive lives and become positive role models in the community. ROAR You works with women while incarcerated, throughout their reentry, and long after, supporting them in every step of their journey to live a happy and free life.

This research report was prepared for ROAR You, in collaboration with The Liberation and Justice Project.

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LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

I am a formerly incarcerated woman, I served 10 years in federal and state prison for a drug conspiracy. I am now a survivor of mass incarceration. I have two children, one of whom I gave birth to while shackled and chained around my waist. In prison, I found strength I didn't know I had. I became a caretaker, encourager, supporter, and champion to the women incarcerated alongside myself. Before my release in 2014, I wrote my mission and promised my dear friends left behind that I would always be a support. After my release, I quickly learned that not only was it challenging for women on the inside, but it could be even more difficult to re-enter. In spite of the challenges I faced, I held true to my promise and began to reach back.

I continued my education with a career in the mental health field, graduated as a Medical Administrative Assistant (MAA), and currently operate a mental & behavioral health facility with 200 or more individuals. In the Black community, mental health is a challenge and people of color are silent about their mental state. I used my voice to partner up with other grassroots organizations that provide positive opportunities and skills. In 2019, I joined JLUSA (Just Leadership USA)'s Emerging Leaders, traveling to Washington D.C. to be trained on the principles of breakthrough action leadership, communication skills, professional relationship effectiveness, and interviewing/employment skills. JLUSA is dedicated to cutting the U.S. correctional population in #halfby2030. JLUSA empowers people most affected by incarceration to drive policy reform.

I joined the movement of #FreeHer, a National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, committed to abolishing incarceration for women and girls. In 2020, I received a Scholarship from Woman 360 University and completed "Launch Your Business." It was there I learned grant writing, registering, financing, branding/marketing, trademark, and "Minding Your Business" (Mental Health). I have so much compassion in my heart for my friends still behind bars. With my life experiences as a driving force and all the work I put into educating myself in the years after my incarceration, I founded Reflections of a Reformed You (ROAR You). Our mission is to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women break the cycle of recidivism and lead productive lives. I encourage the women I work with to find their strength, engage with their communities, regain their dignity and become positive role models for the next generation of girls. Hopefully this will begin to end the cycle of recidivism and support girls so they do not end up in the system.

Reflections of a Reformed You is currently providing supplies and activities for up to 100 incarcerated women and mentoring for 25 women after they are released from prison. ROAR You has contacted parole boards, signed petition letters, provided food, clothing, and hygiene boxes, distributed transitional housing resources, communicated by emailing with the women through JPay, reconnected women with their families, and helped women submit requests for their stimulus checks. With my mental health expertise I help facilitate a support group for over 13 formerly incarcerated women.

As a speaker, prison reform activist, volunteer in the community, I have committed my life and work to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women like myself, break the cycle of recidivism. I'm very excited to present this research study to everyone, as I believe it concisely demonstrates the problems with our criminal legal system for women in my state of Georgia.

Be The Change One Day At A Time!

Sincerely,



Angela Wilks
Founder and Executive Director, Reflection Of A Reformed YOU



INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

The Women and Girls of Georgia

What is it like for women and girls affected by Georgia's criminal legal system? Often the Department of Corrections, community organizations, and researchers focus on the conditions within male facilities due to the higher population. However, there has been a rise in incarceration rates for women, more so than men in recent years.^[1] This leaves women with limited resources, programming, and essential supplies, which can hinder successful re-entry. Women face unique challenges within correctional facilities, including childcare, pregnancy, history of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and higher rates of mental illness and substance use.^[2] These circumstances make the experience of women unique and worth studying.

Studies typically have taken a national or regional approach to studying the lives of women that have encountered the system. Due to the small population relative to males, researchers tend to group women together, despite their race, class, and other unique distinctions. Studies also tend to separate the lives of girls and women within the system. However, the experiences which women have in their childhood affect their outcomes as they become adults. This study covers the landscape of women and girls within Georgia's criminal legal system. We explore the lives of the girls within their schools and juvenile systems, and how their experience can influence future outcomes.

Each state has different characteristics, policies, and histories that affect those incarcerated. Georgia has a unique story which contributed to making it one of the top 10 states with the highest incarceration rates within the United States.^[3] Although Georgia is notorious for its criminal legal system, there is a lack of an in-depth, concise reporting on the lives of women and girls.

The information used within this report come from a variety of resources. This includes academic articles, books, government reports, news articles, and non-profit organization reports. Within this report, the researchers use binary gender terms due to the categorization of sexes and genders used within criminal legal system. This report is not meant to be exhaustive of all the information about justice oriented in Georgia women and girls, but to shed light on a population that have limited data. Hopefully this piece will help drive the conversation to the needs of within the community.

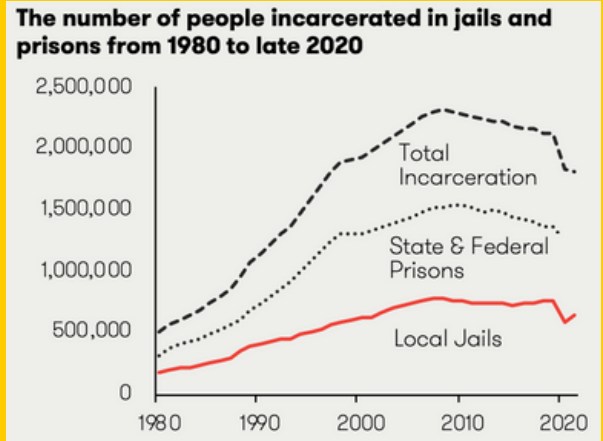


Source: [Atlanta Magazine](#)

U.S. STATISTICS ON THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

The criminal legal system is rooted in discriminatory practices and laws, tough on crime sentencing policies, and socioeconomic inequality. This contributes to the United States having the highest number of incarcerated people in the world, with 3 million currently behind bars. A 2020 report from the [Prison Policy Initiative](#) found the following:

- The U.S. is 5% of the global population, but 25% of the world's prison population
- 2.2 Million are currently in prison
- 0.8 Million in jail or awaiting trial
- 1,833 state prisons
- 110 federal prisons
- Private prisons in the US incarcerated 115,954 people in 2019
- 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities
- 3,134 local jails
- 218 immigration detention facilities
- **\$80 billion taxpayer dollars** are spent on our current prison system, accounting for one out of every 15-state general fund discretionary dollars



Source: [Vera Institute of Justice](#)

Mass incarceration has become an epidemic in the United States. Incarceration not only affects those detained, but it has collateral consequences for their families, friends, and community. When one has a record, it can affect many areas of their life. Depending on the crime and the state they reside, those reentering society may face the following [\[4\]](#):

- decreased employment opportunities
- lack of housing and bans from public housing vouchers
- revoking of voting rights
- banned from public assistance (i.e. food stamps)
- lack of healthcare
- decreased educational opportunities and bans from student aid

When reentering the community, those with a record are continued to be punished for their crimes. Due to the devastating consequences and continued surveillance, there are high rates of recidivism. A 2018 US Department of Justice study found that within 9 years, 83% of the returning citizens reoffended. [\[5\]](#)

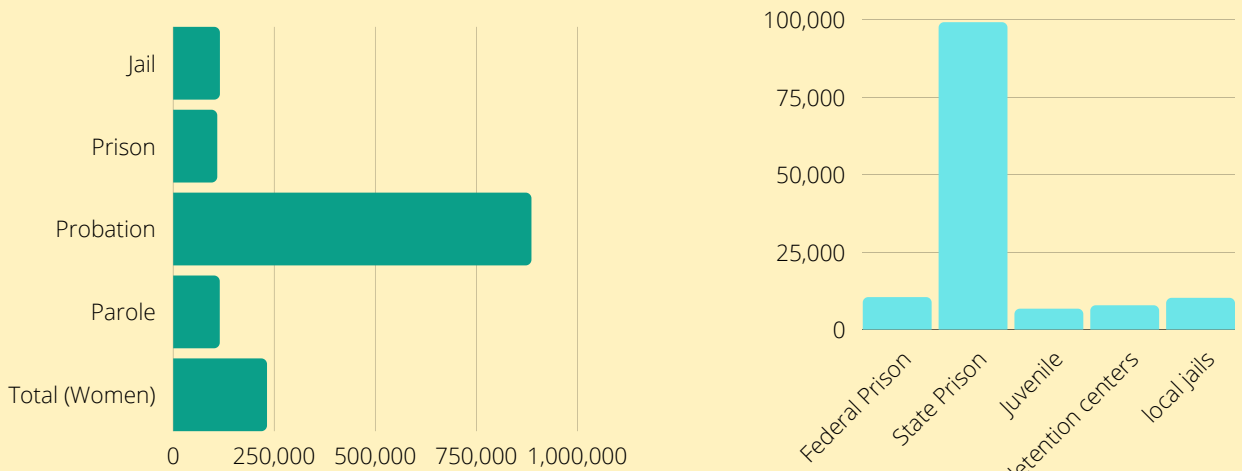
Many of those incarcerated come from low-income communities and return to those same places upon their release. They return to neighborhoods with high poverty, high unemployment, heightened police surveillance, minimum resources, and limited housing options; therefore, there are few opportunities to help them to succeed. [\[6\]](#) This creates a cycle that pushes people back into the system.

The alienation from society also has an impact on their relationships with their family and friends. Due to the lack of employment opportunities, they may not be able to provide for their family or themselves. This, among other factors, can cause emotional and financial strain within families. Depending on their family's location, after returning, they may not have a place to stay. There is a high chance of homelessness and a lack of shelters due to conviction bans. [\[7\]](#)

U.S. STATISTICS ON WOMEN IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

The effects of mass incarceration are detrimental for both men and women. However, women experience specific struggles while incarcerated and upon re-entry. Often their issues are overlooked in the conversation of prison policy because they are a smaller population in comparison to men. Women typically have higher rates of mental illness, history of abuse, childcare concerns, and female related medical issues. Currently, there are 231,000 women and girls incarcerated or detained in the United States and the Bureau of Prison houses women in 29 facilities across the country.

2020 NATIONAL FEMALE POPULATION IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM



Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)

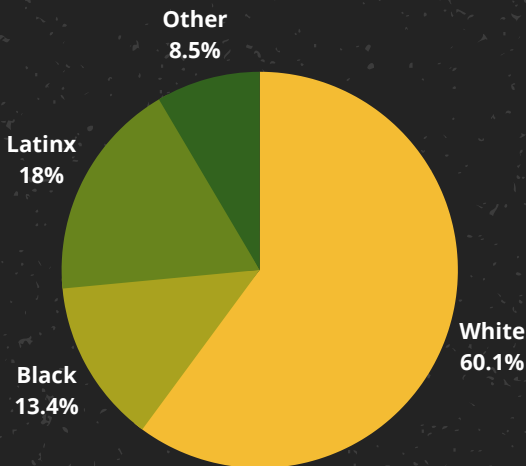
Women's incarceration has grown at an alarming rate in the past thirty years. This is the result of a number of socio-economic and political factors, particularly policies and practices established during the War on Drugs. In addition, as class disparities and job insecurity increase, women are faced with fewer job options and stress to provide for their families. Non-violent drug and property offenses make up more than half of the offenses for which women are sentenced. Currently, 25% of women in prison have been convicted of a drug offense and 26% of a property crime as compared to 14% and 27% of incarcerated men, respectively. [\[8\]](#)

Incarcerated mothers and fathers are equally likely to have experienced childhood poverty; however, men have higher incomes prior to arrest. Incarcerated women's incomes on average ranged from \$10,000 to \$20,000. [\[9\]](#) Furthermore, Black women had lower incomes as compared to white women. [\[10\]](#) This causes women to try to make ends meet to provide for their families.

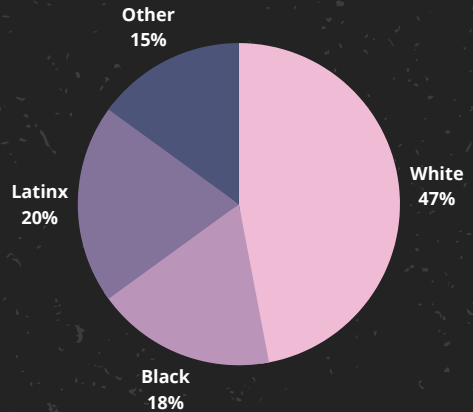
The majority of women that are incarcerated are mothers. Around 80% of those incarcerated are mothers and are the primary provider for their children. [\[11\]](#) Loss of parental rights, finding childcare, and separation from children are the realities of many incarcerated women. Around 4% of women that are detained are pregnant at the time they are admitted. [\[12\]](#) Due to the lack of quality, gender specific health care, miscarriages and health complications due to pregnancy are common.

NATIONAL RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

U.S. POPULATION



FEMALE INCARCERATION POPULATION

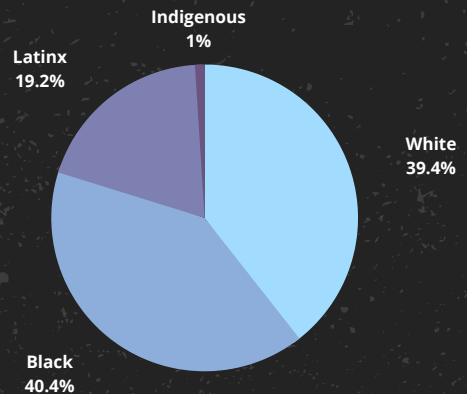


Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)

"AFRICAN AMERICANS ARE NOT SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO USE OR SELL PROHIBITED DRUGS THAN WHITES, BUT THEY ARE MADE CRIMINALS AT DRASTICALLY HIGHER RATES FOR PRECISELY THE SAME CONDUCT."

Michelle Alexander, [The New Jim Crow](#)

MALE INCARCERATION POPULATION



Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)

Racial disparities in policing, sentencing, and incarceration proliferate the criminal legal system. Historical policies, laws, and practices have created a system that targets Black and Brown communities. Black people comprise 13% of the population but make up over 40% of the incarcerated population.^[3] Black people are incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of white Americans and Latinos more than 2 times.^[3] The imprisonment rate for Black women is almost two times and Latinas 1.3 times that of white women.^[8] The War on Drugs, which increased the prison population, continues to be one of the primary reasons for high rates of incarceration. Drug offenses continue to be a top conviction for both men and women and non-violent drug offenses common in federal prison.^[13]

The re-entry process for Black and Brown people are more challenging. The lack of resources and systemic inequality in low income, communities of color, create a revolving door into the criminal legal system. Lack of housing options, employment opportunities, quality healthcare, education opportunities, and police hot spots are common characteristics of the neighborhoods which newly released people come home to.^[3] This creates an environment where those released are more likely to reoffend or are targeted by the system. The dire conditions within these neighborhoods are designed to channel people in and out the prison system.

HISTORY OF THE PRISON SYSTEM IN GEORGIA



The Georgia Penitentiary at Milledgeville Source: [Roots Web](#)

Georgia, much like many states in the South, has a long history of racial segregation, mass incarceration, and a thriving prison labor system. The rise in the prison population begins generations ago after the Civil War in 1865. The 13th Amendment outlawed slavery, except when

one is convicted of a crime; therefore, incarceration became a legal loophole for enslavement. The convict lease system was established to force newly freed Blacks back into free/low-cost labor. [14] This system leased incarcerated people to private parties for their labor and discriminatory laws were established to increase the prison population. [15-16] Georgia was one of the first states to establish the lease system and allowed the governor to “farm out the Penitentiary” [17] and required “all able-bodied convicts” to work. [18] Georgia’s leasing system was the most economically diverse and used female labor (and children) within its system. [17]

Three years after the Civil War ended, one Georgia Prison saw an increase from 7 formerly enslaved people to 147, a 2,000% increase. [18] With the need for labor and the emerging industrial industries, the prison system became a streamline of income and production. Coal mining, plantation labor, brick making, clothing tailoring, blacksmith work, railroad building, operation of steam mills, and iron work were jobs done by leased incarcerated persons. [17-18] Privatization of prison labor brought worse conditions for those incarcerated but increased profits for businesses. By the 1900, 35 years after the end of the Civil War, the prison population in Georgia grew 1500%. [17]

Until 1869, all incarcerated females in Georgia were kept in Milledgeville Prison, which also housed men in separate quarters. [18] From 1873-1899, Black women averaged 47 women convicted of a felony yearly, in comparison to white women averaging 1 woman. [18] At first, the women worked in “typical” female jobs, such as seamstresses and washerwomen, but eventually they worked with males in labor camps and in the field. [18] Both incarcerated men and women were disciplined through whipping, torture, and subjected to inhuman treatment and conditions. [15-19] In addition, women were subjected to sexual abuse and rape while they were incarcerated, often as forms of punishment, which resulted in numerous pregnancies. [17-18] Within prison labor camps, Black women were forced to undergo medical procedures and experiments from white doctors, often without anesthesia or medication. [18]

The Georgian convict lease system was abolished in 1908; however, the use of chain gangs and labor camps were still used for years after, they just called by a different name, public work camps. [15] It was not until the mid-1940s when the public work camps abolished “whipping, shackles, leg irons and chains.” [19] Although the lease system was gone, the number of incarcerated people continued to rise, especially for Blacks. Black Codes, followed by Jim Crow laws were established, which criminalized most actions of Blacks, which helped to further increase the prison population.

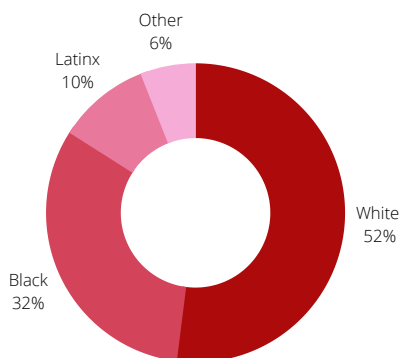
The 1970s began the era of mass incarceration which increased the prison population drastically. Mass incarceration was fueled by the War on Drugs, expansion of the prison population, mandated sentences, increased police presence, and numerous laws and policies against drug charges. [15] The prisons and jails in Georgia continue to be majority Black. Although Black people make up around 31% of Georgia’s population, they comprise 58% of the prison and jail population. [20] Nationally, in 1972, there were less than 350,000 people incarcerated by 1997, it rose over to 1 million, and by 2019, 2.3 million people were incarcerated. [13-21] Georgia specifically, has a higher incarceration rate, than the national average, and even higher than most countries. [20] Nationally for women, from 1970 to 2015, the population had grown from around 8,000 to almost 100,000, a rate of over 900%. [1] According to Vera Institute, in Georgia “since 1980, the number of women in jail has increased 1,107%, and the number of women in prison has increased 600%.” [22]

GEORGIA STATISTICS



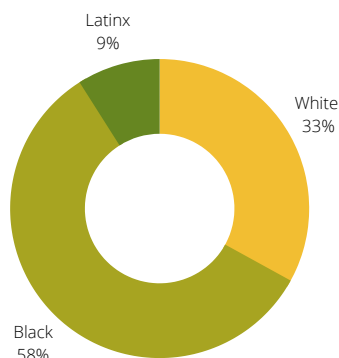
Georgia's has one of the largest prison systems in the United States. Georgia has a higher incarceration rate than the national average, and even higher than most countries. In Georgia, each year 236,000 people are booked into local jails. There are currently 3,900 men and women in jail, 54,000 in state prison, 7,900 in federal prison, and 1,100 in Juvenile facilities. [20] In 2019, Georgia had the 8th highest incarceration rate and had an 2.2% increase in the prison population from the previous year. [20] Much like most of the country, the racial disparities in Georgia are stark. Although Black people comprise 32% of the state's population, they make up 58% of the state's incarcerated population. [20] In addition, much like many prisons in the U.S. Georgia's prisons are overcrowded and are running 105% over capacity. [23]

STATE POPULATION BY RACE



Source: [Census](#)

INCARCERATED POPULATION



Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)

In the state of Georgia, those with a felony conviction lose the following civil and political rights until completion of parole or probation.

- Right to vote
- Right to run for or hold public office
- Right to serve on a jury
- Right to serve as a Notary Public

In Georgia, those with a felony conviction lose the following for good:

- Right to own gun

Those with sex-offenses are barred from:

- Public housing

"THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED – RETURNING CITIZENS – OFTEN FACE A CRUEL IRONY IN AMERICA. HAVING PAID THEIR DEBT TO SOCIETY, TOO MANY ARE BANNED FROM THE BALLOT BOX THAT COULD HELP THEM DISMANTLE POLICIES THAT ESSENTIALLY EXTEND THEIR SENTENCES."

– STACEY ABRAMS



Federal prison population is up in Georgia by 2.2%

GEORGIA CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

In the state of Georgia, there are:

- 35 state prisons that house nearly 50,000 offenders.
- 12 substance abuse treatment facilities
- 2 integrated treatment facilities
- 2 transitional centers
- 7 probation detention centers
- 6 youth development campuses (YDCs)
- 19 regional youth detention centers (RYDCs)
- 2 ICE processing centers and 3 centers where immigration detainees are healed

The Division oversees the custody of state offenders by contract in:

- 4 private prisons
- 21 county prisons

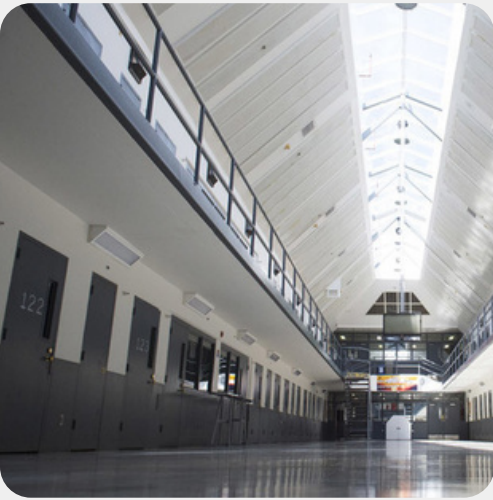


Picture of The Georgia Penitentiary at Milledgeville



Source: [Georgia Department of Corrections](http://www.gdcr.com)

WOMEN'S FACILITIES LIST



Arrendale State Prison

Location: Alto, Ga

Security Level: Special Mission

Capacity: 1490

Work Programs: Farm Operation (swine and cattle), General Maintenance, Food Service, Contract Details, Fire Department, Equine Rescue Center, Hay Operation

Emanuel Women's Facility

Location: Swainsboro, Ga

Security Level: Medium

Capacity: 415

Work Programs: N/A

Pulaski State Prison

Location: Hawkinsville, Ga

Security Level: Medium

Capacity: 1211

Work Programs: Correctional Industries Garment Plant, Grounds Maintenance, Custodial, Laundry, General Maintenance, Food Service, Contract Details, Education & Vocational Aides, Library & Law Aides, Vehicle Maintenance, Warehouse, Horticulture, Equine Rescue

Whitworth Women's Facility

Location: Hartwell, Ga

Security Level: Medium

Capacity: 442

Work Program: Outside work details include assignments for Hart, Elbert, & Madison Counties; the Cities of Elberton, Lavonia, Royston, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources

Arrendale Transitional Center

Location: Alto, Georgia

Security Level: Medium

Capacity: 112

Work Programs: Provides work release throughout the Habersham and Hall County areas.

"In Georgia, the ratio of black girls receiving suspensions in the same period compared with white girls was 5 to 1"

Tanzina Vega, The New York Times



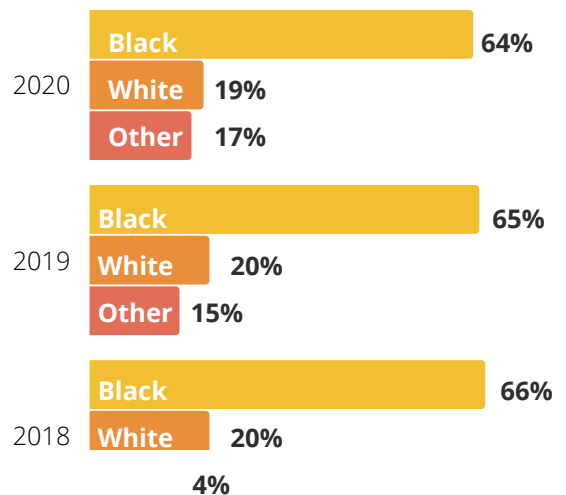
SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

In 2020, Georgia's Black students comprise 37% of the K-12 population, but account for 56% of the population that is disciplined. [24] Legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2016, Unsafe School Choice Option of 2017, and the Georgia Appleseed Initiative, try to address the widespread disparities in the treatment of students of color in the state. However, Black students are still referred to juvenile justice systems at a higher rate than white youth and receive more school suspensions. [25]

Pregnancy and childbearing, higher rates of sexual and physical harassment and assault, and/or family caretaker responsibilities are a few of the burdens Black girls have to bear. [26] Research studies tend to group Black students into a homogenous group; however, the experience of Black girls differs from boys. Black girls are expelled and/or suspended at higher rates than any other race and gender and are the fastest growing population within the juvenile justice system. [26]

In Georgia, much like on the national scale, Black girls are disproportionately disciplined in K-12 schools. From 2011-12, the ratio of Black girls receiving suspensions compared with white girls was 5 to 1. [27] A 2015 study showed that Black girls comprised 73% of the Black students that were suspended and 65% of the Black students expelled. In other words, Black girls were suspended and expelled at a higher rate than Black boys. [28] Over the three year period of 2018-2020, you see similar trends in the disproportionality of the of student discipline by race and gender. According to the Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), from 2018-2020 Black girls averaged 65% of the disciplinary actions out of all girls in the K-12 system, although they comprise less than half of the female population. [24] In 2020, the most common incident was harm to a person (i.e. fighting), and the most common consequence was in-school suspension (i.e. detention). [29] In the same year (2020), girls comprised 32% of those disciplined and of the total population of girls disciplined, Black girls were disciplined the most at 64%.

Georgia K-12 Disciplinary Rates



Source: [GOSA K-12 Student Discipline Dashboard](#)

GEORGIA'S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

During the age of mass incarceration, the juvenile system also expanded. Zero tolerance policies, increased presence of police in schools, and the lack of resources to Title I schools, funnel children, particularly Black children, into the criminal legal system.^[26] Entering into the juvenile system at an early age increases the chances of incarceration, lower educational attainment, increased chance of unemployment, and negative mental and physical health outcomes into adulthood.^[30] In the U.S. over 131,000 girls were arrested in 2019, for mostly non-violent offenses and their offenses trend similarly to those over 18.^[31] Black girls are particularly subjected to harsher punishments than Black boys and white girls.^[26] Girls that identify as LGBTQ+ are also disproportionately within juvenile facilities. Around 40% of girls identify as LGBTQ+, and with girls typically having stricter dress codes, those that are non-binary are often targeted for their clothing.^[11]



Source: [Richard Ross](#)

Georgia's juvenile facilities consists of four different types:

- Regional Youth Detention Centers (RYDCs) are secure short-term centers for youth awaiting trial or waiting to enter a community program or long-term facility.
- Youth Development Campuses (YDCs) are secure long-term facilities for youth sentenced or committed to DJJ custody by juvenile courts.
- Community Services Office (CSOs) are where DJJ staff members provide intake, case management, practical supervision, detention planning and aftercare supervision.
- Georgia Preparatory Academy (GPA) locations are found at each RYDC and YDC and at three Education Transition Centers (ETCs).

Facilities have some gender specific services, such as the Metro Regional Youth Detention Center's Girl Scouts and the Macon Youth Development Campus's Girls Squad.

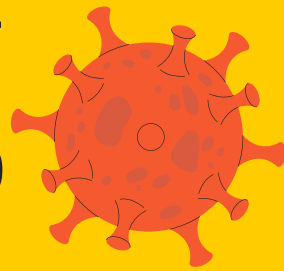
Georgia disproportionately punishes Black children at a higher rate than white children, yet, schools continue to follow policies that aid in the increase of juvenile system.^[28] Within Georgia's YDCs' secure facilities, girls range from 14 to 21 years old, with the majority 16-18 years old. Violent, property, and public order offenses were the most common. Public order offenses include drug offenses, weapons, and non-violent sex offenses.^[32]

OFFENSE CLASSIFICATION Gender: Female	AGE									
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Violent	1	5	18	51	91	118	119	33		
PROPERTY			1	8	32	47	86	95	25	2
Public Order*			2	12	25	48	75	59	21	
Violent SEX				2		1	2	3		1
Violation of Probation (VOP)**				2	19	30	61	61	39	3
Grand Total	1	8	42	127	217	342	337	118	6	2

Source: [Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice](#)



NATIONAL MEDICAL COVID -19 RESPONSE



As of September 1, 2021, 1 in 3 incarcerated people have contracted COVID-19 and almost 3,000 have died.^[33] Most jails, prison, and detention centers have had low vaccinations rates, substandard testing, continued overcrowding, increased mortality, and lack of access to healthcare needs. These institutions cannot control the spread of COVID-19 because of historical practices and policies which already could not contain and treat other infectious diseases. They are not equipped to stop the virus due to ^[34]:

- Lack of or improper testing, screening, and/or contact tracing for COVID-19 infections
- Lack the medical supplies needed to treat people who get seriously ill
- CDC guidelines that are not tailored to correctional settings
- Lack of social distancing due to the close nature of confinement
- Structural issues within infirmaries and clinical spaces which cannot separate infected persons
- Understaffing of correctional healthcare systems
- Security policies overruling health concern
- Jail and prisons not actually being closed environments because of staff and volunteers entering and leaving

The U.S. jail population dropped by 25% from June 2019- June 2020; however, most prisons still have not significantly reduced its numbers.^[35] Although prisons began releasing people due to the pandemic, those programs have since stopped or slowed, which has resulted in the first increase in incarceration beginning in March 2021.^[36]

COVID-19 has further increased the healthcare disparities within low-income and communities of color. The majority of those imprisoned come from poor neighborhoods, which have been devastated by the pandemic. Preexisting conditions and lack of access to healthcare are common among those arrested, therefore being in prison makes their conditions worse.^[34] Black people, who have been heavily affected by COVID-19, also have to deal with mass incarceration and being targeted by law enforcement. In June 2019, Black people were incarcerated at about 3.3 times the rate of white people and as of June 2020, this disparity has increased to a rate of 3.5.^[35] Historical health disparities and discrimination within the criminal legal issue along are continue to affect this community during a global pandemic.



National Correctional Jurisdiction's Covid Policies ^[36]

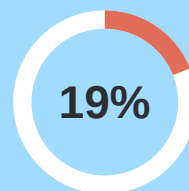
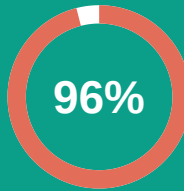
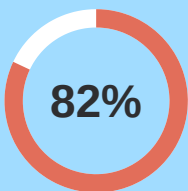


Provided PPE

Tried to Published Covid Cases

Offered Free Calling

Provided Sanatizers



COVID -19 RESPONSE IN GEORGIA'S WOMEN'S FACILITY

According to the [Georgia Department of Corrections](#), the following have been implemented in order to decrease the transmission of COVID-19 cases:

- Suspension of tours and volunteer visits
- Modified in person visitation
- One free 15 minute call and 2 free emails a week
- Social distancing and mask requirements
- Limitations on programming and movement of new and released people
- Screening of all staff and contractors
- Increased facility sanitation, including access to more hand soap and hand sanitizer

Georgia's
COVID-19 Response
Grade

F

Much like other facilities within the county, Georgia has largely failed in containing COVID-19. The [Prison Policy Initiative](#) gives grades to each state for their response to the pandemic. Georgia was given a F, the lowest of all grades. This grade takes into account infection rates, policy changes, vaccination rates, death rates, and decreasing the prison population.

There is limited information on how COVID-19 has affected the female facilities in the state. Women's facilities already drastically lack medical services, and the COVID-19 virus only exacerbated these existing issues. Investigations have taken place by journalists and [pleas](#) from those inside have been published on news websites. In a [letter to Warden Murray Tatum Lee Arrendale State Prison, GA from the Southern Center for Human Rights](#), they listed a number of requests for policy change that would improve the health and well-being of incarcerated women in the midst of this pandemic. Within the letter they speak to:

- incarcerated women reporting the Postpartum mothers were shackled and placed in solitary confinement, days or weeks after giving birth, a practice which is a violation of Georgia law
- unclean cells with hazardous plumbing and electricity
- little to no access to cleaning and hygiene supplies
- medically high-risk women are placed in medical isolation without adequate sanitation and access to basic necessities
- Covid-19 patients are placed in punitive solitary confinement
- understaffing leading to violence and poor medical response times
- unsafe meal preparation
- Limited access to grievance forms, and interception of legal mail



Photo Source: [FiveThirtyEight](#)

WOMEN'S HEALTH



Incarcerated women have a high rate of substance use, mental illness, and a history of domestic violence in comparison to men. It is reported that up to 90% of incarcerated women have been victims of physical and sexual abuse prior to their incarceration.^[37] In addition, women have higher rates of sexual abuse from staff and other incarcerated people while within prisons and jails.^[38] There is limited data on the health of women within Georgia. The following is current legislation and issues on the health care of women in facilities.

Georgia Dignity Act ^[39]

In 2019 Georgia passed the Georgia Dignity Act to ensure the safety of pregnant incarcerated women. In addition to expedited transfers, the following is prohibited:

- squatting or coughing during a strip search during the 2nd or 3rd trimester of pregnancy
- any vaginal examination unless by a licensed health care professional
- using handcuffs, waist shackles, leg irons, or restraints on a pregnant woman in the the 2nd or 3rd trimester, in labor, or in delivery, or on a woman in the immediate postpartum period
- restraints, except wrist handcuffs or in certain situations, on a woman in the immediate postpartum period
- solitary confinement of a pregnant woman or woman in the immediate postpartum period

Georgia's Women's CARE Act ^[40]

The CARE Act, which stands for "Childcare Alternatives, Resources and Education," was recently introduced but not yet enacted. Unreliable or inaccurate data results in poor care for women. This Act would be an addition to the Georgia Dignity Act. The CARE Act would require the following:

- Collection of data on women who are pregnant and incarcerated or sentenced
- Creation of a Maternal Mortality Review Committee
- Pregnancy tests after 72 hours of detention to improve the care given to women in the earliest stages of their pregnancy
- If a woman is pregnant at the time of sentencing, the sentence will defer until 6 weeks after birth (unless denied by judge). During that time, they will be under supervision and receive resources

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

- 1 To amend Article 1 of Chapter 1 of Title 42 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,
- 2 relating to inmate policies, so as to provide for prohibited practices relating to a pregnant
- 3 female inmate or a female inmate who is in the immediate postpartum period; to provide for
- 4 definitions; to prohibit certain actions relating to strip searches, restraints, examinations,
- 5 labor and delivery, solitary confinement, and transfer; to provide for related matters; to
- 6 provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.



SEXUAL ASSAULT

P.R.E.A.

On September 4, 2003, President George W. Bush signed into law the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003. The goal of the act is to eradicate prisoner rape and sexual assault of all types in correctional facilities. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) established the Protecting Inmates and Safeguarding Communities Program in Fiscal Year 2004. Funding was then made available for states to reform facilities to prevent prisoner rape sexual assault. In 2011, BJA established the PREA Demonstration Projects to provide funding to state and local governments for generating statistical reports regarding assault cases.

Around 80,000 women and men, a year are sexually abused in U.S. correctional facilities.^[41] These assaults were either perpetrated by another incarcerated person or facility staff. In the 2011-12 National Inmate Survey, it found that in a year span 3,381 (around 4%) incarcerated people experienced one or more incidents of sexual victimization.^[42]

In 2020 the Georgia Department of Corrections released their most recent PREA report. The report shows that there were 1,421 PREA allegations total with 120 (8%) from female facilities. The majority of allegations were “inmate to inmate” harassment or abuse.^[41] Of the allegations, only 39 (3%) were found to be substantiated. Within the women’s facilities, the majority of allegations came from the Arrendale facility and were “inmate to inmate.” Of the 120 allegations 8 (7%) were substantiated and were majority “staff to inmate” sexual abuse.

Facilities	Reported Allegations					Substantiated				
	Total	Harassment (Staff/Inmate)	Abuse (Staff/Inmate)	Harassment (Inmate/Inmate)	Abuse (Inmate/Inmate)	Total	Harassment (Staff/Inmate)	Abuse (Staff/Inmate)	Harassment (Inmate/Inmate)	Abuse (Inmate/Inmate)
Arrendale SP	93	16	19	27	31	8	0	5	0	3
Emanuel WF	4	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Pulaski SP	15	5	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
Whitworth Facility	8	1	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	0

Source: GDC, 2020

ABUSE IN JUVENILE FACILITES

For juvenile facilities, the average rate of youth-on-youth sexual assault is 2%, however, staff sexual misconduct is 5%.^[43] Within these facilities, children that were Black, under 14, identified at LGBTQ+, and had a history of abuse were at a higher risk for assault by staff. Youth on youth assault were three times higher in female only facilities than male. Facilities that are larger and have less staff had higher rates of assault. Georgia’s Department of Juvenile Justice has PREA policies for staff, which is mandated, however the data is unknown.

TRANSGENDER HEALTH



Ashley Diamond, Source: [GLAAD](#)

A Case Study

[Ashley Diamond](#) (age 43) has brought two lawsuits against the Georgia Department of Corrections for housing her in the Coastal State Prison for men. She requested a transfer to a women's prison after mistreatment, attacks, sexual assaults, the denial hormone pills, and other healthcare related issues.

Georgia Policy

In 2019, Georgia adopted a [new policy](#) addressing the treatment of transgender incarcerated people. They are to evaluate and assess their mental and physical condition and create an individualized treatment plan. However, it is not clear how this policy is being implemented.

HEALTHCARE FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED

Many undocumented women do not get the healthcare they need. They are unable to receive medical insurance for fear deportation if they seek care and/or their immigration status being discovered. For those detained by I.C.E., the detention centers are ill-equipped to meet the needs of the undocumented. [\[44\]](#) The detained are abused, mistreated, and are not given access to basic needs (i.e., showers, food), arguably even more so than those in U.S. prisons and jails. One issue that has come to light is that all over the country, detained, undocumented women report medical malpractice and sterilization while in U.S. I.C.E detention centers. These women sought medical treatment for routine procedures, however, while under anesthesia, non-consensual, sterilizing procedures were performed. After an investigative report brought on by the media attention, a report indicated at least 19 women in Georgia were alleged victims of these medical crimes. Nineteen surgeries, which included hysterectomies, were performed at the Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, GA. [\[45\]](#)



Source: [WGXA](#)

MENTAL HEALTH

Incarceration has dire impacts on one's mental health. Conditions within facilities have been documented to be inhumane, lack critical resources, and do not promote rehabilitation. Although some do not have a mental health diagnosis, those that are incarcerated are at higher risk to develop mental health conditions, such as depression, or experience traumatic events that will impact them in the future. [46] Those that are diagnosed with a mental illness prior to incarceration tend to have a tougher time within the facility and negative outcomes when they are released. Prior to incarceration many were unable to seek counseling services or mental health care due to cost or limited resources within their community. Therefore, when entering into a facility their needs will continue to not be met.

Coping with the stresses of imprisonment and the strain of being away from home is sometimes called "pains of imprisonment." "Crowding, monotony, lack of privacy, loss of freedom, loss of relationships, the lack of heterosexual relationships, a decrease in autonomy, the absence of personal goods and services, and concerns about safety represent the critical challenges for people sentenced to prison." [47] Those that are incarcerated are also exposed to violence from other incarcerated people and/or staff. This exposure to violence can affect them mentally, especially women that have a history of abuse and domestic violence.

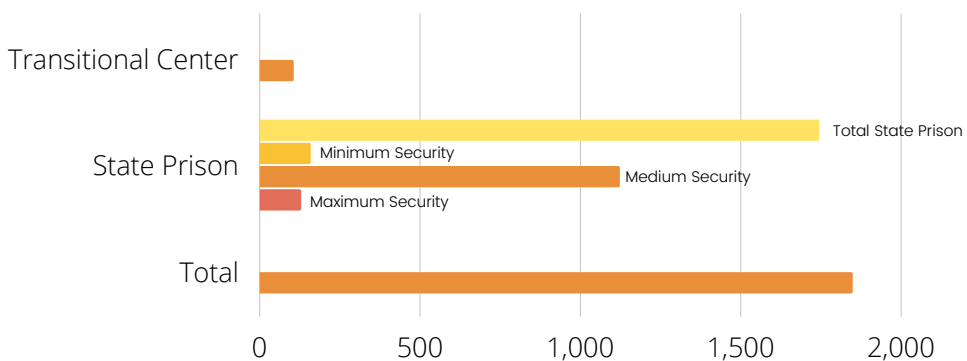
A strain of familial disconnect

Studies show that contact with family leads to better outcomes and more successful reentry; however, maintaining social relationships while incarcerated is challenging. Incarceration takes a psychological toll on the incarcerated and their families. Lack of visitation or communication with those on the outside, lack of family reunification programming, stripping of parental rights, and the inability to help their family monetarily can affect familial relationships. The stigmatization and isolation which incarceration promotes further relationship divides. [48]

Children of incarcerated parents are at higher risk of not completing their schooling, having higher rates of unemployment, and higher rates of health conditions. However, those that have a relationship with their incarcerated parent have better life outcomes and the parent is more likely to successfully integrate back into society. [48]

Grief after the death of a loved one affects people in many ways, but increased suicidality, anger, anxiety, depression and substance abuse are all common. For incarcerated women, they are not able to grieve properly while incarcerated due to being unable to participate at any end-of-life ceremonies, guilt is for being unable to see their loved one in their final days, and lack of counseling services. [47]

The Number of Female Active Inmates With Mental Health Level 2 And Above from the August 1, 2021, Georgia Department of corrections report



Source: [Inmate Statistical Profile](#)

Social Disability [49]

As returning citizen, many people experience a great deal of cognitive and social stress upon re-entry. While confined and subjected to routine behavior it's common for individuals to experience a loss of time perception, self and purpose. Furthermore, during incarceration, technology, fashion, professional industry standards, and cultural norms can change drastically. Returning citizens must acclimate to contemporary changes and a new job market while simultaneously coping with anxiety and the other mental health implications of re-entry. Social stigma towards felonies and the lack of recent credit scores, job history, and technological skills can further make finding housing, jobs, or education programs near impossible. The accumulation of this mental health, financial and systemic strains are what is known as a social disability.

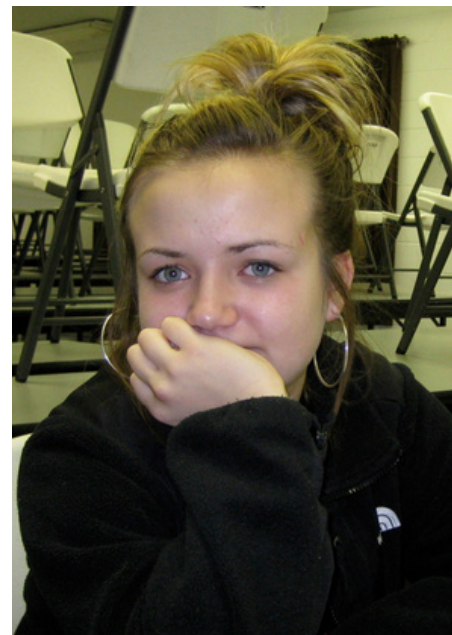


Solitary Confinement

Numerous research studies have concluded that the lasting effects of solitary confinement are often acute and have long lasting mental health concerns. Long durations of solitary confinement often result in clinically significant symptoms of depression, anxiety, or guilt.[50] Recent research has revealed additional symptoms, including social isolation, loss of identity, and sensory hypersensitivity.[51] There are disproportionately high rates of serious mental illness and self-harming behavior compared with general prison populations.

Georgia's Juvenile Facilities

Within the juvenile facility there is mental health programming and behavioral health services. When entering the facility, all youth are assessed and screened, and 50% are typically referred for more services.[52] Services provided within DJJ facilities include counseling, case management, substance abuse treatment, and sexually harmful behaviors treatment. Over 50% of juveniles are diagnosed with in impulsive-conduct, substance abuse, ADHD, and/or Autism Spectrum.[32] The majority of those with a mental health diagnosis are in the Youth Development Campus, which house those with more serious crimes, who tend to have more mental health needs. Mental health interventions within the facilities include Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS) and Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS).



Source: [Juvenile Justice](#)

DEATHS IN GA CORRECTIONS FACILITIES



Top: Susan Weidman, Melynda Holden, Barbara Oreszak and Marlo Nichols Bottom: Stephanie Widener, Rosalind Pettiford, Cassandra Gilbert and Mary Ann Rinehart.

Source: [AJC](#)

Over recent years, the Georgia Department of Corrections has been under investigation and scrutiny for its medical practices. From suspended medical licenses to abuse from doctors, women within these facilities face negligence and poor care when trying to seek treatment. In 2017 a number of deaths at Pulaski Prison, the second largest women facility, led to an investigation into the prison's medical negligence. The state assured changes would be made but in 2019 eight more women died.

The number of deaths since 2020 and deaths related to due to Covid-19 in Georgia facilities have not yet, and may never, become public information.

Below are some of the documented deaths since 2019. [\[53,54\]](#)

Cassandra Gilbert, 55, died Feb. 6 2019

Gilbert died of liver failure as a result of untreated cancer that spread from her colon to her liver and lungs. Beginning in 2017 she complained of severe abdominal but was not seriously examined until October 2018. In November 2018 it was confirmed as cancer and that it had begun to spread. Despite those results, she wasn't seen by an oncologist until January 2019, and, by that point, it was too late and she died at Navicent Health Medical Center in Macon.

Susan Weidman, 57, died Feb. 26, 2019

Weidman was found unresponsive in a Pulaski solitary unit. Her death was the result of numerous heart and lung issues, including an irregular heartbeat, enlarged heart, and pulmonary hypertension. Since she began her sentence in 2014 she was denied the medication she took for her breathing issues. She often would remain in her cell during meal hours as she didn't have the strength or enough oxygen to walk to the dining hall.

Rosalind Pettiford, 57, died June 15, 2019

Pettiford had undergone a series of hernia operations before going to prison in 2017. In 2018, she told staff and her family the hernia had returned but the prison medical team did not treat her. Due to this and not receiving any medication, Pettiford died in an emergency room at WellStar Atlanta Medical Center from respiratory failure and multi-organ failure.

Stephanie Widener, 39, died July 8, 2019

Widener died at WellStar Atlanta Medical Center due to severe septic shock and multi-organ failure. In the year prior, she had undergone surgery for an intestinal blockage and had a difficult recovery after contents of her intestines began to leak. Regardless of weakened physical state, she returned to the general prison population and shortly after was transferred back to the hospital into the ICU, where she succumbed to her illness.

Melynda Holden, 48, died July 20, 2019

Holden died at WellStar Atlanta Medical Center from Stage IV lung cancer that had progressed over the preceding months. Holden was hospitalized twice in the months before her death.

Mary Ann Rinehart, 63, died August 11, 2019

Rinehart was an insulin-dependent diabetic who dealt with chronic untreated pain in her legs and feet. She died at WellStar Atlanta Medical Center from metastatic colon cancer. She had a suspicious bump on her collarbone and Rinehart told staff she was experiencing pain but was not initially granted a doctor's visit. Finally, an examination of the bump led to a scan that showed cancer had spread from Rinehart's colon to her back and spine. She passed soon after.

Marlo Nichols, 53, died September 21, 2019

Nichols died in the Pulaski medical unit from Stage IV cervical cancer. The cancer wasn't discovered until Nichols was hospitalized in August following months of complaints to medical personnel that she was frequently constipated and dealing with abdominal pain. At the hospital, the cancer was found to have spread to the point that chemotherapy wouldn't help. Nichols returned to Pulaski and was housed in the medical unit where she died.

Barbara Ann Oreszak, 65, died October 19, 2019

A death certificate has yet to be completed for Oreszak. The Pulaski County coroner said Oreszak's death was the result of respiratory failure that followed years of lung issues. No one claimed Oreszak's body, so she was buried at the Georgia State Prison Cemetery in Reidsville.

Stephanie Nicole White, died June 19, 2020

There is little information on White's death but the medical examiner's office said was coronary artery disease.

Name not public, August 6, 2020

Cause not public but this woman died while under custody at Pulaski Prison.

We also uplift the women who have died in custody, although we do not know their names.



PROGRAMMING INSIDE



Emanuel Women's Facility Hosts Open House and Graduation for Inmates who completed their Library of Congress Braille Transcribers Certification

The current women's prisons in Georgia offer the following programs at different facilities. However, many of these programs are underfunded and many women who would like to participate are denied access.

Programming includes academic, counseling, recreation, religious and vocational.

Academic Programming

- Adult basic education
- Literacy classes
- General Equivalency Diploma
- Special education classes
- Driving Under The Influence School

Religious Activities

- Various Worship Services
- Bible Study
- Choir
- Islamic Studies
- Pastoral Counseling and Kairos

Vocational/On the job training

- Custodial Maintenance
- Grounds Maintenance
- Laundry
- Building Maintenance Repair
- Food Preparation
- Baker
- Cook Apprentice
- Law
- Library Aides
- Cosmetology
- Culinary Arts
- General Office Clerk
- Computer Technology
- Customer Service
- Food Service
- Horticulture
- Laundry
- Grounds-keeping
- Custodial & Vehicle Maintenance
- Plumbing
- Garment Worker
- Veterinary Assistant
- Graphic Arts

Counseling Programming

- Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous
- Re-Entry
- Thinking For A Change
- Family Violence
- Job Readiness
- Health Education
- Moral Recognition Therapy
- Motivation For Change
- Work Ready Assessment
- Moral Recognition Therapy
- Matrix
- Relapse Group
- Active Parenting
- Family Violence
- Behavior Stabilization
- Confronting Self
- Sex Offender Psycho-Educational Program
- Thinking For A Change
- Children's Center
- Residential Substance Abuse Center

Recreation Activities

- General Recreation
- Physical Health

Compiled from facility homepages on [GDOC](#).



REENTRY & RECIDIVISM



When entering back into the community from incarceration, there are many burdens to overcome while getting acclimated to daily life. Housing, transportation, healthcare resources, employment, and

emotional support are needed in order to thrive after incarceration. Women specifically have higher rates of mental illness, abuse, and childcare responsibilities which make the transition more difficult if supports are not there. Counseling, economic opportunities, family unification, housing, and female specific health care are all need resources; however, many times it is unavailable for adults and children released.

In a recent 24 state (including Georgia) recidivism report from the DOJ, 82% of those released were re-arrested within 10 years. [55] The recidivism rate over the 10-year period for men was 83% and for women it was 76%. In addition, Black people and those under 39 were more likely to recidivate. Drug and property charges were what the majority of people were rearrested for. Georgia has a recidivism rate of around 30%, however this number does not include those that have a parole or probation violation, which would increase recidivism rate (some say to 50%). [56] As for juveniles, their recidivism rate is 32% over the three years after they are released. Female youth had a recidivism rate of 18%. [58]

The [Georgia Department of Corrections Website](#) claim they are implementing measures to combat recidivism. This includes legally required programs, cognitive therapies, and collaborations with state agency and community partnerships that support transition. The targets of effective offender interventions stated are:

- Criminal thinking
- Substance abuse
- Education
- Housing
- Employment

Although the Georgia DOC is said to provide these services, many women leave a facility without supports.



Georgia transitional housing for those entering back into the community include recovery residences and structured housing. While recovery residences provide “sober living environment that promotes recovery from alcohol and other drug use and associated problems;” structured housing is a “facility available for those who have been recently released from incarceration or displaced and are in need of a healthy, safe and controlled environment.” [58] There are 6 co-ed recovery residences and 22 female only. Only 8 of the recovery residences accept children and 11 accept pregnant women. There are 4 structured residences that are co-ed and 1 that is female only. Only 1 accepts both pregnant women and their children. The majority of both recovery and structured locations have admissions fees. The fees and the limited resources for women that have children and/or are pregnant furthers the burdens of transitioning successfully.

CONCLUSION

Dedicated to the women and girls of Georgia

This report shows the grim reality of the women and girls within Georgia's criminal legal system. This population is forgotten in the research because of its small numbers in comparison to men. However, the story of incarcerated women needs to be told. We show how the conditions within Georgia's criminal legal system are worse than most states, and even most countries. It is one of the largest prison systems within the United States and continues to increase its incarceration population each year. Georgia has failing scores when it comes to the pandemic response, treatment of those incarcerated, overcrowding, and programming.

Historic policies and discriminatory laws have targeted low income and communities of color for generations. These practices have affected millions of lives and has created an inhuman system that seeks to keep people incarcerated. Like most of the country, racial disparities that

are present within Georgia's legal system is striking. Although Black people make up 32% of the state's population, 58% of those incarcerated are Black. It is also known that incarceration affects families, communities, and one's life outcome, yet there has not been systematic changes.

The treatment of girls, specifically Black girls, within our school systems has implications for their adulthood. Black girls are disciplined at a higher rate than Black boys and white girls, typically for minor infractions. When exposed to the juvenile system in childhood, children are more likely to enter into the legal system as adults. Much like the adult system, there have been many reforms, initiatives, and policies to combat the treatment of students of color in schools; but they have not made much of a difference.

The COVID-19 pandemic had further exacerbated the failing conditions within facilities and has put lives at risk. New policies to combat the global pandemic have not worked because previous infrastructure was lacking. This has caused facilities to be hot spots for the transmission of COVID-19. Women with pre-existing conditions, pregnant, and/or being released, have little to no medical care and are at higher risk of medical complications and death.

Community organizations and advocacy groups have long tried to bring attention to the lives of women and girls within the system; however, the conditions have not changed. This report uplifts the lives of a population which the criminal legal system often overlooks. It is our hope that this report is comprehensive in highlighting the injustices within Georgia's system and shows the importance of the lives of these women and girls.



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