

As of 2015, **7,489 individuals in Virginia prisons** had been there for 10 years or longer.

A national crisis

Too many people are serving decades-long prison sentences, both in Virginia and nationwide.

Nationally, 212,441 people - or one of every six people in state prisons - have been incarcerated for at least 10 years.

That includes **7,489 people, or 21%, of people in prison in Virginia.**

Long sentences are not inevitable, but the result of punitive “tough on crime” approaches by lawmakers and prosecutors. Since 1999, the number of Americans in prison for 10 years or more **has increased by 83%.**

Virginia, meanwhile, has seen an increase of 16% since 2005.

Many states have taken laudable steps to reduce the number of people behind bars for “low-level” offenses, but little has been done to bring relief to people needlessly serving decades in prison.

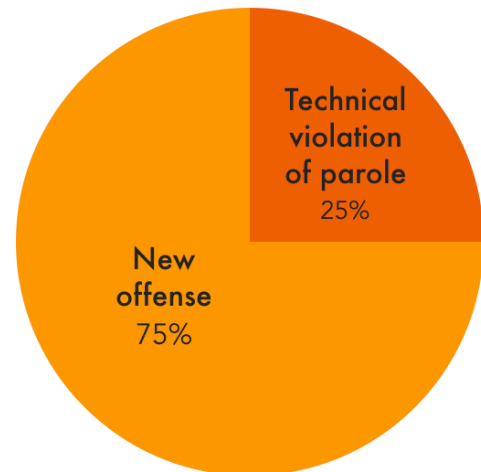
Our report *Eight Keys to Mercy* presents eight ways to immediately create meaningful opportunities for their release. (For more, see the link at the bottom of this page.)

Parole is broken

For people who have worked hard to earn their release from prison, parole officers should do everything possible to support their reentry, rather than sending them back. But too many are **returned to prison for noncriminal “technical” violations**, like missing a substance abuse meeting.

In Virginia, technical violations account for 1 in 4 returns to prison from parole

Reasons for returns to incarceration from parole, 2016



The number of people serving long sentences has grown dramatically

Percent change in the number of people who had already served 10 years or more from 2005 to 2015, by state

