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Despite Decreases in Both Jail Population and Staffing, DOC Spending has Not Substantially Changed

September 12, 2024, – New York City’s criminal legal system has been the subject of numerous reforms, lawsuits, and other developments over the last decade. The Independent Budget Office of New York City (IBO) has completed an analysis of staffing and spending trends at the Department of Correction (DOC) from 2014 through 2023. This is the third report in a series of publications that cover the Department of Correction. Previous reports in this series cover [changes in the length of jail stays](#) and [an analysis of DOC infrastructure spending on Rikers Island](#).

[IBO’s analysis](#) found that although the jail population and DOC staff headcount have declined substantially since 2014, DOC spent a similar amount in 2023 as in 2014, adjusting for inflation. As there have not yet been cost savings from DOC’s lower jail population and headcount, it should not be assumed that further decarceration or even fewer staff will alone—without better management—reduce expenditures in the future. If DOC’s spending levels more accurately reflected its headcount, more funding could be available for community-based programs to support people involved with the criminal legal system.

Key takeaways of the report:

- In 2014 and in 2023, the Department’s annual expense spending totaled \$1.4 billion, the vast majority of which was for personnel costs. However, the total number of active DOC staff declined by 24% in 2023 compared with 2014, while the jail population fell by 45% over the same period.
- Salaries and overtime costs for uniformed staff accounted for most of DOC’s personnel spending. In 2023, the Department spent \$181 million less in on uniformed salaries compared to 2014, due to its lower headcount. However, those savings were partially offset by an increase of \$116 million in overtime costs.
- Conventional wisdom is that headcount and overtime are inversely related, that adding personnel leads to lower reliance on overtime, and vice versa. However, over this decade, DOC uniformed overtime spending increased during years of rapid hiring early in the decade, as well as amid declining headcount in more recent years.
- Non-staffing costs, which account for 20% of the Department’s spending, increased by \$69 million by the end of this period, mainly due to increased contracting costs. Together with increases in uniformed overtime, these additional costs fully offset uniformed base salary spending declines, maintaining DOC’s overall spending level.