



WHEN NEW PRISON ADMINISTRATIONS PROMISE CHANGE --
But the Data Shows Decline

Every time a new prison administration takes charge, the public is promised the same things: improved safety, stronger rehabilitation programs, better staff training, and a clearer path to reducing recidivism. Yet year after year, national U.S. statistics -- and state-level data, especially in places like South Carolina -- tell a very different story. Instead of improvement, many indicators suggest that conditions are getting worse, not better.

Across the country, prison systems continue to struggle with overcrowding, understaffing, and corruption. New leadership often enters with bold reform language, but the trend lines show that these promises rarely translate into meaningful change. In many facilities, assaults on prisoners by staff have increased (bringing court order required bodycams in many states, S.C. included), prisoner-on-prisoner violence has climbed, and "emergency" lockdowns have become more frequent. Rather than stabilizing the system, each administrative transition seems to implement temporary disruption that compounds existing problems. Recently S.C. intentionally made it more difficult for SCDC prisoners to receive money so they can buy food and hygiene -- the blocking of money, has created a black market where as of this month a \$7 bag of coffee goes for \$35 with stealing, robbing, and prisoner rape, on the rise because of SCDC's new policy on who can send prisoners money. Instead of fixing a problem, they created many many more, and it seems intentional.

South Carolina is a clear example of this pattern. Over the past decade, SCDC has cycled through various reforms -- security upgrades, staffing initiatives, classification changes -- but the outcomes often fall short, and cost tax payers millions of dollars. Staff shortages remain severe, overtime spirals upward, and bad policy-driven violence continues to rise. Instead of long-term strategic planning, each new administration appears to restart the system with its own policies, priorities, and experiments based on personal ideologies. The result is inconsistency, confusion, and a lack of accountability when those policies fail.

Nationally, the U.S. continues to rank among the highest incarceration rates in the world. Rehabilitation programs -- central to reducing future crime -- are chronically underfunded or inconsistently implemented. When management changes become a routine, continuity becomes impossible. Programs start, stop, and restart under new leadership, leaving incarcerated individuals without stable support.

The truth is simple: Without sustained leadership, long-term investment, and genuine commitment to humane policy, each "change" becomes just another reshuffling of the deck -- while the statistics show so far -- treating prisoners like animals, isn't working, and punitive punishment styled policies is a mechanism for administrative failure.

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