

Breakdown of projected benefits of Penobscot County diversion proposal

This paper presents a fiscal analysis demonstrating that investing in diversion programs offers a more cost-effective and socially beneficial alternative to constructing a new jail. By redirecting funds toward community-based services as laid out in our [nine-track diversion model](#), Penobscot County can reduce incarceration costs, recidivism rates, and the strain on courts and law enforcement. In contrast, building and maintaining a new jail represents a long-term financial burden that fails to address the root causes of crime. The evidence shows that diversion programs not only save taxpayer dollars but also improve public safety outcomes by prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment.¹

Because of the nature of county jails, population numbers are always shifting. From our observation, the typical population of Penobscot County Jail is usually somewhere between 220 to 240. For this model, we will be using **240**. According to the Maine County Commissioners Association, over **90%** of those incarcerated in Maine county jails are pretrial², meaning the overwhelming majority have not even been convicted of a crime they are accused of. That would mean roughly **216** of those being held are potentially eligible for diversion.

Part 1: fiscal analysis

Based on the 2025 Penobscot County Jail Fund budget, an estimated **\$65,328.18** is spent annually to incarcerate a single person. This means that it costs about **\$14,110,887** annually to hold the pretrial population (216 individuals) of Penobscot County Jail.

We estimate that the annual cost of an individual's participation in a diversion program would be about **20%** the annual cost of incarceration. That means an individual's participation would cost about **\$13,065.64** (or **\$1,088.80** monthly).

¹ [Decarceration Courts: Possibilities and Perils of a Shifting Criminal Law](#)

² [Maine County Commissioners Association](#)

That means if **60% (130)** of cases were successfully diverted, instead of costing taxpayers **\$8,466,532** annually on incarceration, it would only cost them **\$1,693,306** annually. That saves **\$6,773,226**.

If **40% (86)** were diverted, **\$4,582,753** would be saved.

Even if only **30% (65)** were diverted, it would still save **\$3,386,613** of taxpayer money, while putting the population of the jail within its capacity of **157**, which eliminates the issue that supposedly necessitates the construction of a new jail.

Although an official number has not been announced for the construction costs of a new jail, the numbers **\$75-80 million** have been suggested. County Administrator Adkins stated that financing a project in that range, specifically a \$75 million to \$80 million bond spanning 20 years at a somewhat aggressive interest rate, would require an estimated annual payment of about **\$5 million**, meaning the actual cost could be close to **\$100 million**.³ If the actual cost is even close to that, it means the establishment of case diversion programs would cost taxpayers **tens of millions of dollars** less than a new jail.

Creating diversion programs for the Penobscot County Jail would also directly address the county's growing budget crisis by reducing both incarceration and outsourcing costs. With over 90% of the jail's population held pretrial, even modest diversion of eligible individuals into supervised community-based programs could save millions annually. Each person diverted costs about one-fifth as much as incarceration, meaning that diverting just 40 to 60% of cases could save the county between **\$4.5 million** and **\$6.8 million** annually. This figure is critical because the county's portion of jail funding, the CAP contribution of **\$8,594,059**, is primarily paid by local property taxpayers. The massive savings from diversion are, therefore, enough to close the current **\$3.4 million** budget shortfall and restore financial stability without placing further demands on property taxes or cutting other essential services.

Part 2: safety analysis

³ [New details emerge about proposed county jail in Hampden](#)

According to the Maine Department of Corrections, the most recent statewide three-year recidivism rate is **21.4%**. This means that roughly one in five people released from incarceration are rearrested or reconvicted within three years. By contrast, studies of pretrial diversion programs nationally and regionally show that participation in such programs can reduce recidivism by an average of about **31.5%** over comparable three-year periods.⁴⁵⁶ Applying that to Maine's baseline, this would mean a diversion recidivism rate of approximately **14.66%**.

Using the same 216 person pretrial population, we modeled how different levels of diversion could affect overall public safety. If **60% (130)** of eligible individuals were diverted, the total number of people expected to reenter the justice system would drop from about **46** to **37**, reducing the overall recidivism rate from **21.4%** to **17.4%**, an **18.9%** improvement in public safety outcomes.

If **40% (86)** were diverted, the expected recidivism rate would fall to **18.7%**, with roughly **41** people reoffending instead of 46. Even diverting **30% (65)** of the pretrial population would reduce recidivism to **19.4%**, preventing several future offenses and lowering overall risk to the community.

⁴ [Shelby County \(Tennessee\) Pretrial Diversion Programs - An Evaluation](#)

⁵ [Pretrial Adult Diversion - A Study of Impact and Process](#)

⁶ [Evaluating The Calibrate Pretrial Program](#)