

Mercyhurst College Civic Institute



An Overview of the Erie County Criminal Justice System

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to organize existing data on the criminal justice system in Erie County in an attempt to better identify and describe trends. This data will be provided to local decision-makers in order to continue discussions on efforts toward improving the local criminal justice system.

According to the National Institute of Corrections, “Successful implementation results from the availability and management of information that is meaningful, timely, and accurately represents the progress made... within the unique cultural and political context of the participating site” (2004, p. 9).

Therefore, it is in the spirit of encouraging further discourse of the issues addressed by this report, and in support of evidence based criminal justice policies, that this report has been prepared.

The Mercyhurst College Civic Institute would like to thank the county, state, and federal agencies that provided the data used in the study.

Methodology

The arrest data for this report was taken from the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System of the Pennsylvania State Police. Data included in this database can be updated or edited (from the present back five years); therefore, data may not reflect more recent changes to the database. It is important to note that arrest data is voluntarily submitted by agencies, not required, therefore some arrest data may be missing.

Other data presented in the report was gathered from various county, state, and federal agencies through annual reports, agency publications, or personal communications.

Arrest Data

I. Violent Crime

Adult Arrests

Adult arrests for violent crime (including murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) in all of Erie County increased between 1999 and 2003 by 9.3%.

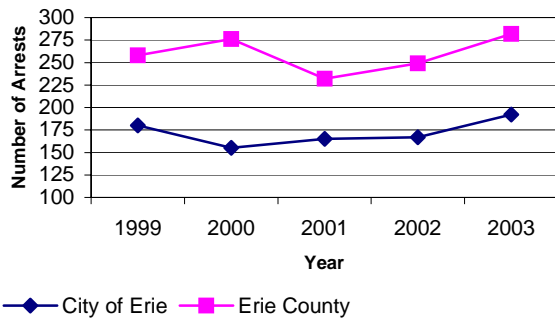
The arrests for violent crime in only the city of Erie increased slightly between 1999 and 2003 by 6.6%. It is important to note that adult arrests in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 66% of all adult violent crime arrests in the County.

Juvenile Arrests

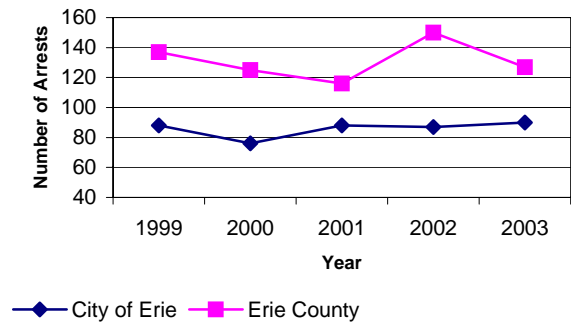
Juvenile arrests for violent crime (including murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) in Erie County decreased between 1999 and 2003 by 7.3%.

Juvenile arrests for violent crime in the City of Erie show very little change in arrest numbers between 1999 and 2003, with an increase of 2.3%. As with adult arrests, it is important to note that juvenile arrests for violent crime in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 66% of all juvenile violent crime arrests in the County.

Adult Violent Crime Index



Juvenile Violent Crime Index



II. Property Crime

Adult Arrests

Adult arrests for property crime (including burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, arson) in Erie County increased between 1999 and 2003 by 2.8%.

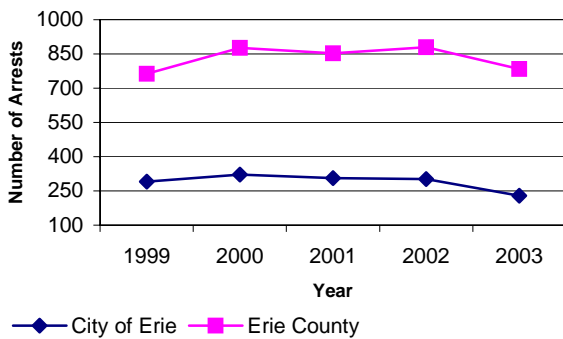
Adult arrests for property crime in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 decreased by 21.3%. Adult arrests for property crime in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 35% of all adult property crime arrests in the County.

Juvenile Arrests

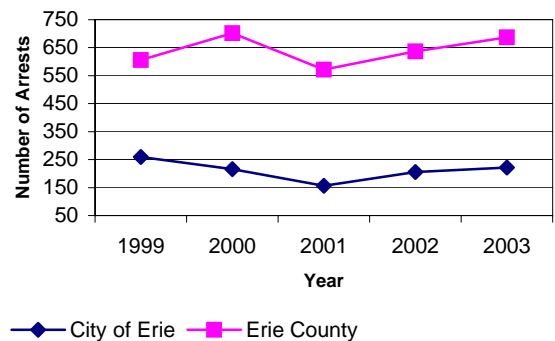
Juvenile arrests for property crime (including burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) in Erie County increased between 1999 and 2003 by 13.4%.

Juvenile arrests for property crime in the City of Erie decreased between 1999 and 2003 by 14.7%. Similar to adult property crime arrests, juvenile property crime arrests in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 33% of all juvenile property crime arrests the Erie County.

Adult Property Crime Index



Juvenile Property Crime Index



III. Non Index Crimes

Adult Arrests

Adult arrests for Non Index crimes (including fraud, other assault charges, drug offenses, DUI, and most other offenses) in Erie County fluctuated slightly between 1999 and 2003, increasing by 11.1%. Adult arrests for Non Index crimes in the City of Erie however, increased between 1999 and 2003 by 36.8%. Adult arrests for Non Index crimes in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 43% of all adult Non Index arrests in the County.

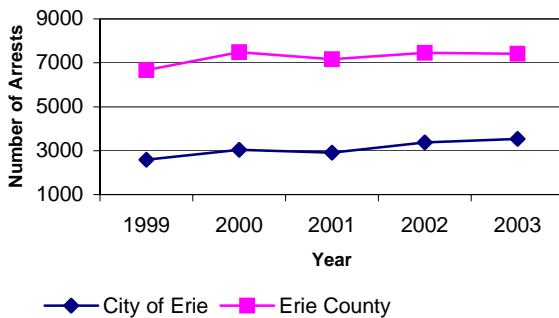
The rate per 10,000 for Adult Non Index crimes reflected similar trends in both the City and the County.

Juvenile Arrests

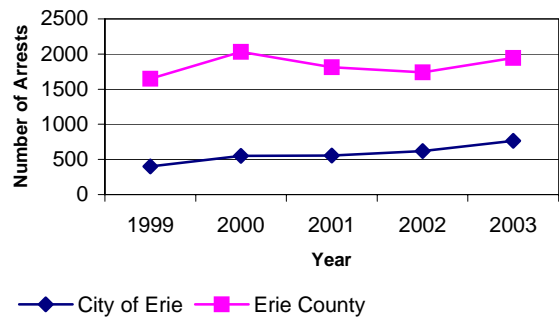
Juvenile arrests for Non Index crimes (including fraud, other assault charges, drug offenses, curfew violations, running away, and most other offenses) in Erie County increased between 1999 and 2003 by 17.9%. In the City of Erie, juvenile arrests for Non Index crimes increased between 1999 and 2003 by 91%. Juvenile arrests for Non Index crimes in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 31% of all juvenile Non Index arrests in the County.

The rate per 10,000 for the County increased by 17.8% between 1999 and 2003 to 591 arrests per 10,000 juveniles while the rate for the City increased by 39.5% between 1999 and 2003 to 696 arrests per 10,000 juveniles.

Adult Non Index Crimes



Juvenile Non Index Crimes



IV. Assault Arrests

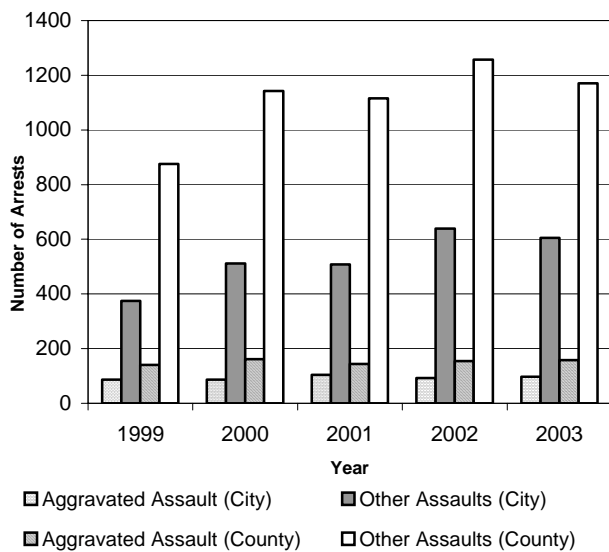
Adult Arrests

Adult arrests for aggravated and other not-aggravated assaults in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 49% of all adult arrests for aggravated and other not-aggravated assaults in Erie County. There is a notable difference in the average for aggravated versus not-aggravated assaults. Adult aggravated assault arrests in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 62% of all adult aggravated assault arrests in Erie County; adult not-aggravated assault arrests in the City of Erie during those years comprised a slightly lower average of 48% of all adult not-aggravated assault arrests in the County.

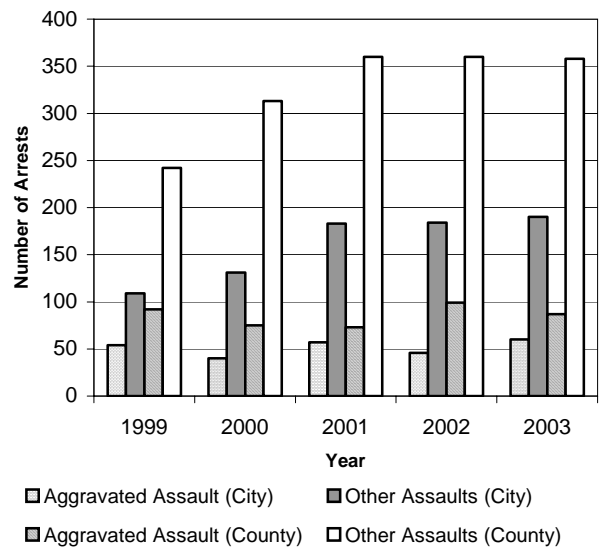
Juvenile Arrests

Juvenile arrests for aggravated and other not-aggravated assaults reflected similar trends. In the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003, juvenile aggravated and other not-aggravated assault arrests comprised an average of 51% of all aggravated and other not-aggravated juvenile assault arrests in Erie County. Juvenile aggravated assault arrests in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 61% of all juvenile aggravated assault arrests for Erie County; juvenile not-aggravated assault arrests in the City of Erie during those years comprised a slightly lower average of 48% of all juvenile not-aggravated assault arrests for the County.

Adult Assault Arrests



Juvenile Assault Arrests



V. Weapons Arrests

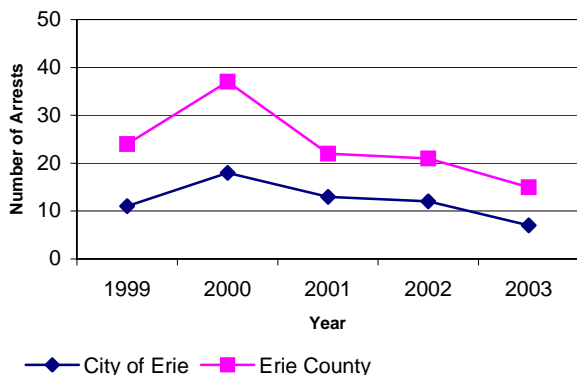
Adult Arrests

Adult arrests for weapon offenses (including carrying, manufacturing, selling, or possessing deadly weapons; manufacture/use of silencers; furnishing deadly weapons to minors; or aliens in possession of deadly weapons) decreased by 37.5 % in Erie County and 36.3% in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003. Adult arrests for weapons in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 52% of all adult arrests for weapons violations in the County.

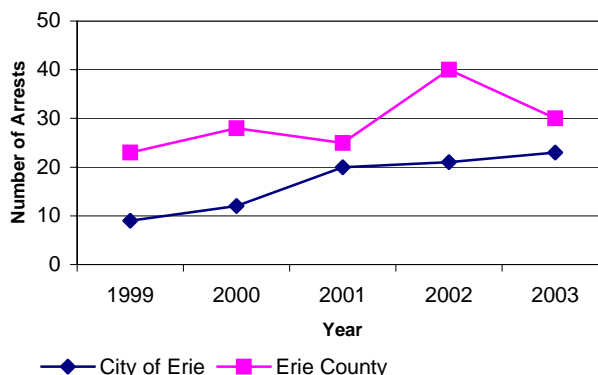
Juvenile Arrests

While adult arrests for weapons have been declining since the year 2000, juvenile arrests for weapons have produced a markedly different trend. In Erie County, juvenile arrests for weapons increased by 30.4% between 1999 and 2003. In the City of Erie, juvenile arrests for weapons increased by 156% between 1999 and 2003. Juvenile arrests for weapons in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 58% of all juvenile arrests for weapons violations in the County.

Adult Weapon Arrests



Juvenile Weapon Arrests



VI. Drug Arrests

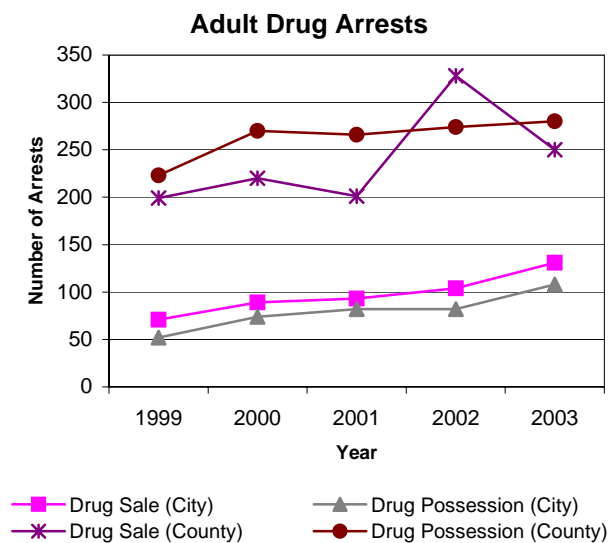
Adult Drug Arrests

Adult drug possession and sale arrests in the City of Erie have continued to increase from 71 arrests for drug sale and 52 arrests for drug possession in 1999 to 131 arrests for drug sale and 108 arrests for drug possession in 2003. Between 1999 and 2003, adult arrests in the City for drug sale increased by 84.5% and arrests for possession increased by 107.7%.

Adult drug possession and sale arrests in Erie County have experienced slight increases and decreases over the past five years. There was a slight increase in both types of drug arrests from 1999-2000, followed by a slight decrease for both between 2000 and 2001. From 2001 to 2002, adult drug sale arrests in Erie County increased from 201 to 328 arrests, and drug possession arrests increased from 266 to 274 arrests. Adult drug possession arrests in Erie County have continued to increase to 280 arrests in 2003, while arrests for drug sale decreased to 250 arrests in 2003. Between 1999 and 2003, adult arrests in the County for drug sale and possession both increased by 26.5%.

A calculation of the rate per 10,000 found similar arrest trends for both the City and County for drug possession and drug sale.

Adult arrests for drug sale in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 41% of all adult arrests for drug sale in Erie County, while adult arrests for drug possession in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 30% of all adult arrests for drug possession in Erie County.



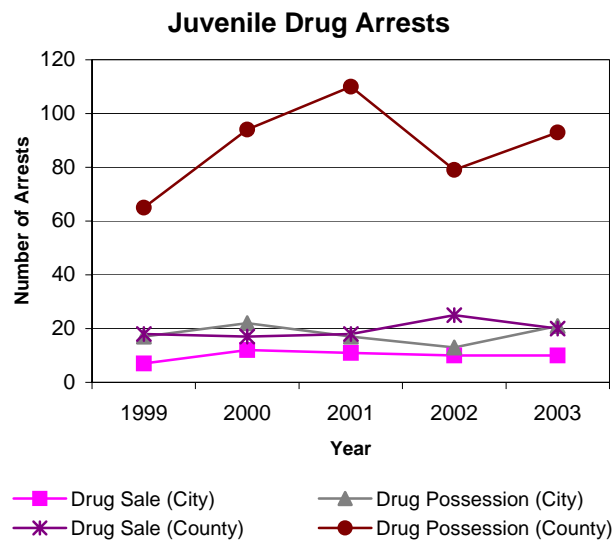
Juvenile Drug Arrests

Juvenile drug possession and sale arrests in the City of Erie fluctuated between 1999 and 2003. Between 1999 and 2003, juvenile arrests in the City for drug sale increased by 42.9% and arrests for possession increased by 23.5%.

Juvenile drug possession and sale arrests in Erie County have also experienced slight increases and decreases over the past five years. Between 1999 and 2003, juvenile arrests in the County for drug sale increased by 11.1% and arrests for possession increased by 43.1%.

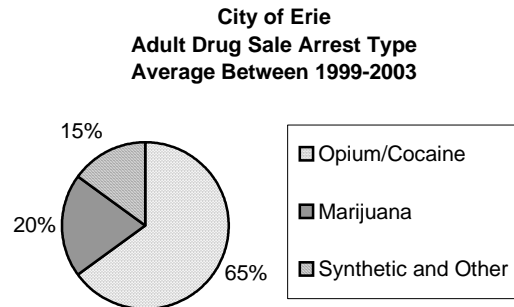
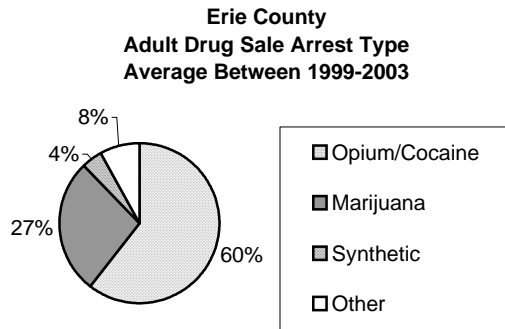
A calculation of the rate per 10,000 found similar arrest trends for both the City and County for drug possession and drug sale.

Juvenile arrests for drug offenses (including sale and possession) in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 26% of all juvenile arrests for drug offenses in Erie County. However, juvenile drug sale arrests in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 52% of all juvenile arrests for drug sale in Erie County, while juvenile arrests for drug possession in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of only 21% of all juvenile arrests for drug possession in Erie County.

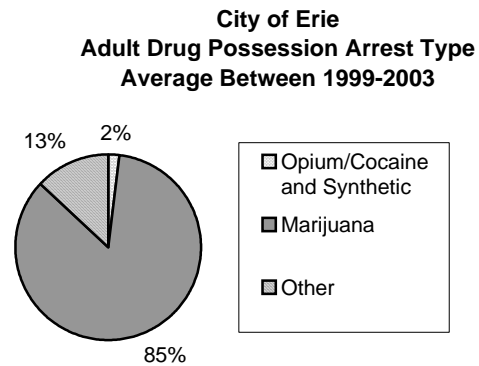
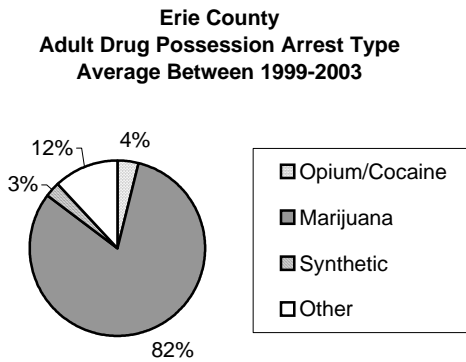


Adult Drug Arrests By Type of Drug

In both the City of Erie and Erie County, on average over half of the adult drug sale arrests between 1999 and 2003 were for the sale of opium or cocaine, and approximately one quarter were for the sale of marijuana. (Note: According to the Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook, a synthetic drug is defined as a manufactured narcotic that can cause drug addiction, such as Demerol or methadones.)



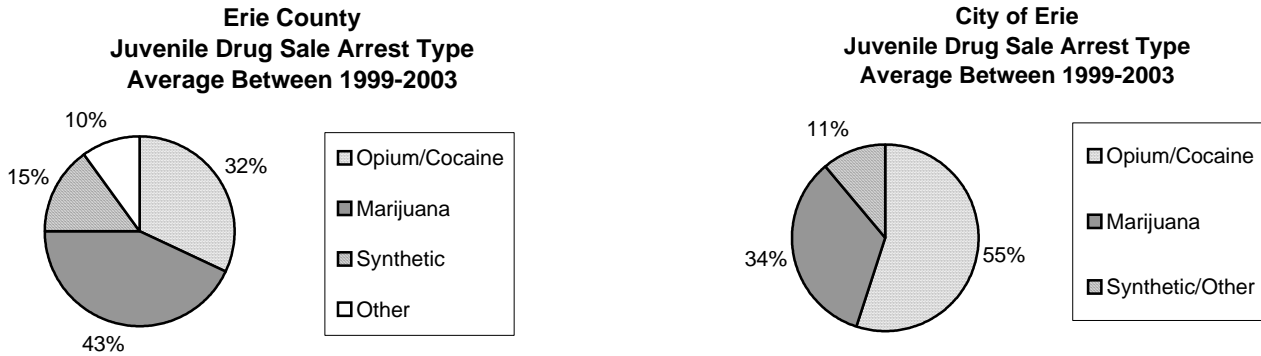
In both the City of Erie and Erie County, on average approximately 80% of the adult drug possession arrests between 1999 and 2003 were for the possession of marijuana.



Juvenile Drug Arrests By Type of Drug

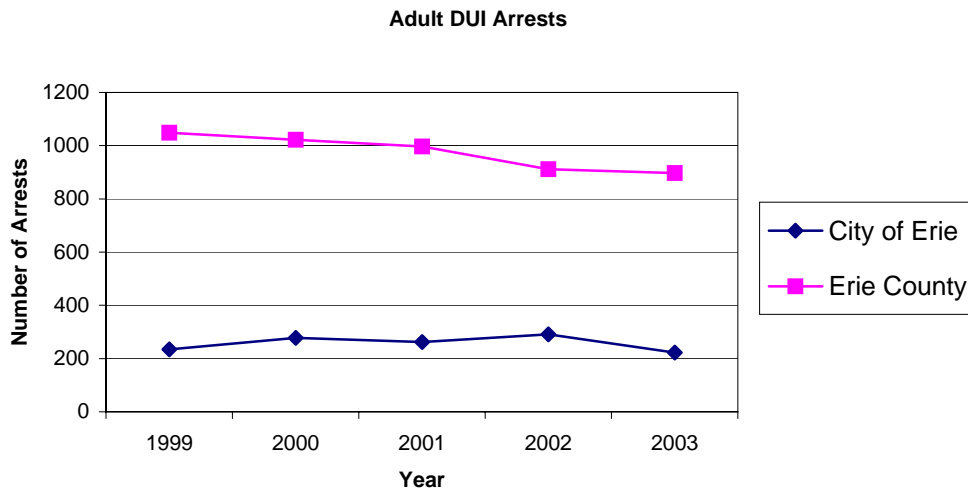
In both the City of Erie and Erie County, on average approximately 90% of the juvenile drug possession arrests between 1999 and 2003 were for the possession of marijuana.

In Erie County, on average approximately 40% of drug sale arrests between 1999 and 2003 were for the sale of marijuana, and approximately 30% were for the sale of opium and cocaine. In the City of Erie, on average approximately 34% of drug sale arrests between 1999 and 2003 were for the sale of marijuana and approximately 55% were for the sale of opium and cocaine.



VII. Adult DUI Arrests

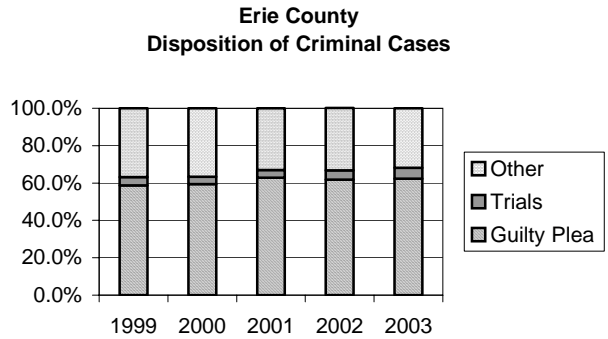
In the City of Erie, adult DUI arrests decreased by 5.1% between 1999 and 2003. In Erie County, adult DUI arrests gradually decreased between 1999 and 2003 by 14.4%. Adult arrests for DUI in the City of Erie between 1999 and 2003 comprised an average of 26% of all adult arrests for DUI in Erie County.



Criminal Case Dispositions

Erie County

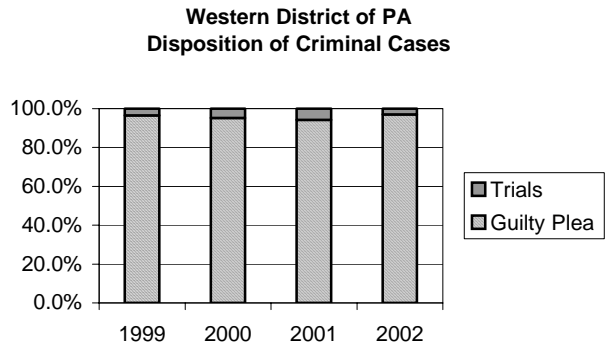
In Erie County, the disposition for approximately 60% of criminal cases between 1999 and 2003 were guilty pleas, and only 4% were trials. The remaining percentage of dispositions during those years were dismissed, withdrawn, or A.R.D. cases. Dispositions for criminal cases in Erie County have remained consistent between 1999 and 2003.



Erie County Court of Common Pleas Annual Report, 1999-2003

Western District of PA (Federal Court)

In the Western District of PA, which includes Erie County, a majority of the dispositions for criminal cases between 1999 and 2002 were guilty pleas (96%).

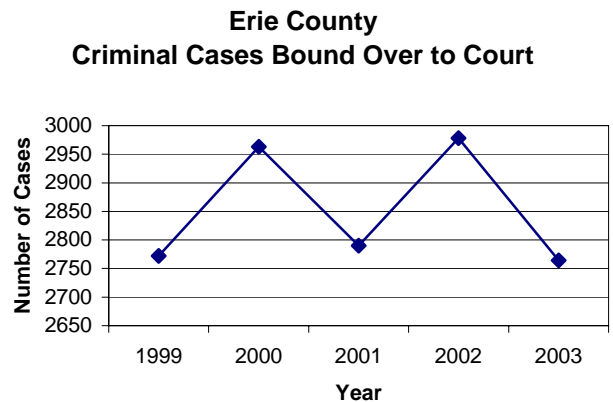


Sourcebook of Federal Sentencing Statistics, 1999-2002

Criminal Cases Bound Over to Court

Erie County

In Erie County, the number of criminal cases bound over to court has fluctuated over the past five years with a decrease from 2,978 cases in 2002 to 2,764 cases in 2003.

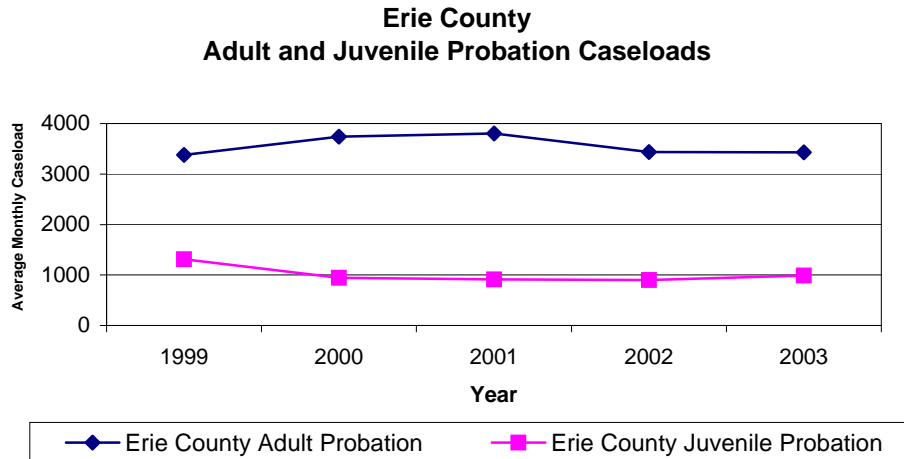


Erie County Court of Common Pleas, Annual Reports 1999-2003

Probation and Parole Caseloads

Erie County Adult and Juvenile Probation

The average monthly caseload for the Erie County Adult Probation Department increased between 1999 (3,378 cases) and 2001 (3,802 cases); and decreased from 2001 to 2003 (3,427 cases). Between 1999 and 2003 the Adult Probation average monthly caseload increased by 1.5%. The average monthly caseload for the Erie County Juvenile Probation Department decreased from 1999 (1,312 cases) to 2002 (899 cases); and increased in 2003 (987 cases). Between 1999 and 2003, the Juvenile Probation Department average monthly caseload decreased by 24.8%.



Erie County Court of Common Pleas Annual Report, 1999-2003

Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (Erie)

According to the County Adult Probation and Parole Statistical Reports by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (2002-2003), the average monthly caseload for the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole in Erie, Pennsylvania was 827 cases in the year 2002 and 895 cases in the year 2003, an increase of 8.2%.

United States Probation (Western District of PA, Erie)

The United States Probation Office in Erie, Pennsylvania, reports that in 2003 they supervised 56 offenders in Erie County, 51 of which resided in the City of Erie. Currently they are supervising 92 offenders in Erie County, 84 of which reside in the City of Erie (M. Rea, personal communication, October 22, 2004). Between 2003 and 2004, the number of offenders being supervised in Erie County has increased by 64.3% and in the City of Erie it has increased 64.7%.

Snapshot of Incarceration Data

I. Average Length of Post Release Supervision

County

The average length of post release supervision is approximately two years (R. Reade, personal communication, November 5, 2004).

Federal

According to the United States Probation Office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the average length of post release supervision is three or five years depending on the class of the felony (J. Beard, personal communication, October 20, 2004).

II. Average Length of Time Served for Releases

National

Nationally, according the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2004), the average sentence to a local jail was just over six months.

Federal

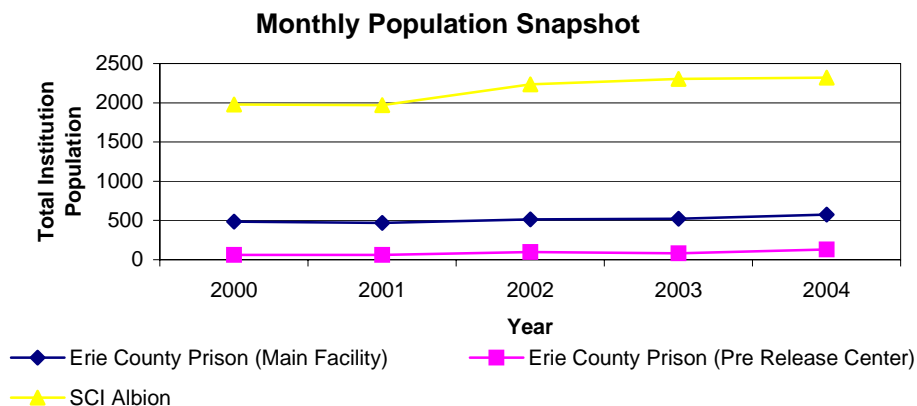
According to the United States Sentencing Commission's Sourcebook of Federal Sentencing Statistics, in fiscal year 2002, the mean prison sentence ordered was 62.8 months, and the median sentence ordered was 41.5 months. According to United States Probation, federal offenders who receive a sentence over one year in length are eligible for 54 days a year of "good time." In almost all cases, offenders are sentenced to time served as well as three or five years of supervised release (M. Rea, personal communication, October 22, 2004).

Erie County Prison

The total institution monthly population of the Erie County Prison Main Facility has gradually increased from 487 inmates in the year 2000 to 577 inmates in the year 2004, an increase of 18.5%. The monthly population of the Erie County Prison Pre Release Center has also gradually increased from 61 inmates in 2000 to 132 inmates in 2004, and increase of 116.4%.

Albion State Prison

Similar to the Erie County Prison, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Monthly Population Reports (2000-2004), the total institution monthly population of the State Correctional Institution at Albion has also gradually increased from 1,976 inmates in 2000 to 2,322 inmates in 2004, an increase of 17.5%.



III. Prison Monthly Population versus Capacity

According to the National Institute of Corrections, a prison should operate at no more than 80% of its capacity. This allows movement of prisoners to different classifications when necessary and also provides space in case a large pool of offenders are quickly incarcerated.

Erie County Prison

The monthly population at the Erie County Prison main facility remained slightly above 80% of capacity in the years 2000 and 2001. It increased to 90% in 2002 and decreased to 76% in the year 2003 after an increase in capacity. As of March 2004, the population had reached 83% of the capacity.

Erie County Prison (Main Facility)	Total Institution Population	Capacity*	Percent of Capacity
2000	487	574	85%
2001	471	574	82%
2002	515	574	90%
2003	524	694	76%
2004	577	694	83%

*J. Veshecco, personal communication, October 29, 2004

Erie County Prison (Pre Release Center)	Total Institution Population	Capacity*
2000	61	75
2001	63	75
2002	99	75
2003	82	152
2004	132	152

*J. Veshecco, personal Communication, October 29, 2004

Albion State Prison

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Month Population Reports (2000-2004), Albion State Prison has been operating at close or more than 100% capacity since 2000. In 2000, it was operating at 162% of capacity. After two increases in capacity in 2001 and 2002, it declined in 2003 to 99% and has been increasing gradually to 111% in March 2004.

SCI Albion	Total Institution Population	Capacity	Percent of Capacity
2000	1976	1220	162%
2001	1970	1982	99%
2002	2234	2084	107%
2003	2306	2084	111%
2004	2322	2084	111%

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, Monthly Population Reports 2000-2004

National Study of Recidivism and State Inmates

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (June 2002) Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994

- A study of 272,111 offenders released from prisons in 15 states in 1994 reports that 67.5% of the offenders were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years. Of those arrested, 46.9% were reconvicted for a new crime, and 25.4% were resentenced to prison for a new crime. Within three years, 51.8% of those released were in prison again for a new sentence or for probation/parole violations.
- Within the first six months of release, 29.9% of the original 272,111 offenders had been rearrested. Within the first year of release, 44.1% of the offenders had been rearrested; within two years, 59.2% had been rearrested. As noted by the report, the first year of release is when nearly two-thirds of the recidivism for these offenders occurred.
- Of those rearrested, 31.9% were arrested for a property offense, 30.3% were arrested for a drug offense, 28.3% were arrested for a public-order offense, and 21.6% were arrested for a violent crime.
- A study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1983 of 108,580 offenders released from prison in 11 states found similar rates. The 1983 study found that 62.5% of the offenders were rearrested and 46.8% were reconvicted within three years.

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (January 2004) Recidivism in Pennsylvania State Correctional Institutions: 1996 - 2001

- Recidivism rates for the Department of Corrections in Pennsylvania were reported at six months, one year, and three years from the date of release. There was a slight increase in the recidivism rate at each time period during the six-year period.

Year	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years
1996	11.7%	20.8%	39.2%
1997	11.4%	21.6%	41.9%
1998	12.8%	22.6%	42.3%
1999	13.2%	23.3%	43.6%
2000	13.5%	24.2%	N/A
2001	14.7%	25.8%	N/A

- Data in the report shows that the majority of the offenders returned to prison between 1996 - 2001 were returned due to technical violations of parole rather than for new criminal charges.
- Data also shows that offenders who are paroled more than once return to prison at slightly higher rate than those released for the first time.

Socioeconomic Status of Offenders

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (2004) Profile of Jail Inmates, 2002

- In 2002, 71% of jail inmates reported being employed and 29% reported being unemployed before their arrest. Of those who reported employment, 57.4% reported full-time employment, 10.9% reported part-time employment, and 18.4% reported occasional employment. This is a slight increase from 1996 when 64% of jail inmates reported being employed and 35.6% reported being unemployed.
- In 2002, approximately 41% of jail inmates reported earning a monthly income of \$1,000 or more prior to their arrest and approximately 30% of the jail inmates reported a monthly income of less than \$300. In 1996, approximately 33% of jail inmates had reported earning a monthly income of \$1,000 or more and approximately 31% of the jail inmates reported a monthly income of less than \$300.
- For both the year 2002 and 1996, a wage or salary was the jail inmates' most reported source of income. In 2002, 63.2% of inmates reported wages or salary and in 1996, 74.7% of inmates reported wages or salary.
- In 2002, 14.3% of jail inmates reported that they were homeless in the past year. In 1996, 19.2% of jail inmates reported that they were homeless in the past year.

Estimated Criminal Justice Costs Per Month

For: United States Probation

	Cost Per Month
Prison	\$1,931.97
Halfway House	\$1,590.66
Community Supervision	\$292.21

J. Beard, personal communication, October 20, 2004

For: Erie County Prison

The current estimated daily cost of the Erie County Prison is \$43.00 and the estimated daily cost of the Erie County Pre Release Center is \$25.00 (J. Veshecco, personal communication, November 3, 2004).

For: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections

According to a report by Dr. Jeffrey A. Beard, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, the estimated daily cost per inmate in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections was \$77.38. This was a decrease from 2001-2002 when the estimated daily cost per inmate was \$80.83.

Data Limitations

The limitations of this study should be noted. The observations are based on the data we received, some of which was somewhat incomplete. As a result, caution should be exercised in interpreting the data and drawing conclusions. However, enough information was received to spark comparisons between the Erie County and City of Erie Criminal Justice Systems.

Conclusions

- Adult assault arrests in both Erie County and the City of Erie increased slightly between 2001-2003. Juvenile assault arrests in Erie County decreased slightly in 2003, while juvenile assault arrests in the City of Erie have remained fairly stable.
- Adult and juvenile aggravated assault arrests in the City of Erie comprised an average of 62% of all aggravated assault arrests in Erie County between 1999-2003; and adult and juvenile not-aggravated assault arrests in the City of Erie comprised an average of 48% of all not-aggravated assault arrests in Erie County between 1999-2003.
- Adult property crime arrests in Erie County remained fairly stable and arrests in the City of Erie decreased between 1999 and 2003. Between 1999 and 2003, juvenile property crime arrests in Erie County increased slightly and arrests in the City of Erie have decreased slightly. For both the County and the City juvenile arrests have been increasing since 2001. Adult and juvenile property crime arrests in the City of Erie comprised an average of one third of all property crime arrests in Erie County between 1999-2003.
- In Erie County, adult and juvenile Non Index crime arrests fluctuated between 1999 and 2003, while in the City of Erie, adult and juvenile Non Index crime arrests increased.
- Adult weapons arrests in both Erie County and the City of Erie decreased between 1999 and 2003. In Erie County, juvenile weapon arrests increased by 30.4% between 1999 and 2003, while in the City of Erie juvenile weapons arrests increased by 156%. Juvenile weapon arrests in the City of Erie comprised an average of 58% of all juvenile weapons arrests in Erie County between 1999-2003.
- In the City of Erie, between 1999 and 2003 adult drug possession arrests increased by 107.7% and drug sale arrests increased by 84.5%. In Erie County, both adult drug possession and drug sale arrests increased by 26.5% between 1999 and 2003.
- Over half of the adult drug sale arrests in both Erie County and the City of Erie were for opium or cocaine. Approximately 80% of the adult drug possession arrests in both Erie County and the City of Erie were for marijuana.
- In the City of Erie, between 1999 and 2003, juvenile arrests for drug sale increased by 42.9% and arrests for possession increased by 23.5%. In Erie County, juvenile arrests for drug sale increased by 11.1% and arrests for possession increased by 43.1%. Juvenile drug sale arrests in the City of Erie comprised an average of 52% of all juvenile drug arrests in Erie County, while drug possession arrests in the City of Erie comprised an average of 21% of all juvenile drug possession arrests.

- In Erie County, approximately 40% of juvenile drug sale arrests were for marijuana and approximately 30% of drug sale arrests were for opium or cocaine. In the City of Erie, approximately 55% of juvenile drug sale arrests were for opium or cocaine, and 35% of juvenile drug sale arrests were for marijuana. Approximately 90% of the juvenile drug possession arrests in both Erie County and the City of Erie were for marijuana.
- In Erie County and the City of Erie adult arrests for DUI gradually decreased between 1999 - 2003. Adult DUI arrests in the City of Erie comprised an average of 26% of all DUI arrests in Erie County between 1999 - 2003.
- The number of criminal cases bound over to court each year by the Erie County Court Administration Office has fluctuated over the past five years, with the most recent data showing a decrease in the number of cases in 2003.
- The caseloads of Erie County Juvenile Probation, Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (Erie), and United States Probation (Erie County) have increased slightly in recent years. The caseloads of Erie County Adult Probation, however, have been decreasing slightly since 2001.
- The average monthly population of the Erie County Prison gradually increased between 2000-2004, with the prison remaining slightly higher than the suggested 80% capacity a majority of the time.
- The average monthly population of the State Correctional Institution at Albion has gradually increased between 2000-2004 with the prison remaining close or over 100% capacity during those years.

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