

PROPOSITION 47 DELIVERS NEARLY 1 BILLION TO CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES



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September 2024

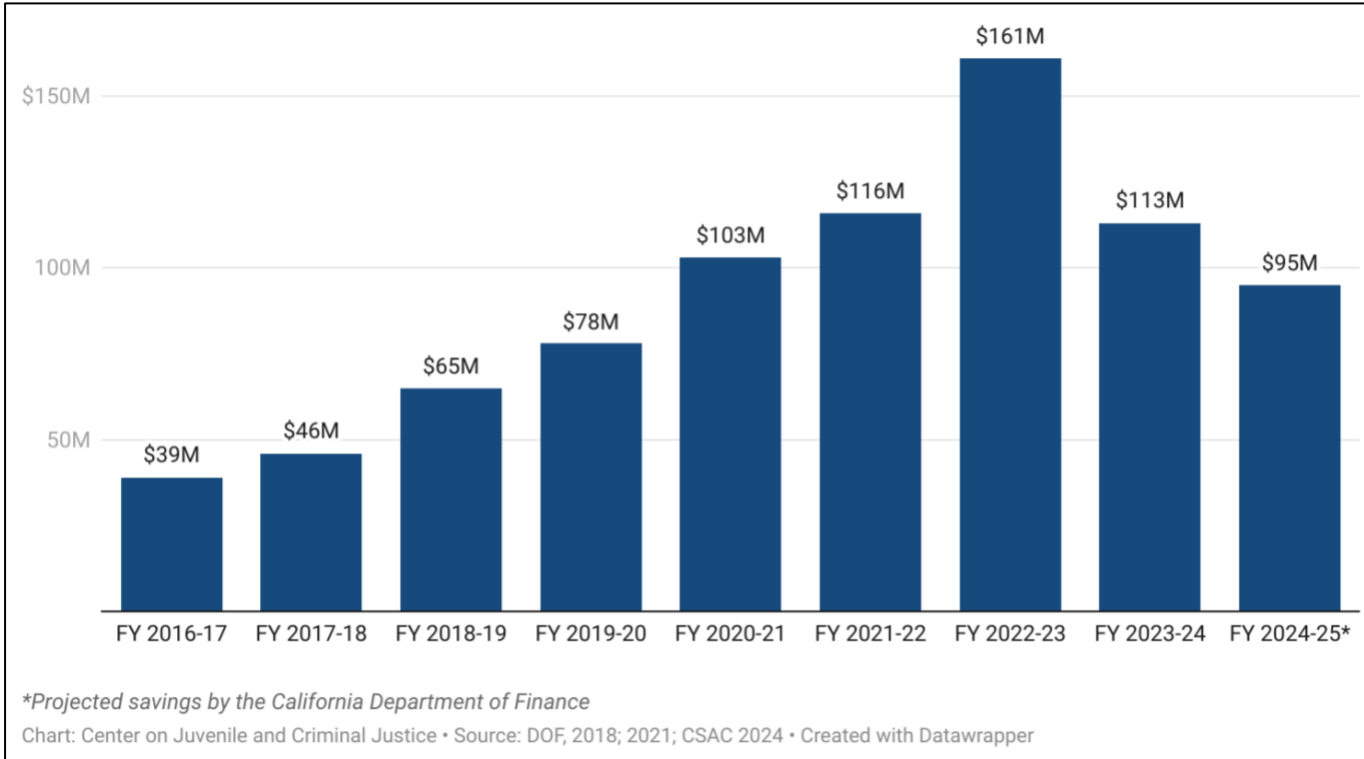
Research Brief

It has been almost 10 years since Proposition 47 (Prop 47) was on the California ballot. Since its passage in 2014, Prop 47 has reduced California’s unconstitutional prison overcrowding and, in the process, saved the state nearly a billion dollars. Prop 47 netted savings by changing certain low-level offenses, such as drug possession and thefts of property valued under \$950, from potential felonies to misdemeanors. California has reinvested these savings into communities for education, trauma recovery services, housing, employment, mental health, and substance use treatment programs—becoming a critical fund for public services.¹

Proposition 47 has:

- Reduced dangerous prison overcrowding;
- Saved the state about \$816 million in prison spending;
- Redirected funds to K-12 education, preventative programs, victim services, mental health, and drug treatment programs.
- Funded programs in almost half of California’s counties;
- Reduced recidivism among participants;
- Served people at a much lower cost than prisons.²

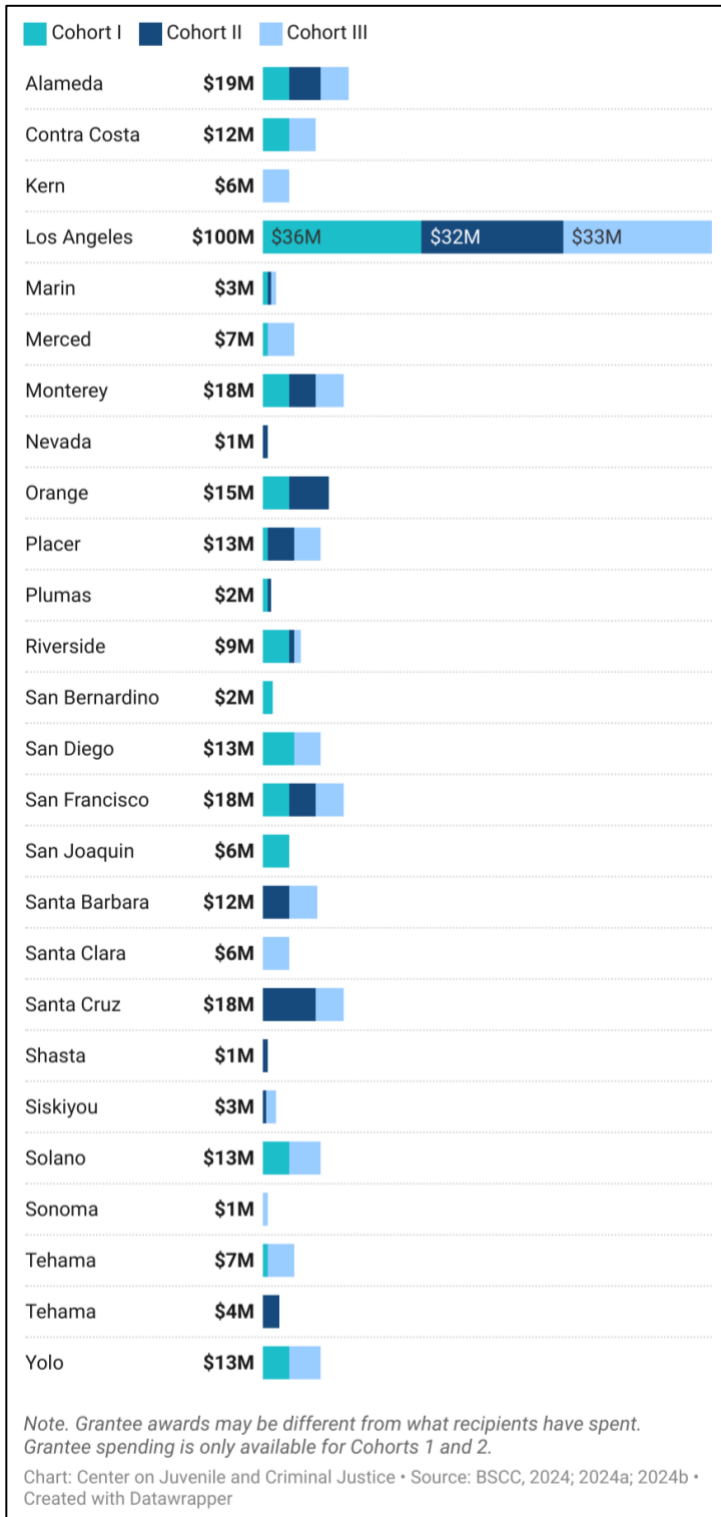
Figure 1. State savings from Prop 47 FY 2016-17 to 2024-25 totaling to \$816 million



¹ Prop 47 created the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Fund to support rehabilitation programs and fund drug and mental health treatment.

² Per-person spending on Prop 47 programs is 2.5% of the cost of incarcerating someone (Figure 4).

Figure 2. Grantee awards by cohort



• **Prop 47 has saved lives by decreasing deadly prison overcrowding and funding critical local programs**

In the mid-2000s, prisons were at almost twice their holding capacity.³ This led to dangerous conditions resulting in approximately one death each week (Brown v. Plata, 2011). By 2014, when Prop 47 became law, the prison population had dropped⁴ but was still well above the Supreme Court’s mandated cap. Prop 47 immediately reduced overcrowding by lowering prison populations below the court-ordered cap within its first year (Lofstrom & Martin, 2024). Since 2014, Proposition 47 has also funneled about \$816 million into three agencies: the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) (65% of funds) supports mental health and drug treatment programs, the Department of Education (25% of funds) expands essential K-12 education, and the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board (10% of funds) develops victims services.

• **Prop 47’s \$816 million savings have benefited many California counties**

The state has saved nearly 1 billion dollars from Prop 47 (Figure 1). The BSCC allocates the vast majority of these savings to support programs that address the root causes of crime. As of 2024, the BSCC has awarded grants across three different four-year funding cycles (referred to here as Cohorts I, II, and III). Grantees must evaluate and report on their program’s overall impact. The first two cohorts have completed their grant cycles and posted results; their evaluations show consistently strong outcomes at a low cost.⁵

To date, Prop 47’s \$816 million in savings has already funded recidivism reduction programs in 26 California counties (Figure 2). These funds support vital services, many delivered directly by community-based organizations (CBOs). For Cohort I, CBOs received about 80% of awarded funds and for Cohort II, CBO’s received 78% of

³ The Supreme Court’s finding in Plata v. Brown found that California’s prison overcrowding violated prisoner’s 8th amendment right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment. See Newman et. al., (2012).

⁴ California adopted Assembly Bill 109 (2011), known as Public Safety Realignment. AB 109 significantly changed California’s criminal justice system and reduced the prison population, but these institutions still operated above the court mandated 137.5% of capacity. See CJCJ (2024a).

⁵ Other analyses have shown promising results of Prop 47 purpose and impacts. See OJP (2012) and CJCJ (2022).

grants (BSCC, 2024; 2024a). CBOs can uniquely support public safety as they often fill service gaps within local and state government while strengthening community bonds. These CBOs have used Prop 47 funds to run programs that have been lifelines to vulnerable communities.

- **Recidivism is down for participants in Prop 47 programs**

Overall, Prop 47-funded programs have reported reduced recidivism rates, unemployment, and homelessness. Most program grantees in Cohort I showed reduced recidivism rates under 23%, as compared to the 35% state recidivism rate (BSCC, 2024). Cohort II produced even better outcomes despite the challenges that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grantees reported a 15.3% recidivism rate which was significantly lower than the state average of 35-45% (BSCC, 2024).

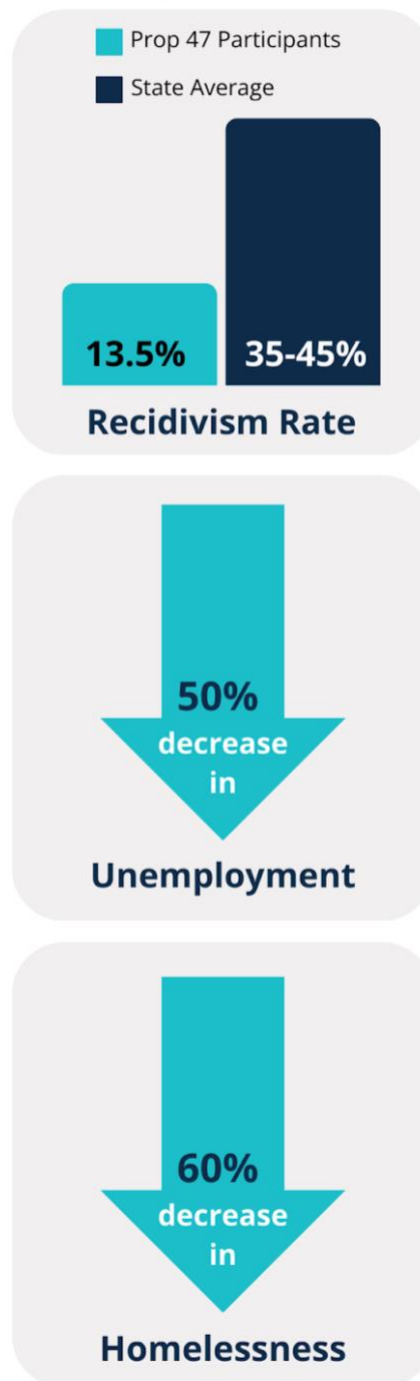
- **Prop 47 participants have reduced homelessness, and higher rates of employment**

Improvements in housing and employment are important measures, which reduce recidivism (Duwe & Henry-Nickie, 2021). Homelessness dropped by 60% among Prop 47 program participants, while living independently nearly doubled. In the same vein, for participants who identified employment as a goal, grantees reported a 50% decrease in unemployment (BSCC, 2024a). Unfortunately, the data collection for Cohort I was inconsistent and aggregated, making it difficult to analyze trends that became more identifiable with Cohort II. No analysis is available for Cohort III grantees, which began September 1, 2022 and runs until June 1, 2026. Nonetheless, the programs selected to receive funding through Cohort III, include Supporting Treatment & Reducing Recidivism (STARR), Project imPACT and Project HOME (Homeless Outreach, Mentorship, and Empowerment) indicating a continued focus on prevention (BSCC, 2024b).⁶

- **Almost 90% of the funds support mental health services**

Prop 47 programs overwhelmingly focus on mental health services. Investments in mental healthcare improve public safety and help to end cycles of incarceration. Data show that those with mental health issues are disproportionately impacted by homelessness, unemployment and incarceration (OJP, 2024). Both Cohort I (87%) and Cohort II (95%) grantees dedicated most of their services to providing mental health support (BSCC, 2024; 2024a). Prop 47 has successfully funded programs that address recidivism’s root causes at a fraction of prison expenses.

Figure 3. Prop 47 II Participants



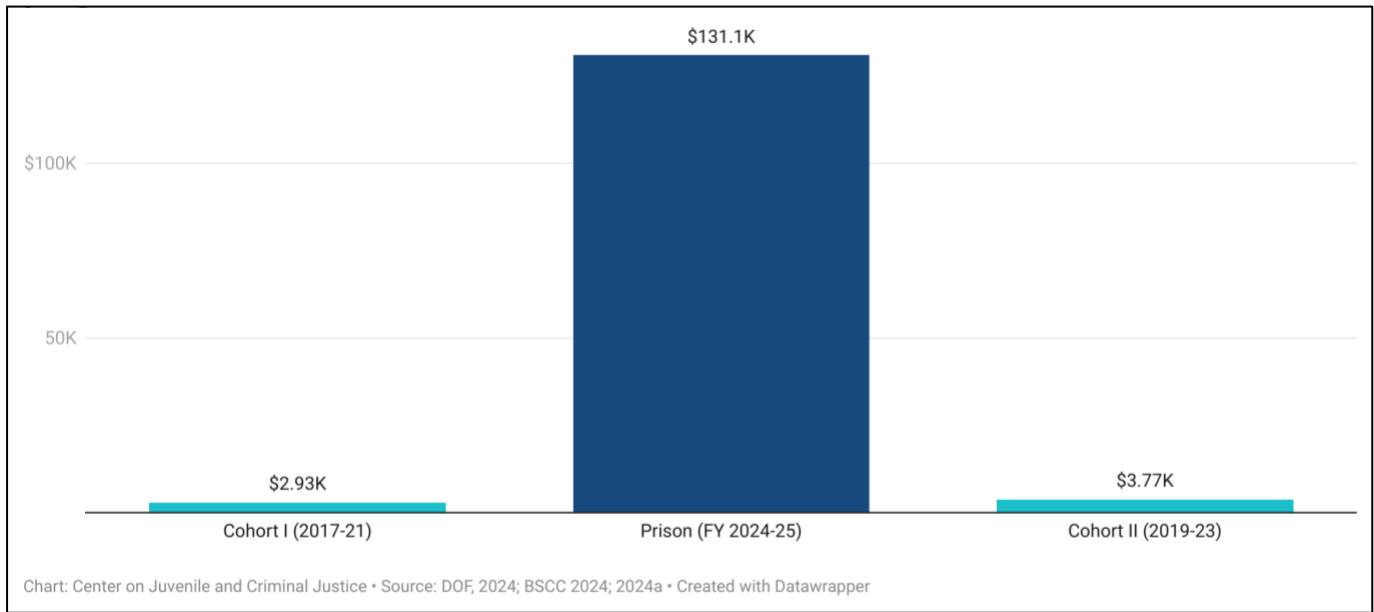
Source: BSCC (2024a)

⁶ See RFP details at BSCC (2024b).

- **California pays about 39 times more to incarcerate someone in prison than for them to participate in a Prop 47 program**

The California 2024-25 State Budget estimates that it will cost \$131,100 annually to incarcerate someone, a 168% increase since 2010-11 (DOF, 2012, 2024). The cost for Prop 47 participants⁷ was roughly \$3,270/participant or 2.5% of that incarceration cost⁸ a stark difference between the \$131,100 per incarcerated person (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Cost per person for one year in a California prison vs. Participants in a Prop 47 program for Cohort I & Cohort II



- **Prop 47 has been significantly successful but is now under baseless attacks threatening the future of California’s focus on rehabilitation**

Despite saving the state hundreds of millions of dollars, putting money into alternatives, and showing successes with those alternatives, Prop 47 is under attack.⁹ Most crimes impacted by Prop 47 have decreased and crime overall is at historic lows (CJCJ, 2024). However, critics mistakenly blame Prop 47 and other criminal justice reforms for perceived increases in crime. Currently, Proposition 36, disguised with the promising name *Drug and Theft Crime Penalties and Treatment-Mandated Felonies Initiative*, would roll back the progress of Prop 47. This measure, which is backed by major retailers such as Walmart, Target, and Home Depot, would reclassify certain drug offenses and increase penalties for those who use drugs (Davalos & Graves, 2024). Additionally, it would increase prison time for a variety of theft offenses. Prop 36 is estimated to cost the state anywhere from several tens of millions of dollars to the low hundreds of millions annually (LAO, 2024). Importantly, it would increase prison populations and slash funding to the critical Prop 47 grant program. This will reverse California’s decade-long effort to support people before they become involved in the justice system; a system that has been shown to perpetuate harm in our communities.

⁷ This includes Cohorts I and II.

⁸ Cohort I (June 2017 to August 2021) spent \$93,718,759 for programs serving 32,007 participants. Cohort II (August 2019 to May 2023) spent \$81,851,583 to support 21,706 program participants. Cohort I programs spent \$2,928 per participant and Cohort II programs spent \$3,770 per participant.

⁹ See Clayton (2024); Salonga (2024); Smith (2024); White (2024).

Conclusion

Prop 47 has saved the state \$816 million dollars since its passage in 2014. Programs, funded by this proposition's savings, have served about 50,000 Californians, reduced recidivism rates, and improved employment opportunities and housing stability; all at a fraction of the total cost to incarcerate someone annually. Proposition 47 has also funneled 25% of its funds to the Department of Education to fund K-12 programs that address truancy. Additionally, it gives 10% to the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board to fund trauma recovery programs.

Regardless of its success, Prop 47 is being attacked. There is a Prop 47 roll-back campaign built on false information and fear mongering. Now, we are at a pivotal point at which elected officials and voters will decide to cut hundreds of millions for innovative community programs while reverting to the hazardous and unconstitutional prison overcrowding, or center rehabilitation. In 2014, California voters reimagined public safety by voting for investments in drug treatment, education, housing, mental health services, and more. This successful vision offers a stark difference from the irreparable damage caused by the "tough on crime era" (Baumgartner et al., 2021). California cannot afford to move backwards.

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