

Consolidation of Small Prisons

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Issue Statement

North Carolina has the largest number of prison facilities in the nation and high prison staffing levels relative to many other states. This issue paper assesses the State's network of prisons, prison staffing patterns, and the area command structure.

Background

In the 1930s, the State took over responsibility for financing and administering the highway system and prisons from county government. At that time, county prison camps were a major source of labor for construction and maintenance of the county roads and highway system.

Today, the Department of Correction (DOC) punishes over 120,000 offenders annually through a system of probation, prison, and parole. There are 91 State prisons located throughout North Carolina and probation and parole offices in each of the 100 counties. Exhibit 1 shows the locations and relative sizes of the State's prisons. The standard operating capacity (SOC) of the State's prisons ranges from a low of 15 to a high of 947, with an average of 200 inmates.

Approximately three-quarters of DOC's \$500 million annual operating budget is personnel-related (e.g., salaries, fringe benefits, and personal service contracts). Excluding public education and higher education, the Department:

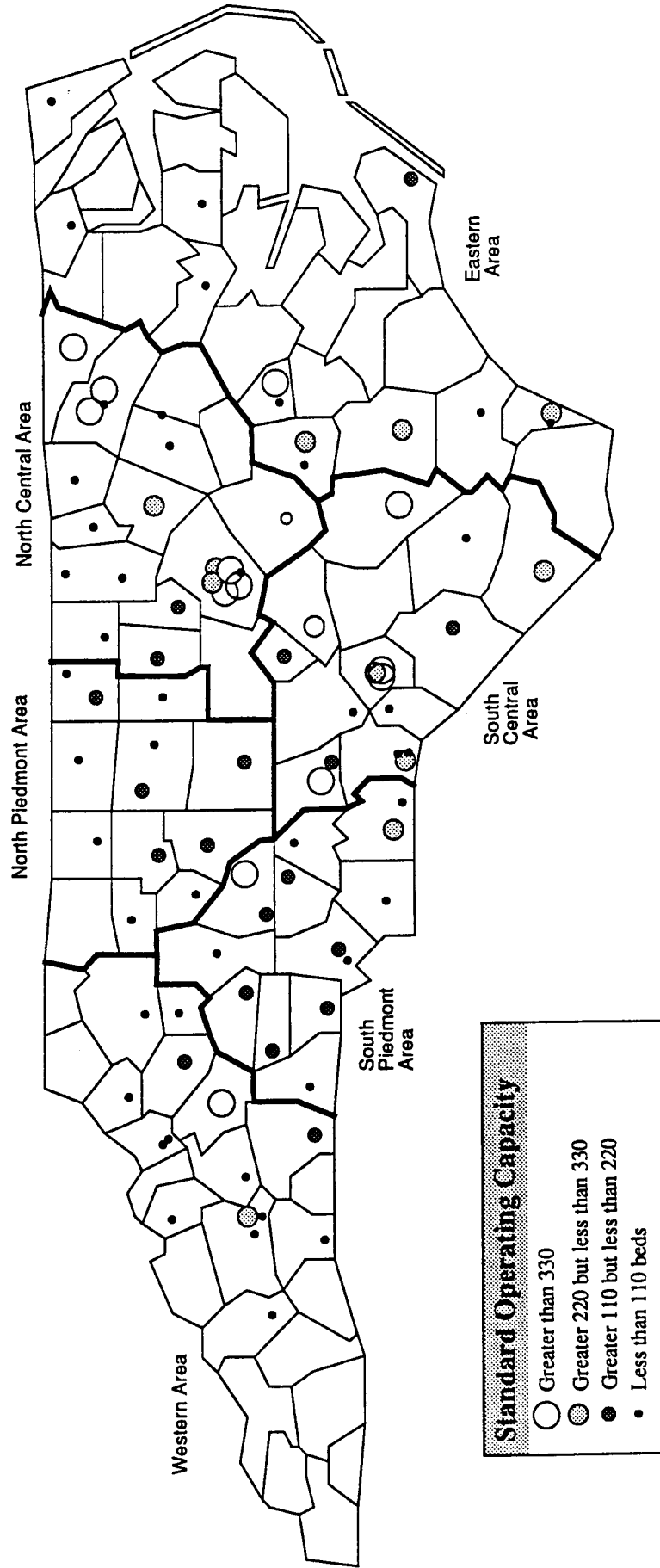
- Has the second largest general fund budget
- Requires one-sixth of the State's annual general fund
- Is the third largest agency employer with 12,849 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs)

The 12,849 DOC positions are deployed in the following general functional areas:

- 11,050 prison-related positions
- 1,799 probation and parole-related positions

EXHIBIT 1

Location and Size of North Carolina Prisons



NOT TO SCALE

As shown in Exhibit 2, the majority of DOC staff, approximately 11,050, are prison-related positions which supervise approximately 20,000 offenders. The State uses 86 percent of its corrections resource to supervise only 16 percent of the offender population. Fourteen percent of the DOC positions are probation and parole positions which supervise sanctions on an offender population of over 100,000.

DOC's operations are organized into four major organizational units:

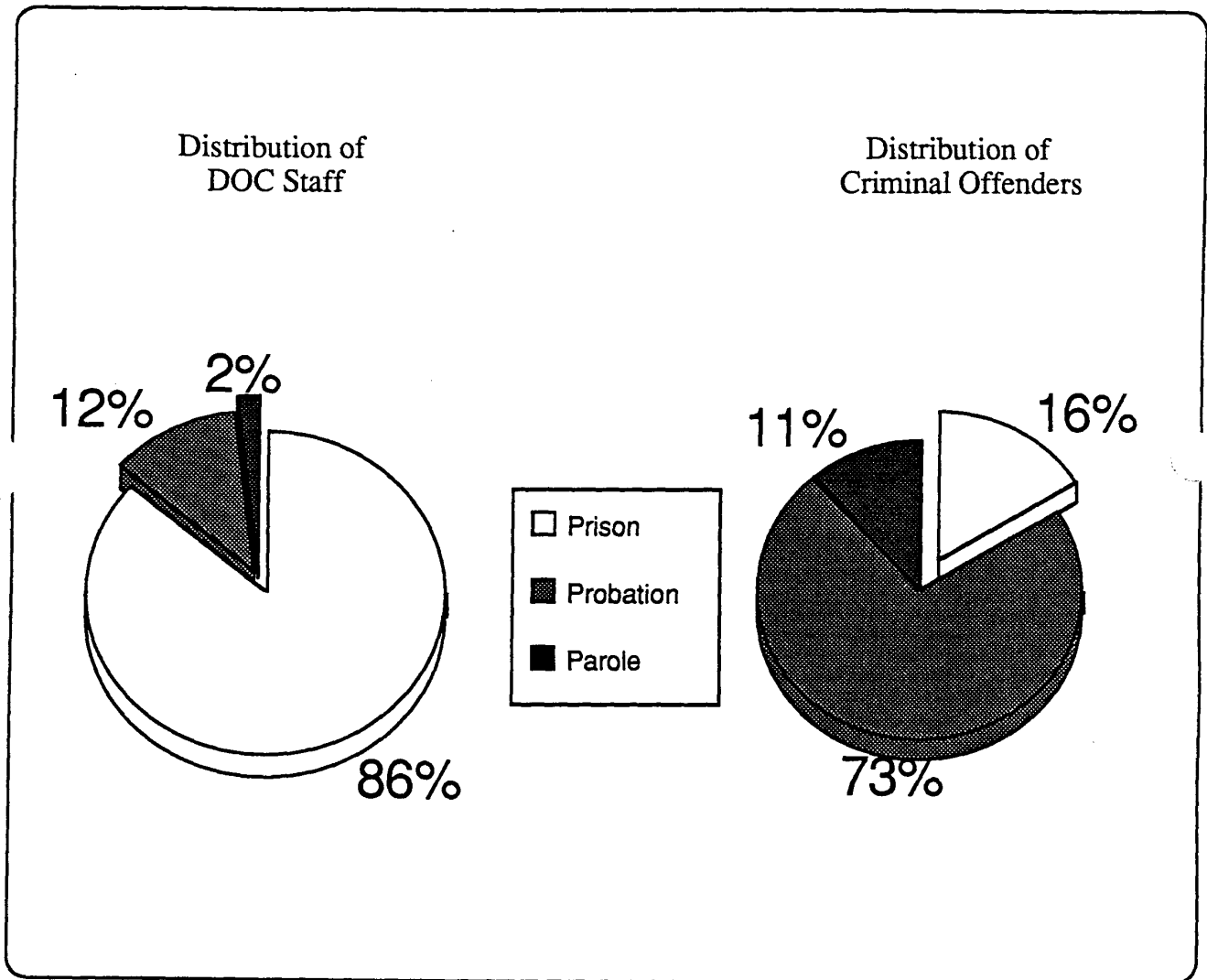
- Central Administration
- Division of Adult Probation and Parole
- Division of Prisons
- Correction Enterprises

The Division of Prisons is the largest of the four divisions within DOC. It has the largest staff and comprises the greatest portions of the operating budget. The Director of Prisons and his staff administer prisons through five command managers:

- Female Command - The command is responsible for receiving all female offenders into five prison facilities. All women facilities report directly to the Woman Command Manager.
- Youth Command - This command comprises eight prisons that receive offenders under the age of 23, who are tried and sentenced as adults yet are separated from the male prison population. The superintendent of the youth facilities reports directly to the Youth Command Manager. Juvenile institutions are operated by the Department of Human Resources' Division of Youth Services.
- Eastern and Western Command - These commands include 69 prisons that report through six area offices located within six geographic areas. There are three area offices in each Eastern and Western Command which report to the appropriate Eastern and Western Command Manager.
- Institutional Command - This command is composed of eight institutions for adult male offenders. Superintendents of institutions in this command report directly to the Institutional Command Manager.

EXHIBIT 2

**Distribution of Department
Personnel and Offenders**



The State's Master Plan for prisons has two growth scenarios, which indicate a need for an additional 15,000 to 21,000 beds and a no growth scenario that requires additional close custody beds. The additional 15,000 to 21,000 beds represent a *doubling* of the existing prison capacity over the next 5 years.

The cost of prison construction and/or rehabilitation is accounted for by capital appropriations that are separate from and in addition to the funding requirements of the Department's annual operating budget. Exhibit 3 shows the most recent trends of DOC's general fund and capital appropriations. Construction costs for a prison bed are only 5 percent of the overall costs of that bed over its design life (i.e., 50 years). The operating cost for a bed, over its life, will likely exceed \$1 million.

North Carolina is not alone in experiencing escalating operating cost and capital requirements. In response to the \$20 billion dollars spent on prisons by federal and state governments last year, the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) issued a report in May 1992 on State and Federal Prisons entitled "Factors That Affect Construction and Operations Costs." The report was based on 32 prisons in 20 states. One of its key conclusions, as shown in Exhibit 4, is that personnel costs account for the majority of prison costs and low inmate-to-staff ratios are characteristic of high cost prisons.

Legal settlement agreements, like *Small vs. Martin*, now require the Department to limit crowding in certain prisons. Under existing legal agreements, the Department is obligated to restrict operations to 100 percent of capacity by June 30, 1994. Currently, the State's prisons operate at 118 percent. Some prisons, that are not subject to the legal agreements, operate at over 200 percent.

As of October 1992, the State's SOC was 17,651 beds. North Carolina has authorized additional beds which will bring the SOC to 20,324. However, even after construction is complete, the State will still not have enough capacity for its current prison population. Plans for an additional \$87 million of construction bond funds are projected to bring standard operating capacity to 22,626.

Findings

Finding 1: North Carolina has the 8th highest correction staffing level in the nation and low prison efficiency as measured by inmates per correction officer in the Southeast.

North Carolina has the 8th highest staffing level per 100,000 state population in the country. It also has one of the lowest ratio of inmates-per-correction officer. Exhibit 5 illustrates the State's ratio of inmates-per-correction officer versus other Southeast states.

A state-to-state comparison of 1990 staffing and expenditure levels was performed. This analysis details the differences between North Carolina and other states. The data used in the analysis was based on a comprehensive data base developed by Municipal Analysis Services,

EXHIBIT 3

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS EXPENDITURES GENERAL FUND AND CAPITAL APPROPRIATIONS

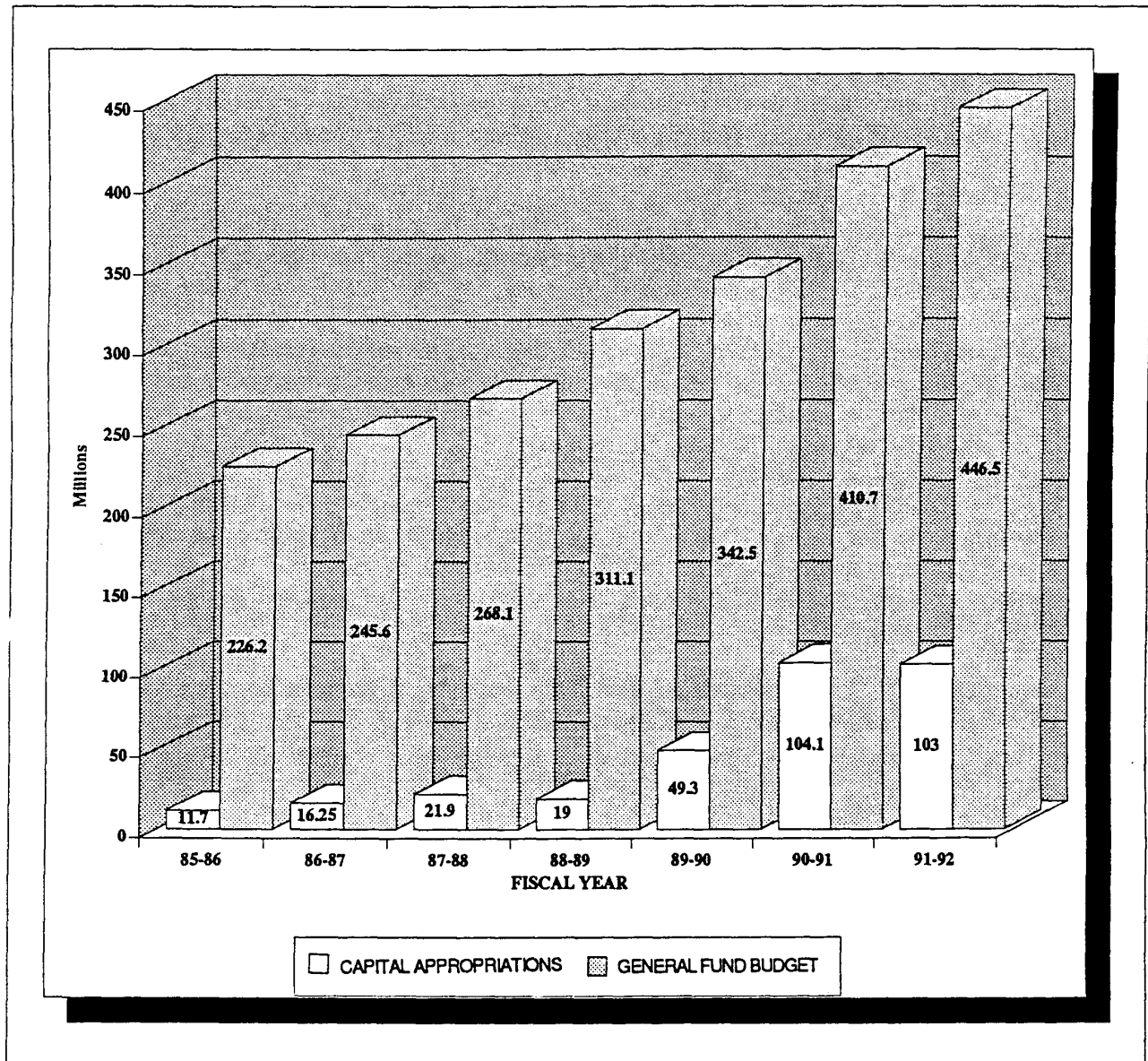


EXHIBIT 4

**Comparison Between the Inmate-to-staff Ratio
and Personnel Costs per Inmate Day**

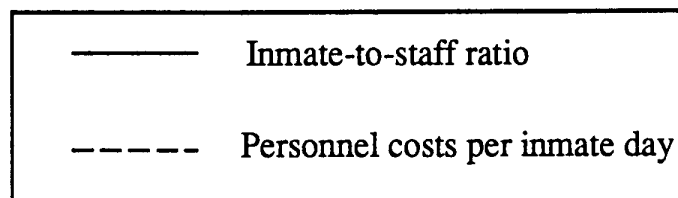
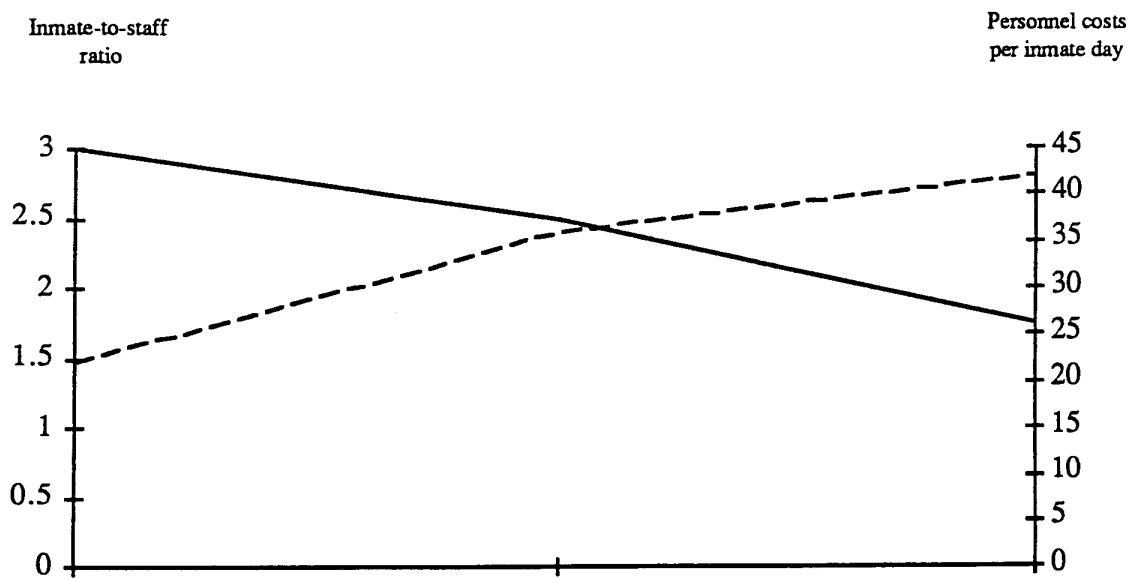
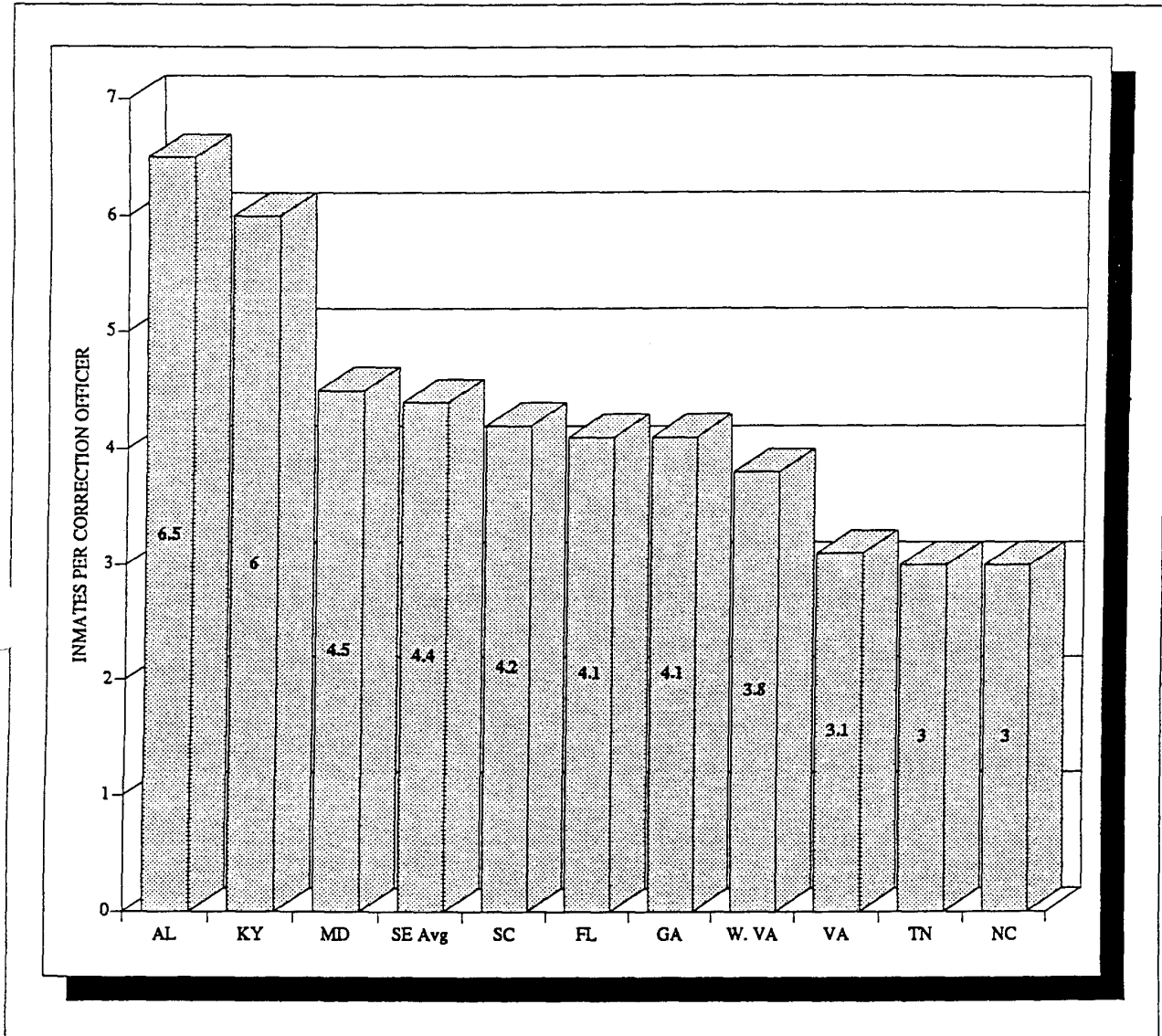


EXHIBIT 5

1991 TOTAL INMATES PER CORRECTION OFFICER OF
NORTH CAROLINA AND THE SOUTHEAST STATES



SOURCE: American Correctional Association, June 30, 1991

Inc. (MAS) from U.S. Census Bureau Data. The data base includes data for populations, staffing levels, and expenditures by function. The analysis provided a consistent-basis for making comparisons by function across states.

Finding 2: Other States manage an equivalent number of inmates with one-third less staff.

According to state-to-state comparative analysis of 1992 staffing levels, North Carolina correction system has significantly more correction staff-per-inmate than the national average for states. Data show that North Carolina ranks third nation-wide, after New York and Rhode Island, for correctional staff per inmate.

Exhibit 6 illustrates the difference between the actual number of staff that North Carolina requires for its inmate population and the national average requirement. The exhibit suggests North Carolina's prison population can be managed and operated with:

- 35 percent fewer Total Staff
- 35 percent fewer Correction Officers
- 37 percent fewer Uniformed Staff

Finding 3: The State has four to six times as many prisons as the national state average.

The 1992 American Correctional Association Directory lists 724 state prison institutions operating in the country or an average of 14.5 prisons per state. The Directory lists 91 institutions in North Carolina, which is six times the average number of facilities in other states. North Carolina has more prisons than any other state, with the next large number of state prisons being: Federal Bureaus of Prisons, New York (51), Florida (39) and Texas (30).

The Directory does not count facilities with security levels rated below "minimum" as prison institutions and therefore does not include Community Correction programs as prisons. Many states have Community Correction programs which are an intermediate sanction. Community Correction programs target offenders who, in the absence of other appropriate sanctions, would otherwise be in prison.

The Corrections Yearbook published by the Criminal Justice Institute, Inc. includes the Community and Reception facilities in its count of prisons. Under the Correction Yearbook count the total number of prison facilities in the nation is 1,214. This equates to an average of 24.5 facilities per state. Using the Correction Yearbook statistics, the State has four times the average number of state prisons.

EXHIBIT 6

NUMBER OF STAFF REQUIRED
(FOR AN INMATE POPULATION OF 19,115)

