

FY24 BUDGET

\$325K TO CONDUCT AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT REVIEW OF SUICIDE RISK AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES IN JAILS AND PRISONS

(EOHHS 4000-0300)

THE PROBLEM

The rate of suicides in Massachusetts state prisons, as reported by the federal government, is almost twice as high as the national rate. Between 2000 and 2019, there were 61 prisoner suicides in Massachusetts state prisons, for an average suicide rate of 32/100,000. The U.S. average rate in state prisons for this period was 18/100,000. (Federal reports of suicide data after 2019 have not yet been posted, but there has been at least one confirmed report of suicide in a Massachusetts state prison since 2019.)

The rate in Massachusetts jails for the same period is even higher. Between 2000 and 2019, there were 80 prisoner suicides in Massachusetts jails for an average rate of 36/100,000.

In Massachusetts carceral facilities, there are environmental hazards, particularly those that present the risk of hanging. These hazards should be documented for remediation. There has also been inconsistent use of the formal reviews that are required by regulation after deaths to evaluate possible mistakes and areas for reform. A state-wide prevention plan, including schedules for remediating hazards, revising policy, conducting training, and imposing oversight, must be developed.

WHAT THIS LINE ITEM ACHIEVES

- This funding would be used to conduct a review of each Department of Correction (DOC) carceral facility, each county house of correction, and each county jail to gather data regarding past suicides and suicide attempts and to evaluate and identify future risks for suicide by confined persons.
- The review would include an environmental scan of all locations within the facility accessible to prisoners and a review of policies relevant to suicide prevention and staff compliance with them, including policies of any providers contracted to provide medical, mental health, substance use or other services to prisoners within the facility.
- H1 does not include this new request.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Today, Massachusetts jails and prisons house many of our most vulnerable residents – a disproportionate number of whom are people with behavioral health conditions. We know that carceral confinement places individuals at high risk of suicide. When a person loses their freedom due to incarceration, they still have the human right to an environment that is protective of their health and safety. The Commonwealth must take all possible measures to protect these high-risk prisoners.

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