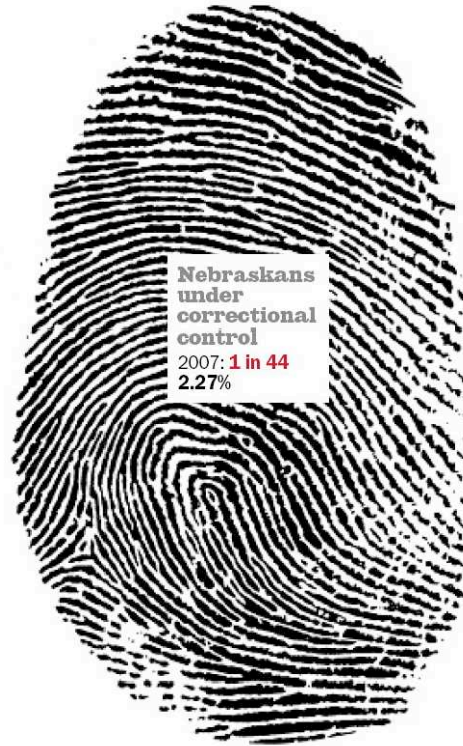


Cuts in programs for nonviolent offenders may end up costing Nebraska



SOURCE: PEW Center on the States

# Alternatives to prison can save tax money

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The State of Nebraska could save millions of taxpayer dollars in the long run if it invests more money in programs that keep nonviolent offenders from returning to prison, says a report released Monday on the U.S. prison population.

But the budget crunch has lawmakers in Nebraska and elsewhere considering short-term cuts instead.

The Nebraska Legislature's preliminary budget, for example, wouldn't fund full-time positions for a statewide domestic violence coordinator or a juvenile justice specialist.

Nebraska's top probation official is worried that the state might give back some recent gains it has made in rehabilitating nonviolent offenders such as drug users and returning them safely to society — existing programs that closely mirror recommendations found in the Pew Center report.

"In this kind of situation, it can sometimes become penny wise and pound foolish," said Ellen Fabian Brokofsky, Ne-

braska's chief probation officer.

The Pew Center on the States report says states can actually save money if they spend more on research-backed programs that better classify criminals by their danger to society and then treat them accordingly.

The savings come because community-based probation and parole programs cost a fraction of the amount of imprisonment. Nebraska spent \$155 million on prisons last year. That's roughly \$95 per prisoner per day.

Iowa spent \$270 million on its prisons in 2008. The total amount Iowa spent on correctional services — prison, parole, probation and juvenile services — was about \$353 million, or roughly 6 percent of that state's total budget.

One of every 54 Iowa adults is in prison, on parole or on probation, one of the lowest percentages in the country. Even so, that figure has skyrocketed since 1982, when only one in 132 Iowa adults was under the state's correc-

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