

# 10 Myths about crime in Vermont

## ***Crime in Vermont is on the increase.***

Crime has been on the decrease in Vermont for over a decade. Vermont has a very low crime rate compared to other states, particularly in violent crime. The most prevalent crimes in 2004 for Chittenden County were thefts and vandalism.

## ***Vermont's prisons are overcrowded because of an increase in crime.***

There are over one hundred prisoners who have reached their minimum sentencing date and are eligible for release but cannot leave because of lack of affordable, adequate housing. Keeping these individuals in prison costs Vermont taxpayers \$35,000-\$65,000 per bed per year.

## ***Transitional housing brings crime and conflict into our neighborhoods.***

Ex-offenders are generally returned to the communities they are from when released from prison. Instead of leaving this population without a source of support, transitional housing offers much more structure and accountability. The occupants of the Dismas house, a transitional house in Burlington, have been exceptional neighbors, with no complaints from neighbors in the past five years. Only two of the 117 residents of Dismas house have been arrested in the past five years. Keeping these individuals in jail costs more than twice as much of taxpayer's money as transitional housing.

## ***Ex-offenders could get jobs if they really wanted to.***

Even without criminal records, many people in this population would have a hard time finding a job. Only 32% have a high school diploma, 28% dropped out of school before the ninth grade, and only 27% have a marketable skill.

## ***Ex-offenders receive lots of free services from the State.***

Most ex-offenders are eligible for food stamps and health insurance because they are low income, but they are governed by the same rules as other citizens. They need to work in order to live in the community.

## ***Most sex offenders are dangerous predators who are strangers.***

Most sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim or the victim's family, regardless of whether the victim is a child or an adult. In Vermont, the victim and the assailant were known to each other in 99% of reported rapes, and in 25% of those they were family members or intimate partners.

## ***Drug addicts are criminals who will never change.***

Drug treatment reduces drug use by 40 to 60% and significantly decreases criminal activity during and after treatment. Methadone treatment has been shown to decrease criminal behavior by as much as 50%.

## ***The fastest growing segment of corrections population is violent men.***

The fastest growing segment of corrections population is women. In the past seven years the number of incarcerated women has increased 255%. The most common crime for women is DUI and for those in prison, Felony Retail Theft.

## ***Most people are sent back to jail for committing new crimes.***

The main reason that ex-offenders are sent back to jail is for violating a condition of their release, such as curfew. Most do not commit another offense. Statewide, there are 10,374 offenders living in the community of which 75% are on probation.

## ***Victims never receive restitution for damages caused by offenders.***

Vermont compensates 83% of victims of violent crime. Vermont has instituted a system of restitution where the State pays restitution to victims and then collects from offenders. A new Parallel Justice Program in Burlington will provide additional support to victims.