

The Star-Ledger

Dozens of N.J. juvenile offenders will also be released early because of law reducing sentences

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NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and The Star-Ledger

Published Oct. 29, 2020

New Jersey will release 50 juvenile offenders early in the days after Election Day, about a fifth of the current population, as a result of a first-in-the-nation law reducing sentences because of the threat of COVID-19.

Gov. Phil Murphy signed the bill (S2519) earlier this month, which will also release thousands of adult prisoners ahead of schedule.

Different state offices oversee incarcerated adults and juveniles, and the Juvenile Justice Commission is in charge of a much smaller group. There were only 243 young people incarcerated as of Friday, according to the agency.

“As with all youth released from the JJC’s care, individual community transition plans have been prepared for each youth and transportation home has been arranged,” spokeswoman Lisa Coryell told NJ Advance Media.

The first wave of releases should happen between Nov. 4 and 6, and another eight people will likely be released early in the following weeks through December, Coryell said.

The law knocks up to eight months off sentences. People convicted of murder, aggravated sexual assault and “repetitive, compulsive” sex offenders are not eligible.

While dozens of inmates and several staff died in adult prisons, the coronavirus was not nearly as devastating to the juvenile system.

A total of 37 residents have tested positive for COVID-19, primarily at the New Jersey Training School in Monroe Township, according to public data.

An additional 75 staff were also positive, including more than two dozen at the Johnstone Campus in Bordentown, although no young people were infected at that location.

No deaths were reported.

Officials continue to test since the first round finished in May. New Jersey was the first state to test its entire juvenile population, which has dropped dramatically in recent years.

Locking up fewer young people has saved the state tens of millions of dollars and created a system where not a single facility is overcrowded, according to the state’s newest Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative report.

“Even with these successes, New Jersey’s juvenile justice reform continues, with a specific focus on minimizing racial disparities,” state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said in a statement. Officials were also working to move more “low-level offenders into community-based programs where they can obtain needed services,” he said.

Nonetheless, some have called for an end to the current system.

The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and other groups argue the state would save even more money, and take better care of young people who commit crimes, by investing only in community-based services.