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### New report from USM’s Cutler Institute examines the scale and impact of parental incarceration in Maine

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Researchers from the University of Southern Maine’s Cutler Institute have completed a first-in-Maine count of children with a parent in the state prison system.

Between 2015 and 2020, 3,403 of Maine’s children (1.4% of young people under age 18) had an incarcerated parent at one of Maine’s prison facilities, according to the team of researchers.

The 10-page report, “**Breaking the Cycle: Interrupting Generational Incarceration in Maine,**” calls for more evidence-based community programming that supports families, prevents incarceration, and facilitates parent-child relationships when parents are incarcerated. The report is the latest report to be released by the Place Matters project, which is housed at the Cutler Institute. The institute is part of the Muskie School of Public Service, located at the University of Southern Maine. The report was authored by Jillian Foley, Erica King, and Casey Benner of Cutler’s Justice Policy Program.



*Cutler Institute Researchers and report co-authors Casey Benner, Jillian Foley, and Erica King and UMA student and justice scholar Jacinta Hunt.*

The number of children with an incarcerated parent found by the report represents a small fraction of the children impacted by the criminal justice system and parental incarceration in Maine, as it does not include data from Maine’s jails, juvenile facility, the number of parents on community supervision, or children whose parents may have been incarcerated and released prior to 2015.

“At any given time, there are about fifty mothers in prison in Maine,” Foley said. “The children of these mothers have greater risk of experiencing trauma, or of facing mental or behavioral health issues as they grow up. They also have an increased risk of facing incarceration themselves.”

Incarceration is a known adverse childhood experience (ACE) and linked to many negative outcomes such as homelessness, justice system involvement, and economic instability.

“There is a cycle of multigenerational incarceration that these data are pointing to,” King said. “We are just beginning to understand what that cycle looks like in Maine, and how many children are being impacted. With the right programs and practices, we can interrupt this cycle and support all children to thrive to adulthood.”

This research was inspired and informed by a number of women who are directly impacted by incarceration in Maine, including Jacinta Hunt, a University of Maine at Augusta student and justice scholar.

“To me, this work is important because these children deserve a successful future,” said Hunt. “Children are our future in Maine. The children who have parents incarcerated in Maine have been lost in the shadows beyond their control. If systems shine a light on this, we can raise awareness and support that is long overdue.”

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