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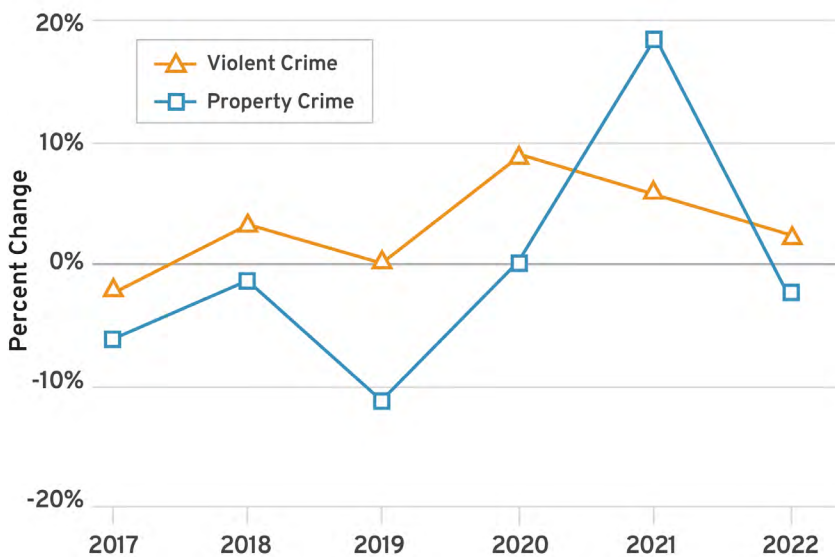
EXPLAINER

Virginia's Criminal Justice Crossroads: Opportunities for Pre-Arrest, Pretrial, and Post-Conviction Change in the Commonwealth

October 2025

Criminal Justice System Profile

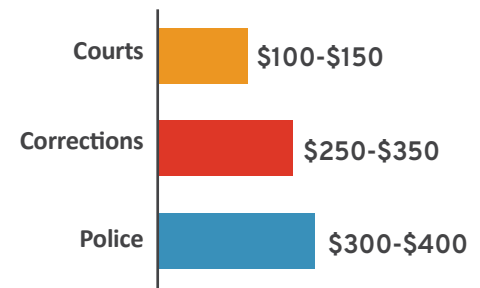
RECENT CRIME TRENDS



Violent crime trends (2014-2024)

Property crime trends (2013-2023)

CURRENT CRIMINAL JUSTICE SPENDING (PER CAPITA, FY 2021)



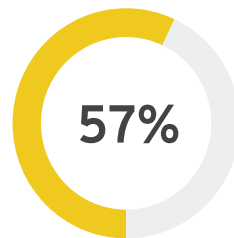
CURRENT RECIDIVISM RATE



CURRENT SUPERVISION POPULATION (2023)



VIOLENT CRIME CLEARANCE RATES (2024)



CURRENT INCARCERATED POPULATION/RATE



Strengths to Build On

- Virginia is one of the country's safer states, with violent and property crime rates significantly below the national average. The "Ceasefire Virginia" initiative, launched in coordination with the attorney general and local agencies, contributed to a 30 percent drop in murders and an 11 percent reduction in violent crime statewide.
- Virginia has been a leader in pretrial justice for over two decades through its early adoption of pretrial risk assessments to bipartisan measures that eliminate some of the most harmful failure to appear responses and a robust, statewide pretrial services system.
- Virginia will soon enact its clean slate law, signed into law in 2021, allowing for automated sealing of certain criminal records for qualifying individuals.

Persistent Challenges

- Police departments are understaffed across the state, the costs of which add up in training and overtime pay, increased operational stress, and diminishing resources. Vacancy rates for departments in major areas around the commonwealth like [Arlington](#), [Richmond](#), [Roanoke](#), and [Norfolk](#) are all between 20 and 30 percent.
- While codified, victims' rights remain unenforceable, leaving them with a limited voice during the criminal proceedings of defendants alleged to have caused them harm. In fact, many localities report an inability to uphold the victims' rights statute for all victims.
- While the commonwealth has a court notification system for defendants, it is an opt-in system that is far less effective than opt-out systems in other jurisdictions. Individuals who opt in to receive notifications are usually already more likely to appear in court, and studies report enrollment rates for opt-in programs [as low as 2 percent](#). Virginia's system does not currently include an easy way for victims to sign up to receive similar notifications.
- Incentives for early release from incarceration upon demonstration of rehabilitation remain limited, in terms of both resentencing opportunities and low parole grant rates. While [medical](#) and [geriatric](#) release are available, as well as parole opportunities for individuals with lengthy sentences for crimes committed as [minors](#), Virginia approves only about 3 percent of applications annually—one of the nation's lowest [parole grant rates](#).

Practical Solutions

- **Law Enforcement Resources.** Virginia should continue its commitment to increasing recruitment and retention rates for departments by modernizing recruitment practices, committing to a culture that fosters professional growth and retention, expanding recruitment pools, and improving workplace conditions. Furthermore, to reduce officer time spent on responses to individuals better served by community behavioral health services, Virginia should commit to facilitating the ongoing implementation of the [Marcus Alert program](#), which creates specialized response models to address mental health crises and maintain dedicated funding for them.
- **Court Reminders.** Virginia should implement a statewide, [automated court reminder system](#) to address the fiscal and human costs of missed court appearances. While most Virginia courts already have reminder capabilities, the current opt-in model limits their effectiveness. Automated opt-out systems significantly outperform this approach, with many states increasing court appearance rates by [20 to 40 percent](#). On average, each missed court date costs [nearly \\$1,500](#) in wasted docket time and avoidable warrants. By contrast, automated reminders cost just [\\$0.60 to \\$1](#) per case and have average startup costs well below 1 percent of a state's annual judicial budget. Court reminders can serve victims' needs as well by actively engaging them in the process (if they so choose) and making their rights clear to them at each step.
- **Parole and Resentencing.** Virginia should commit to a greater utilization of its parole by working to bring its parole grant rates up safely and considering the reinstatement of [discretionary parole](#), abolished for felonies in 1995. Additionally, the commonwealth should expand opportunities for resentencing by passing [second look legislation](#) that would allow courts to revisit and potentially modify sentences of eligible individuals after they have served a significant portion of their term, somewhat similar to how the commonwealth already treats minors. These laws incentivize rehabilitation and good behavior during incarceration by offering people hope of sentence reconsideration based on their progress and making communities safer when individuals return to society.



For More Information

Check out our [Criminal Justice Crossroads](#) series on Virginia:

- [Virginia's Criminal Justice Crossroads: Pre-Arrest Issues in the Commonwealth](#)
- [Virginia's Criminal Justice Crossroads: Pretrial Issues in the Commonwealth](#)
- [Virginia's Criminal Justice Crossroads: Post-Conviction Issues in the Commonwealth](#)

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