

# Long Sentences and Oklahoma's Parole Process

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# Overview

- Sentencing in Oklahoma
- Costs of long sentences
- Parole as effective cost reduction
- Underutilization of parole in Oklahoma
- Recommendations



The background is a solid dark red color overlaid with a collage of faint, semi-transparent business-related graphics. These include a donut chart in the top left, a line graph with multiple data series in the top center, a 3D pie chart in the middle right, and several bar charts of varying heights and orientations in the bottom left and bottom right. A small table is also visible in the top right corner.

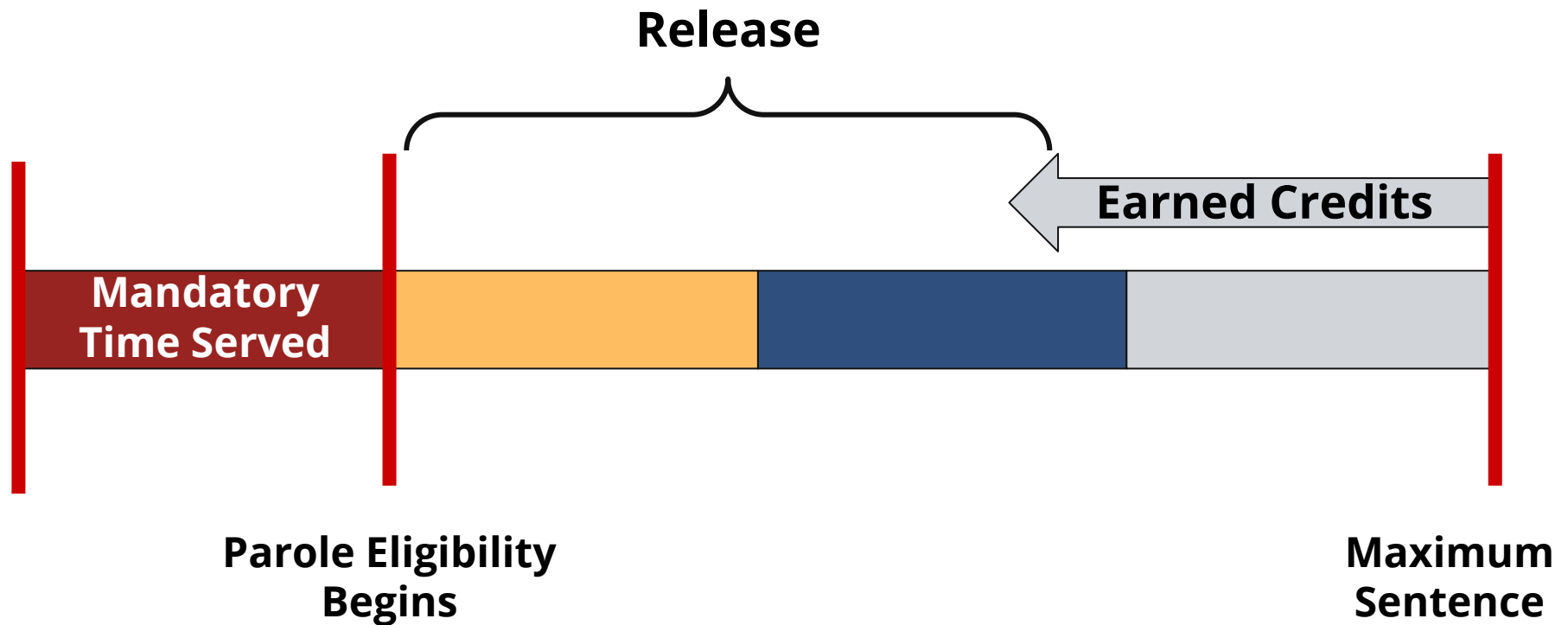
Month/Year	2013	2014	2015
Jan	100	120	150
Feb	120	140	160
Mar	150	180	200

■ Sales by product groups

# Oklahoma has very long sentences



# Oklahoma's sentencing is indeterminate

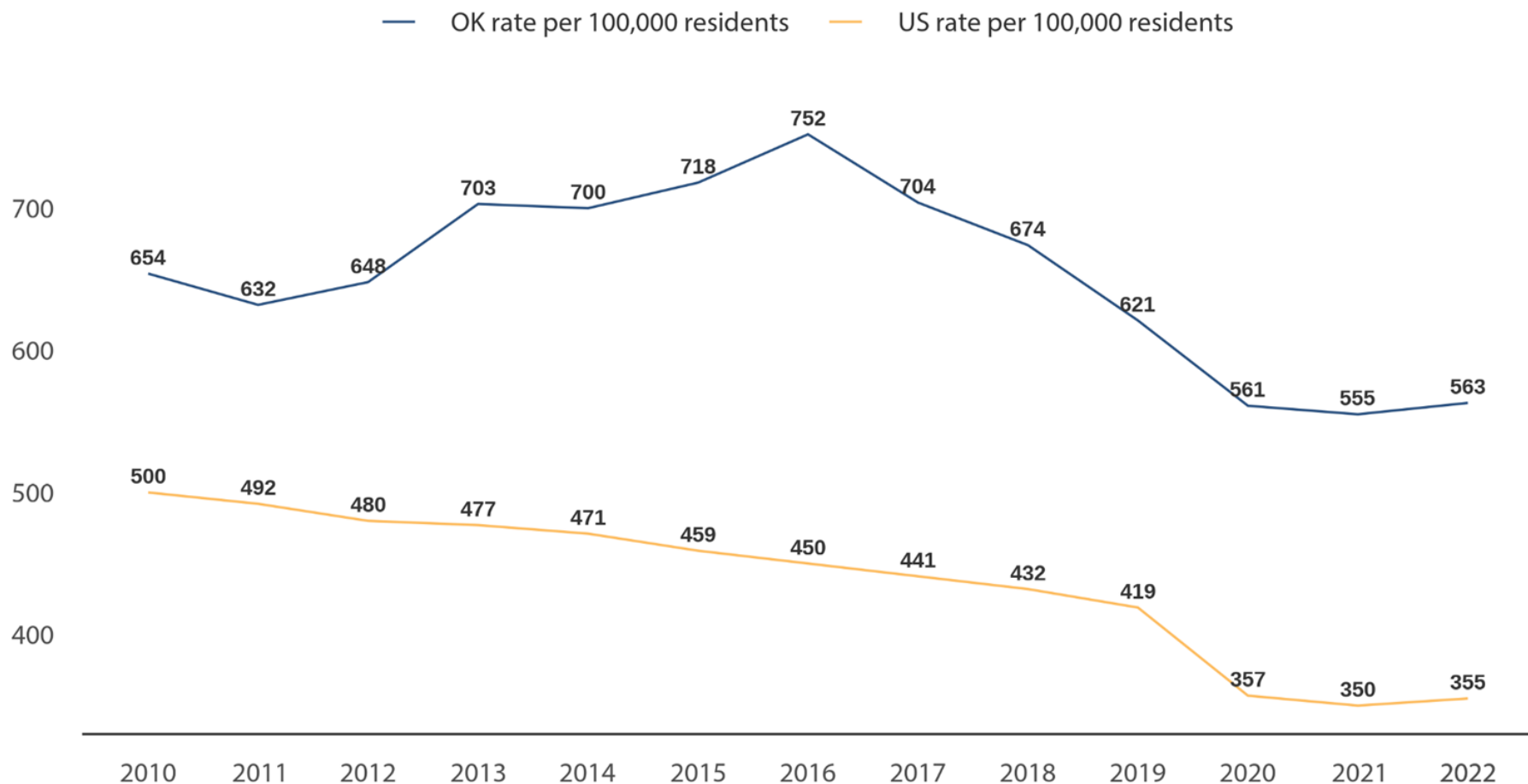


# Limiting indeterminate sentencing increases incarceration

- Enhancements and mandatory minimums decrease indeterminacy
  - Three Strike Law (21 O.S. § 51.1)
  - 85% Crimes (21 O.S. § 13.1)
- Underutilized parole system limits “front-end” release mechanism



## Despite declines Oklahoma's prison population was nearly 60% higher than the national rate per 100,000 residents in 2022



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Prisoner Series.

Chart by: Polina Rozhkova



**One in ten  
incarcerated women**

**One in six  
incarcerated men**

**One in three are  
Black**

**One in three are aged  
55+**

**As of July 2021,  
3,774 people in  
Oklahoma  
prisons were  
facing a life or  
virtual-life  
sentence**



**Long sentences cost  
billions, but have  
limited public safety  
benefit**





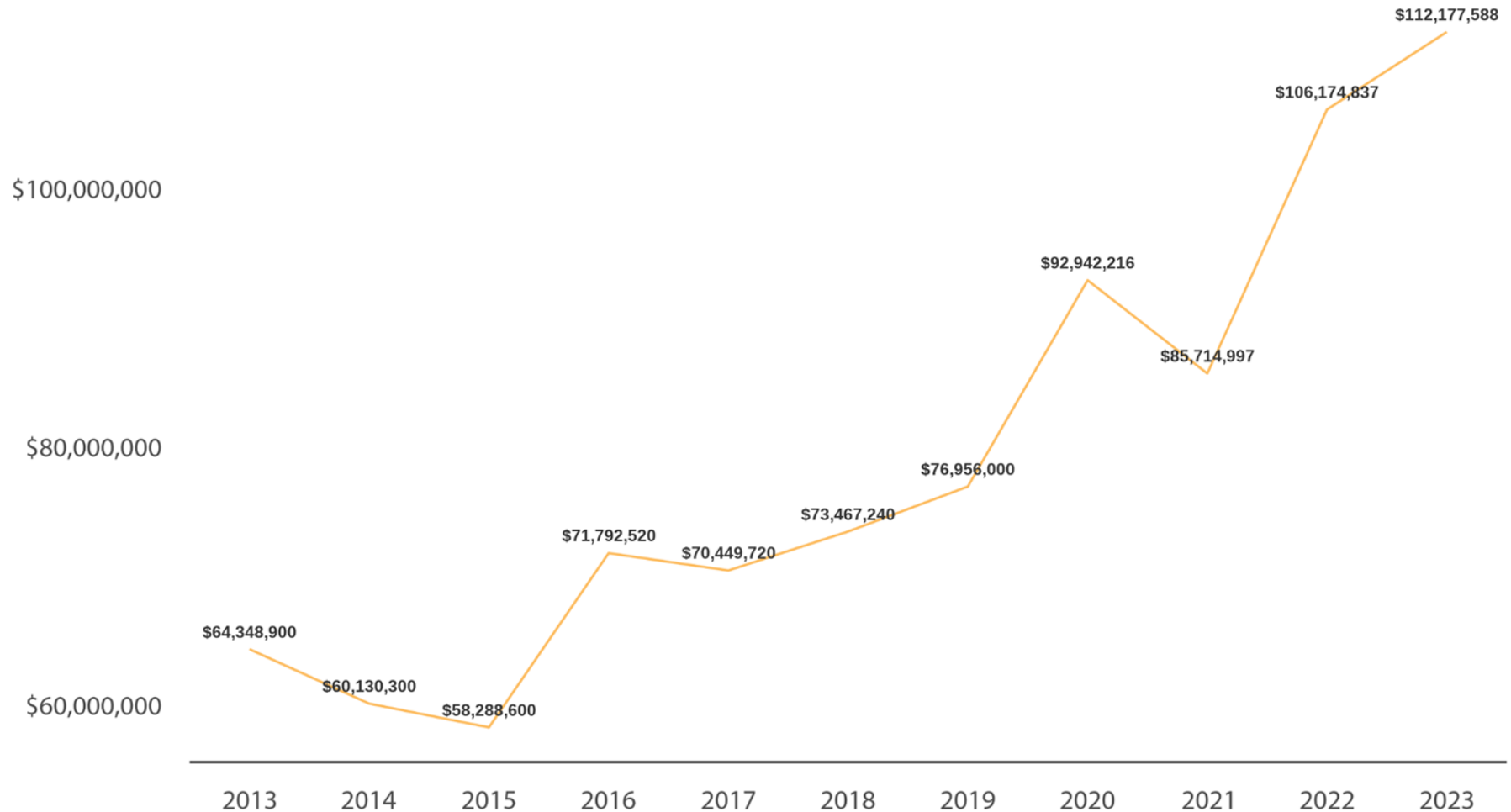
# Long sentences cost taxpayers billions of dollars

- It will cost Oklahoma, on average, \$455,000 to incarcerate one person for 20 years
- In July 2021, 8,027 people were serving a sentence of 20 years or longer
  - A conservative estimate places this cost at \$3.7 billion dollars over 20 years



# Budget set aside for DOC health services in 2023 was almost 75% higher than 2013

*Dollars not adjusted for inflation*



Source: Analysis of Oklahoma Executive Budget Reports.

Chart by: Polina Rozhkova



# Lengthy sentences endanger prisons with no public safety benefit

- Crowded prisons are dangerous for both inmates and staff
- Long sentences do not improve public safety outcomes
- Aging adults have incredibly low recidivism rates



# Long sentences hurt Oklahoma's families and communities

- 26,000 children in Oklahoma have a parent who has been incarcerated
- Keeping family members in prison for decades puts massive financial burden on non-incarcerated members
- Long sentences deplete Oklahoma's workforce and take money out of local economies



# Parole can save taxpayer money, but only if used effectively



# Informed and equitable parole decisions promote successful reentry

- Board investigates eligible cases to determine if early release from prison would best serve the public interest
- Board can grant parole for nonviolent offenses, but can only make recommendations to the governor for violent offenses



# The Legislature determines parole eligibility

- As of 2018, individuals become eligible for parole after serving 25% of their sentence
- Administrative parole speeds up process, but has more restrictions on eligibility
- Medically frail and aging prisoners (60+) may also be eligible for dedicated parole processes



# Parole lowers incarceration costs and enables positive reentry

- Parole frees up bed space in prisons and saves state funds that would otherwise be spent on incarceration
- Once on parole, individuals can obtain a steady job and contribute to Oklahoma's tax base
- Parolees can also reunite with their families and become active members of their communities



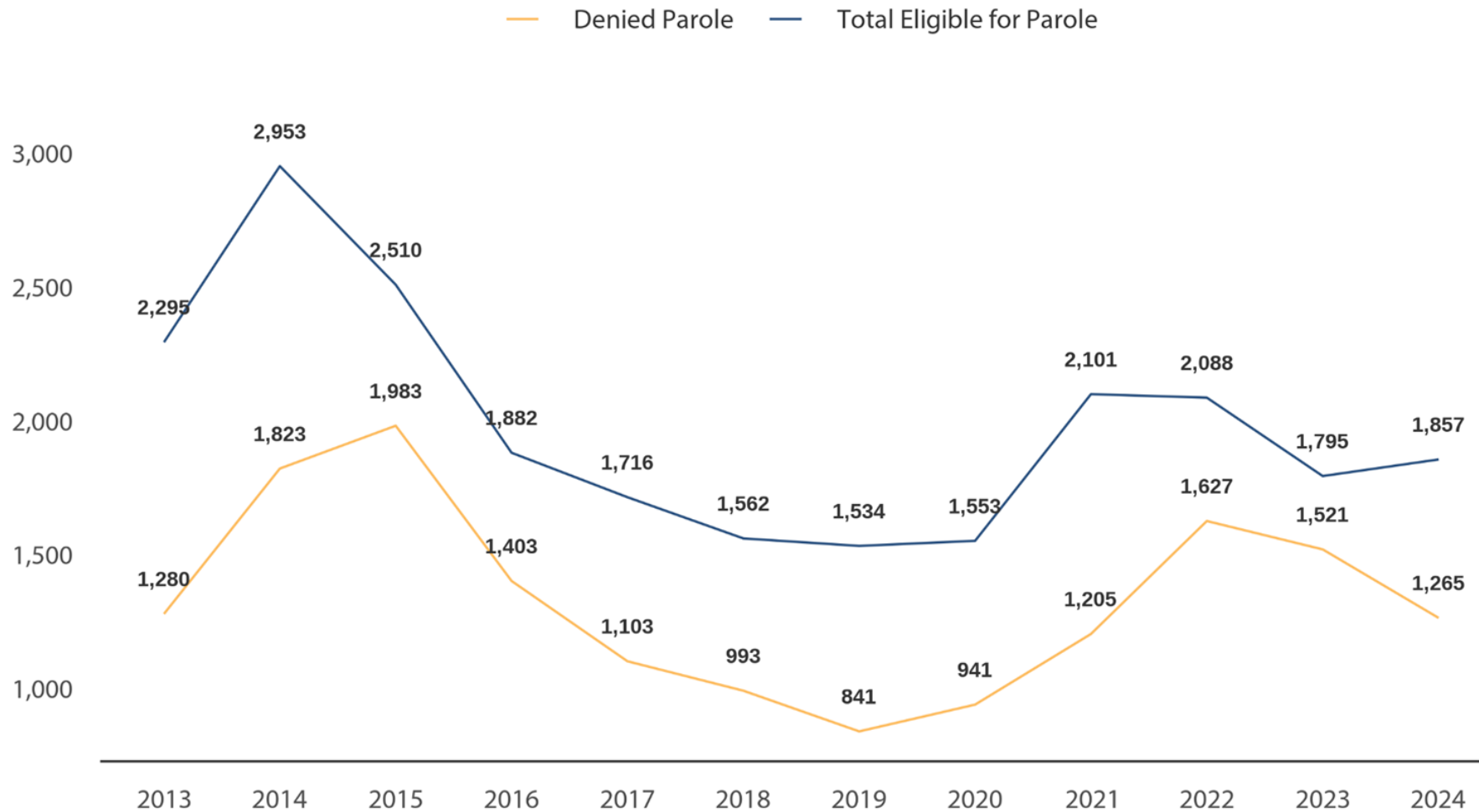


# Parole in Oklahoma remains underutilized



# The majority of people considered are denied parole

*Numbers for 2024 are incomplete*



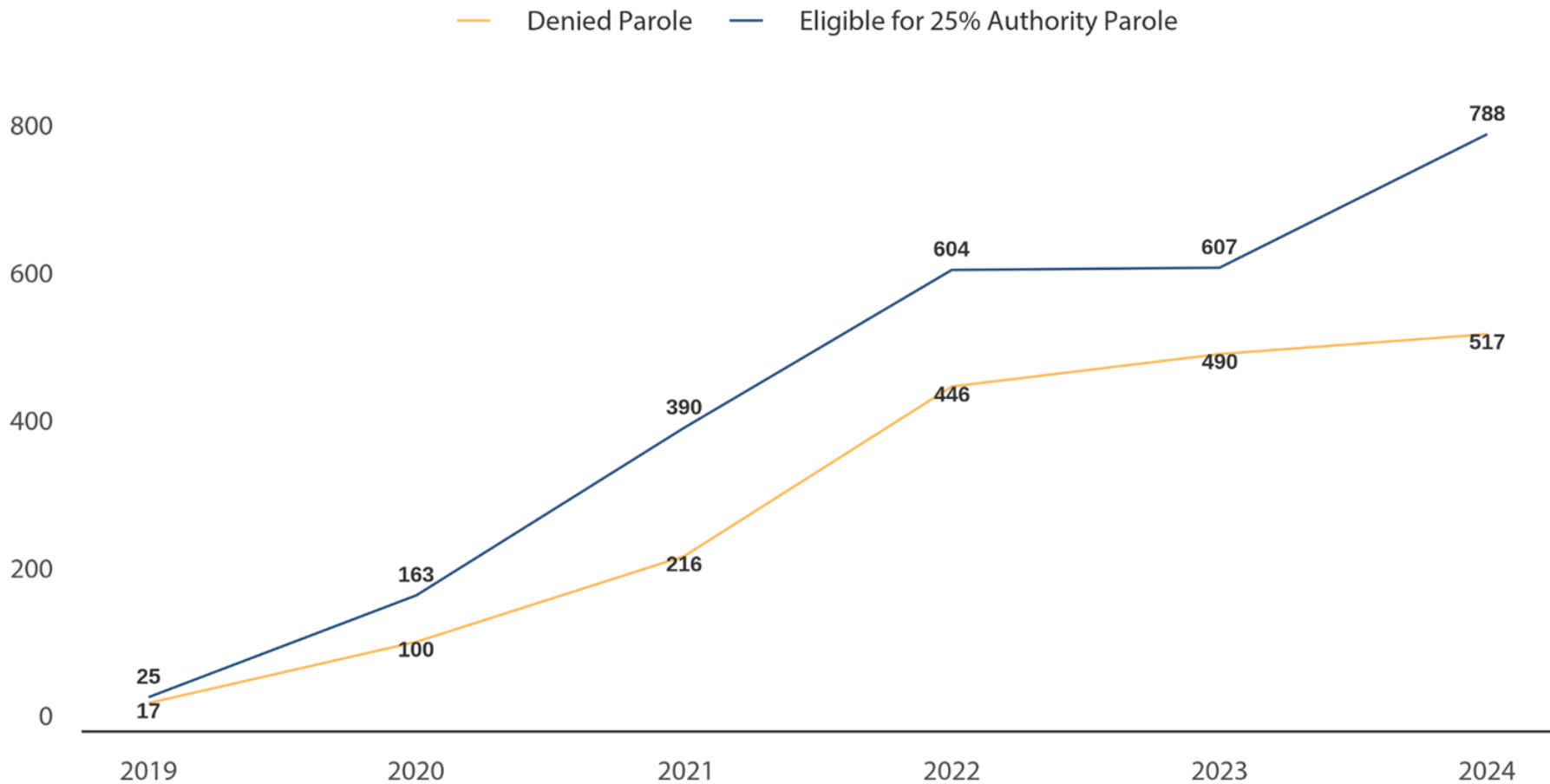
Source: Analysis of Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board Docket Search.

Chart by: Polina Rozhkova



## Denials remain high despite expansion in parole eligibility

*Numbers for 2024 are incomplete*

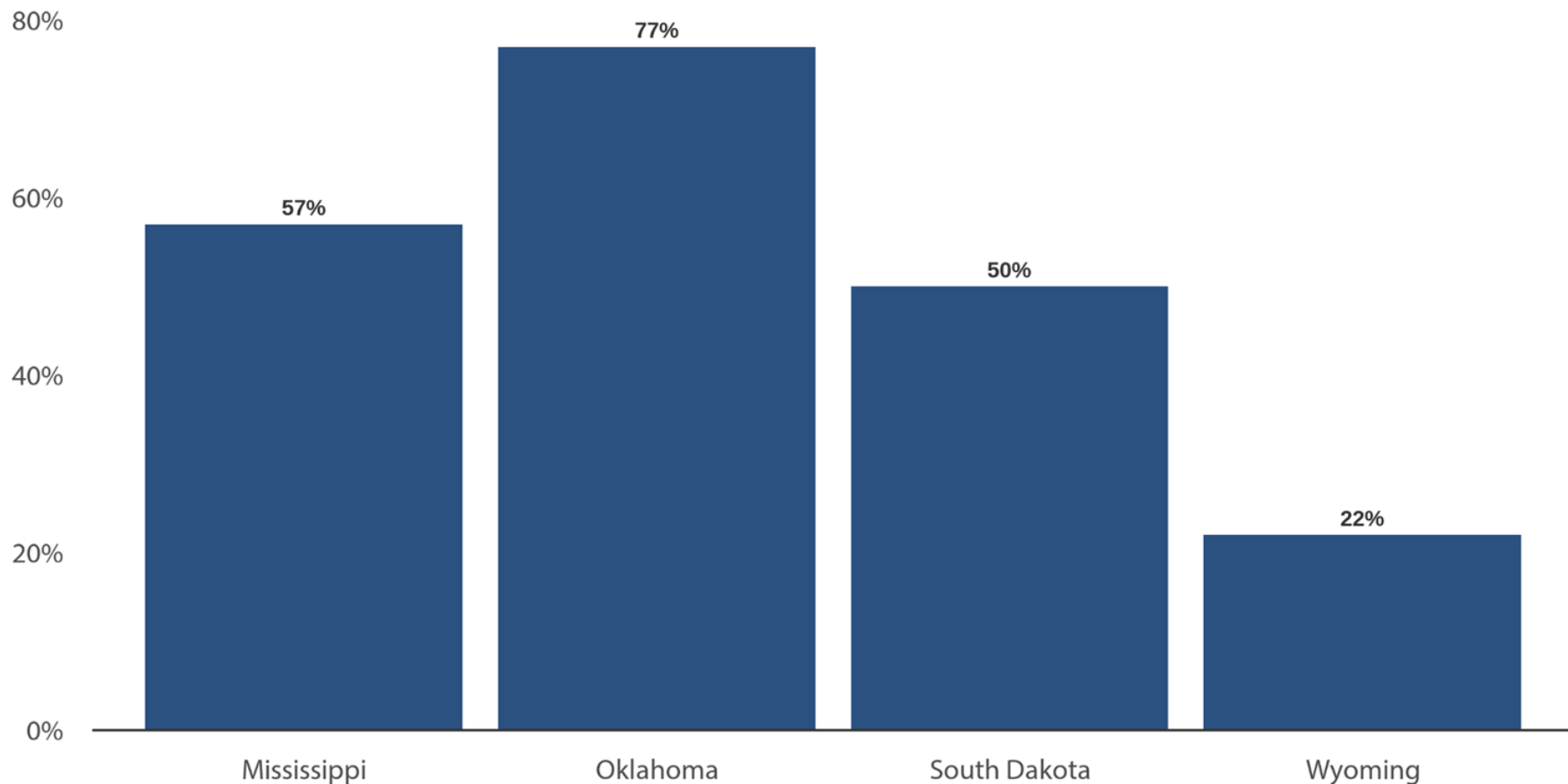


*Source: Analysis of Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board Docket Search.*

*Chart by: Polina Rozhkova*



## Parole denied at higher rates in Oklahoma than states with similar or higher incarceration rates



Source: Data gathered by the Prison Policy Initiative from publicly available information and open records requests.

Chart by: Polina Rozhkova



# Low approval rates keep people in prison longer and increase costs

- Low approval rate for parole limits the benefits of indeterminate sentencing
- Eligible individuals are remaining in prison until earned time credits release them
- Expanding eligibility for parole alone, is not sufficient



# We must investigate the roots of Oklahoma's high denial rate

- Places to begin looking:
  - Investigative and decision-making process of Pardon and Parole Board
  - DOC internal guidelines on plan compliance and infractions
  - Extent of Legislative regulatory power on parole decisions



# Questions?

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