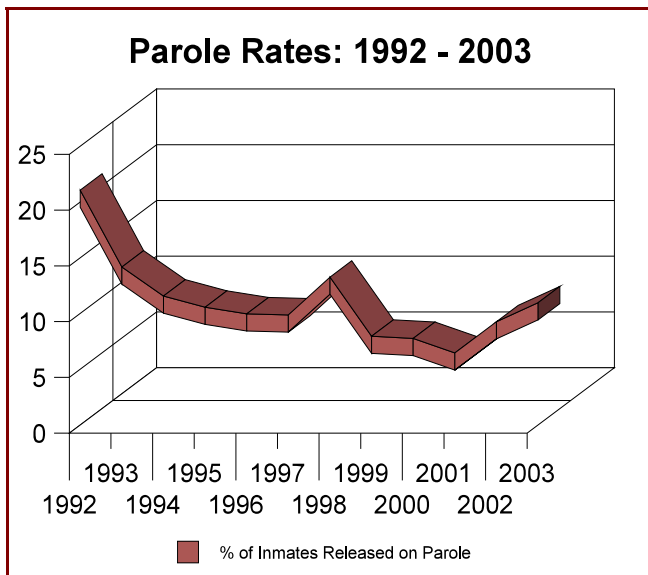


PARDONS AND PAROLES IN ALABAMA

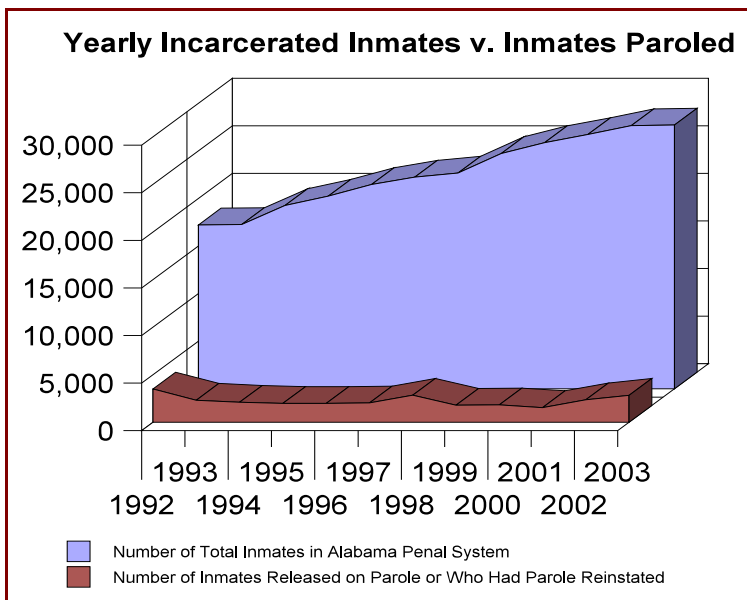


prison capacity by almost 5,000 inmates, but the yearly percent of inmates paroled at that time was 20.3%. By 2003, the number of state inmates had significantly risen to 27,727, yet the percent of inmates paroled had dropped to 10.2%.

Around the same time that parole issuances began to decrease, the State began voicing opposition to the Board's parole grants, effectively forcing Board members to rescind their parole determinations. For example, in July 2000 and August 2004, the Board granted parole to Kenneth and Michael Thornton and Melanie Lowery, respectively. However,

About 22% of parolees released each year will return to prison within three years.

The Board of Pardons and Paroles has had authority since 1939. As incarceration rates have increased, parole has become a critical mechanism for controlling Alabama's bulging prison population. In the early 1990s, a significant portion of Alabama's prisoners were paroled; however, over the next decade, as the prison population dramatically increased, the percentage of inmates paroled decreased. In 1992, the State was already housing 17,222 prisoners, exceeding its



in these cases, shortly after the grants were issued, the governor and attorney general demanded that the Board reconsider its determinations and ultimately all three parole grants were rescinded. Recognizing the desperate state of Alabama's

prisons, in 2003 Governor Bob Riley created a special parole board to expedite

Special Parole Boards are being eliminated despite no meaningful change in the prison population.

the parole process for nonviolent offenders. Though this effort resulted in parole releases for 2219 offenders, due to the large

number of prison admissions, it only decreased the total prison population by 350 inmates. Moreover, what little relief these special dockets have provided has come under attack and may end because legislators are currently trying to abolish the special parole board.

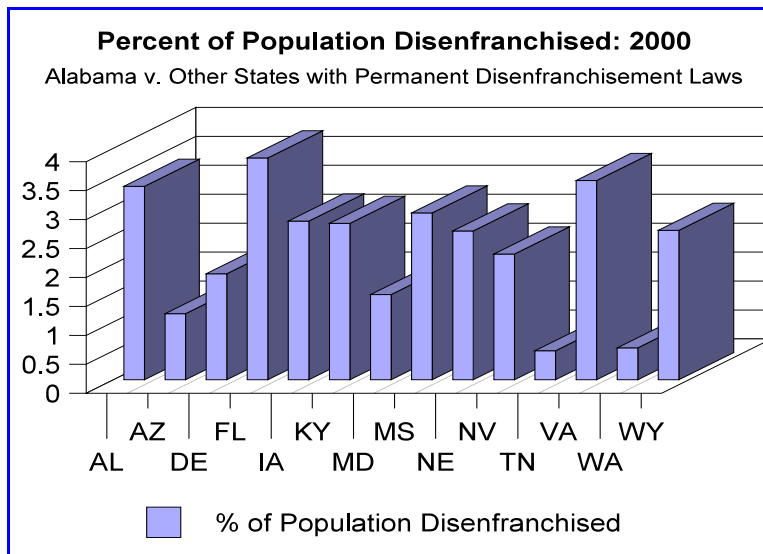
Stringent victim notification laws, which apply to a broad array of offenses, have created a backlog of over 2500 parole cases. Though many of these prisoners may eventually be paroled, as a result of victim notification laws, the Board is over a year behind schedule.

Over 145,000 ex-felons remain ineligible to vote in Alabama.

The State of Alabama has begun to move towards a truth-in-sentencing system which would

eliminate parole as a release valve and escalate the overcrowding crisis. Under a truth-in-sentencing system, average sentences are expected to increase by fifteen months, causing the prison population to increase significantly due to longer periods of confinement.

Truth-in-sentencing reforms would increase the average prison sentence by 15 months.



Stringent parole conditions and lack of support for those who re-enter the community have resulted in a high degree of recidivism among parolees. Indeed, an estimated 22%

of parolees released in 1999 returned to prison within 3 years.

Most states automatically restore ex-felons' voting rights. In Alabama, ex-felons face a complex and time-consuming process to get back their right to vote. Approximately 148,830 ex-felons are disenfranchised in Alabama; 2428 have had their voting rights restored since 2003. Alabama has one of the highest rates of disenfranchisement in the United States.