



# RESEARCH AT A GLANCE

## Lengthy criminal histories shown among incarcerated low-level felony offenders

Class 4 felony prison admissions, particularly those involving drug offenses, account for a substantial proportion of the increase in Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) admissions over the past 10 years.

Since state fiscal year 1995, an overall increase was seen both in the number of total court commitments and in Class 4 felony commitments. The number of Class 4 felons committed to IDOC rose 185 percent between FY95 and FY04. Drug offense convictions, particularly possession of a controlled substance, resulted in the most incarcerations.

In FY04, Class 4 felons' most common prior arrests were for property offenses (averaging six previous arrests), and drug offenses (averaging five previous arrests). Class 4 felons averaged three prior periods of incarceration.

This data is consistent with previous research indicating that Class 4 offenders have lengthy criminal backgrounds and relatively short stays in prison. Examination of these trends is useful to justice practitioners and policymakers as they determine whether incarceration is appropriate for this population of offenders.

Figure 1

Total court commitments by offense class, FY95 to FY04

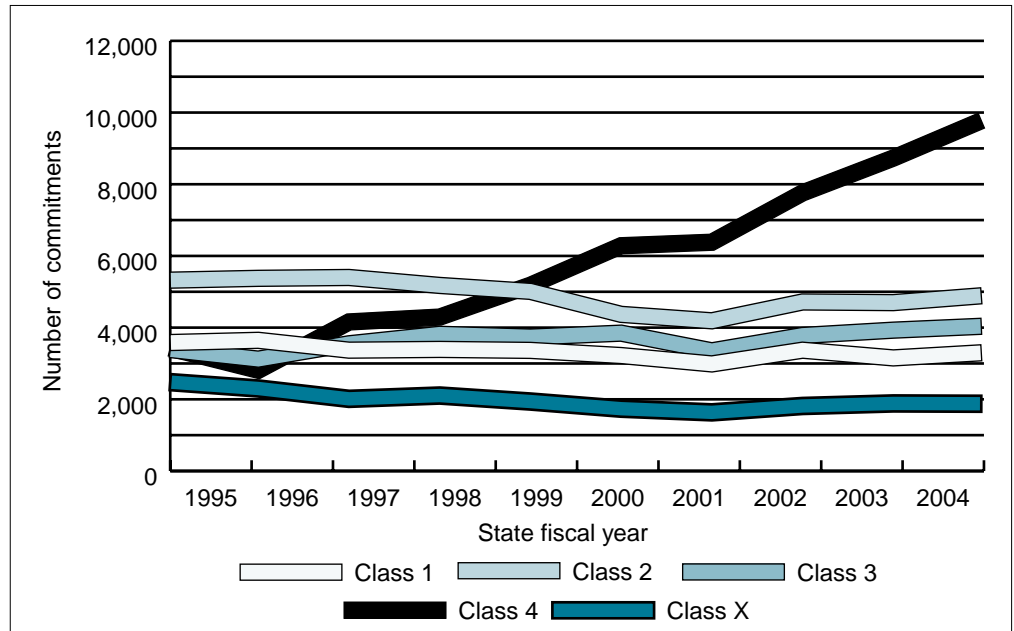
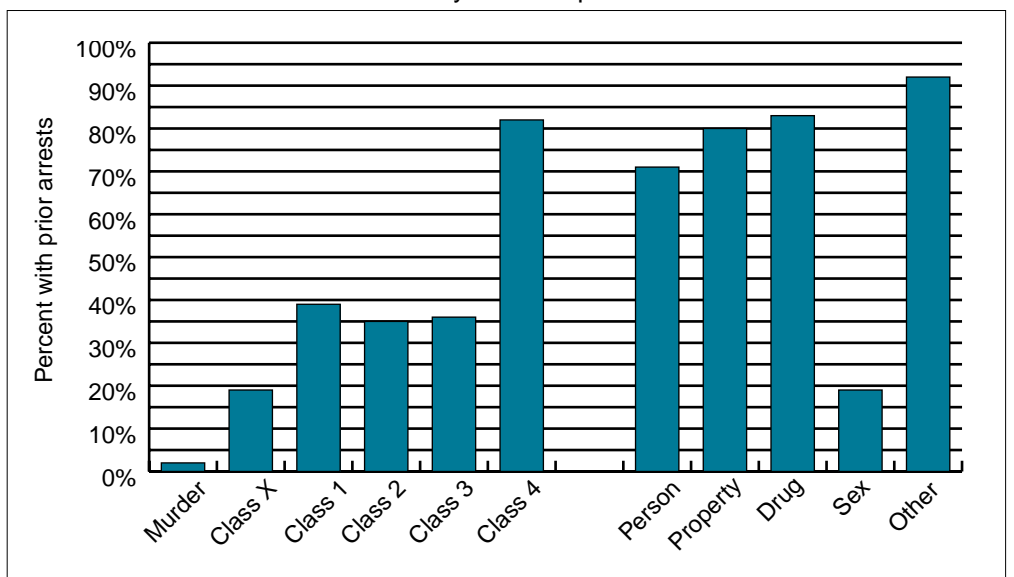


Figure 2

Class 4 felony offender prior arrests



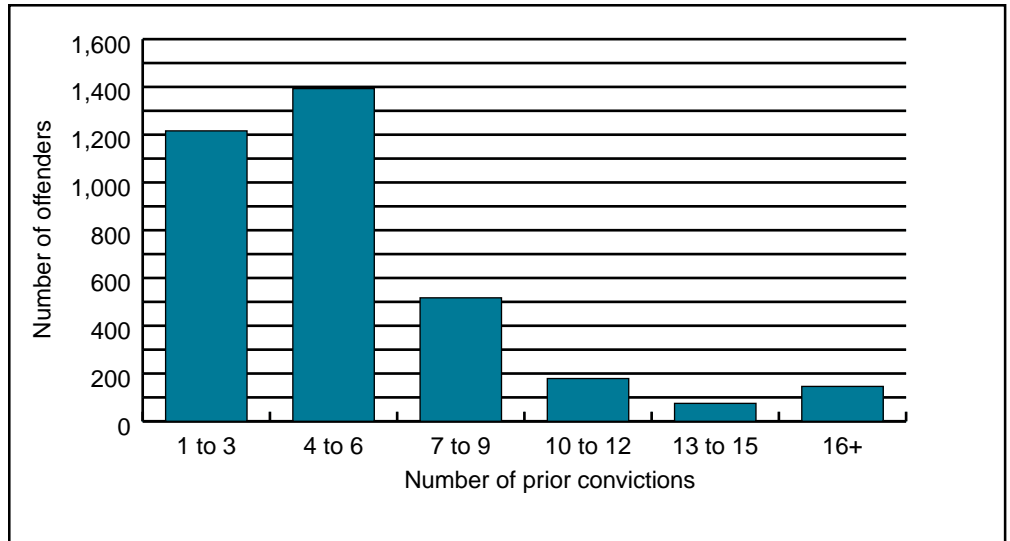
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- Class 4 offenders typically have lengthy criminal backgrounds and relatively short prison stays.
- Conviction of a Class 4 felony, the least serious felony offense, can result in a sentence to probation for up to 30 months or a one to three year prison sentence.

Figure 3

Conviction history of Class 4 felons committed to IDOC, FY04



- Class 4 felons committed to IDOC in state fiscal year 2004 averaged 15 prior arrests and a 13-year arrest history.
- In FY95 Class 4 felons accounted for just 18 percent of all court commitments, and by FY04 this figure had escalated to 40 percent.

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