**Key issues facing American prisons today**

**Introduction**

The United States has the largest prison population in the world, with 2.3 million people behind bars as of 2015. While that number has declined in recent years thanks to a focus on reducing prison sentences for non-violent offenders and an increase in alternatives to incarceration, American prisons still face many challenges.

**Caging**

Caging, or placing inmates in cages for disciplinary reasons, is a controversial practice common in some U.S. prisons but not all. It can range from being used as punishment for infractions such as fighting with other inmates or assaulting staff members to being used to isolate mentally ill patients from the general prison population. The latter use of caging has been banned by some states' legislatures, including California and New York; however, it remains legal in most others—including Alabama, where the practice drew widespread attention after one inmate died while locked up inside his cell during a summer heat wave that saw temperatures climb above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius).

**Funding gap**

Corrections money is rarely increased, regardless of the state of the economy. Corrections, on the other hand, are frequently seen as a key source of money savings when budget cuts are necessary. Understandably, it is difficult to argue in our culture that appropriate finance for jail operations is as vital as education for our children or assistance for the poor.

Prisons are expensive to build and maintain once they are functioning. This is especially true for prisons that contain the most dangerous inmates. As a result, rather than creating new facilities, we see patchwork patches done to keep aging facilities running. Furthermore, equipment is frequently out of date, putting employee safety at risk. These serious challenges must be addressed as soon as possible(Wallace, 2018).

**Food quality**

Food quality is a major issue in many prisons, and it's not hard to see why. Prison food has long been criticized for its lack of variety, low nutritional value, and poor taste. In some cases, prisoners may not be given a choice between meals—they may only eat what their captors give them whether they like it or not. The general rule of thumb seems to be that prison food tends to be unhealthy and unappetizing; some inmates have even described it as "slop." While this may change depending on where you're imprisoned (and how much money your family can afford), most inmates are left with few options when it comes to eating right.

**Educational opportunity**

One of the biggest issues facing American prisons today is the lack of educational opportunities. Inmates are not provided any access to education while they are incarcerated, and many never acquire a basic high school diploma or GED before being released back onto the streets. This makes it difficult for them to find jobs after their release, which can lead to recidivism.

In addition to providing a real skill that will help inmates earn money and improve their own lives once they have been released from prison, education also helps offenders avoid committing more crimes in the future because they now have an education they did not have before.

**Contraband**

While contraband is a problem in prisons, it can be dangerous to inmates and staff. Some of the most common items smuggled into prison are drugs, cell phones and weapons.

Inmates may attempt to smuggle drugs into their cells in order to sell them or use them themselves. Drugs are often smuggled in through visitors who come with the intention of selling them on behalf of an inmate they know; this is called "kiting," and it's a big problem in many American facilities today. Tougher security measures such as metal detectors at entrances can help prevent this type of smuggling but don't eliminate it entirely. If you've been convicted of drug possession or trafficking charges before, you'll likely face harsh penalties if caught attempting to smuggle narcotics into your correctional facility again—and if you're caught with more than 25 grams (less than 1 ounce), federal law mandates that you serve at least 10 years behind bars without parole!

**Incarceration of children**

You might be surprised to discover that children are being incarcerated at an increasing rate in the United States. In fact, there are more than 80,000 youth behind bars today—a number that has doubled since 1995. Some of these children have been sentenced for minor crimes and others have been tried as adults.

**Conclusion**

I hope that this article has given you some insights into the current state of prisons and how we can improve them. As I mentioned earlier, there are many issues facing American prisons and these are just a few of them. There are many more issues that need to be addressed, but hopefully my list above gave you some ideas as well!

**References**

Ron Wallace. (2018, December 11). *5 of the biggest challenges facing corrections in 2019*. Corrections1. Retrieved November 18, 2022, from <https://www.corrections1.com/2018-review/articles/5-of-the-biggest-challenges-facing-corrections-in-2019-b9Afg8ZhS84p06uT/>