

## Made out like bandits: NY prisoners got \$34M in federal COVID stimulus funds



*Some inmates received two stimulus checks. RICHARD HARBUS*

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Thousands of [New York's prisoners](#) made out like bandits during the [coronavirus pandemic](#) – collecting \$34.3 million in federal emergency stimulus funds, state records show.

A total of 26,232 stimulus checks were received by inmates in New York state prisons through September, according to the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

Some of the inmates received more than one check since stimulus payments were given over two years spanning the Trump and Biden terms.

“It’s strange. It’s double dipping. You can make money while in prison,” said Councilman Robert Holden (D-Queens).

“The taxpayers are paying for the housing and food of inmates. The money should go back to the taxpayers who are paying for their incarceration,” he added.

There are about 1.4 million inmates in the U.S. Last year, the federal government delivered \$783.5 million in stimulus checks to inmates under President Biden’s American Rescue Plan, Fox News reported. But the overall total likely exceeds \$1 billion because inmates also were entitled to stimulus funds under the 2020 pandemic relief package approved by Congress and former President Trump.

Individuals who are US citizens or permanent residents were eligible for stimulus checks of \$1,200 if they had income of \$75,000 or less under the initial Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Taxpayers filing jointly were eligible for \$2,400.

Nothing in the law specifically prohibited convicted prisoners from obtaining the stimulus checks.





*The IRS originally said that inmates did not qualify for the stimulus, but a class action on behalf of prisoners was filed and a federal judge in Northern California ruled that the federal government could not deny stimulus funds to citizens. Christopher Sadowski*

But the Internal Revenue Service in May 2020 concluded that incarcerated individuals did not qualify for stimulus checks. They refused to issue payments to inmates and ordered federal and state prison officials to intercept checks already mailed to inmates.

A class action on behalf of prisoners was filed and a federal judge in Northern California ruled that the federal government could not deny stimulus funds to citizens just because they were incarcerated..

Judge Phyllis Hamilton called the action “arbitrary and capricious” and ordered IRS officials to advance payments to inmates and make it easier for them to apply for the stimulus checks they’re legally entitled to.

State corrections officials said if an inmate had not received a stimulus payment, they were provided an IRS form and direction on how to apply for a rebate.

There are roughly 1.5 million incarcerated people in the U.S and most of them were eligible for stimulus payments based on their income, according to lawyers in the class action suit.