

Goal: Public Safety

Subject Area: Incarceration, Rehabilitation and Reentry of Offenders

Objective: Decrease the number of offenders who stop reporting to their parole agent.

Why this objective is important:

Individuals on parole are completing their sentence in the community. If they stop reporting for supervision, they are not completing the sentence imposed by the court and must be held accountable. Parolees who flee parole supervision are known as absconders. Typically these are parolees who leave community corrections centers or are drug users who avoid supervision because they are using drugs again. However, some are violent and can be a danger to public safety. The Board of Probation and Parole issues a warrant for their arrest and pursues them. Once a warrant is issued, it remains in effect until that person is found.

How are we doing:

The state's 3.3 percent absconder rate for 2009-10 is significantly less than the national rate of 7 percent. The board continues to seek additional ways to prevent parolees from fleeing supervision and continues to partner with local police to expeditiously track down absconders. Fugitive Apprehension Search Teams in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Erie and Harrisburg focus solely on hunting down and arresting absconders.

Strategies
Continue to address risks and needs of offenders, such as pursuing drug treatment, violence prevention programming, and criminal thinking errors.
Continue to improve relationships with local police to effectively and expeditiously track down absconders.

Measures:

Measure	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
Average monthly number of the total offenders in absconder status.	1,406	1,263	1,034
Average monthly percentage of supervised offenders in absconder status	4.6%	4%	3.3%

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Subject Area: Incarceration, Rehabilitation and Reentry of Offenders

Objective: Decrease the number of technical parole violators (parolees who break their conditions of parole) recommitted to prison.

Why this objective is important:

Offenders able to be effectively managed in the community through a graduated sanctioning process and those who receive treatment and programming are more likely to complete parole successfully and not commit further crimes. The goal is to keep parolees under community supervision when possible to do so safely.

How are we doing:

For several years, the percentage of technical parole violators steadily declined and the percentage of convicted parole violators remained stable. In 2009-10, the percentage of technical parole violators decreased and convicted parole violators increased slightly. The Board of Probation and Parole's 2010-11 projections are 187 or fewer technical parole violators and 170 or fewer convicted parole violators recommitted per month.

This year, the board implemented a new Violation Sanctioning Grid to guide parole agents in determining the most appropriate type of sanction to impose. Not all parole violations result in a return to prison. However, an offender's addiction to illegal drugs and alcohol, family problems, lack of jobs and lack of resources can limit an agent's ability to safely and effectively manage a parolee in the community. The Violation Sanctioning Grid ensures every response is consistent with proven strategies and every violation is met with a swift, appropriate response.

Strategies

Continue to use a Violation Sanctioning Grid (VSG) to guide parole agents in determining the most appropriate type of sanction to impose for particular parole violations because not all parole violations result in a return to prison.

Measures:

Measure	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
Average monthly number of state sentence supervised offenders returned to prison and closed by the field as technical parole violators	237	257	231
Average monthly percentage of state sentence supervised offenders returned to prison and closed by the field as technical parole violators	1.06%	1.16%	1.06%

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Subject Area: Incarceration, Rehabilitation and Reentry of Offenders

Objective: Decrease the percentage of individuals whose parole is revoked within one year of release from prison.

Why this objective is important:

Reducing recidivism, or the number of parolees recommitted to prison after committing another crime or violating conditions of parole, is a vital part of the mission of the Board of Probation and Parole. Offenders may participate in treatment and programming in prison, but it is in the community where they put into practice what they have learned. Fewer crimes mean fewer victims and safer neighborhoods.

How are we doing:

The reduction in the one-year recidivism rate is promising. The challenge is to achieve a three-year, sustained reduction—the nationally recognized measure of recidivism. The state’s three-year rate is 43 percent and the national rate is 51.8 percent. (Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report 2002 Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994)

Many factors affect the board’s ability to reduce recidivism. Offenders often return to communities with high unemployment, crime, poverty rates and drug prevalence. These are difficult obstacles for offenders — who often have limited education and job skills and often have substance abuse problems to overcome. The board will continue to incorporate supervision and case management strategies that have been proven to reduce recidivism.

Strategies

Continue to incorporate in the Pennsylvania parole system supervision and case management strategies that are most effective in reducing recidivism.

Measures:

Measure	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
One-year recidivism rate	21.8%	20.9%	20.2%

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Objective: Increase the number of offenders identified as appropriate for parole based on reduced risk of committing another crime.

Why this objective is important:

Offenders participate in treatment and programming in prison designed to change their behaviors and attitudes toward crime. Making Pennsylvania safer requires examining the totality of the offender and determining whether an individual's risk of reoffending has actually been reduced.

How are we doing:

The Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole has increased the percentage of parolees who successfully complete parole. The parole rate for all offenders at all risk levels decreased during FY09/10 due to the 2008 suspension of parole releases. The parole rate has now returned to its pre-suspension levels.

During the suspension of parole, Dr. John Goldkamp was asked to conduct a review of the parole process. The Board has implemented many recommendations from the final report and is currently working on how to better identify offenders who are likely to reoffend in a violent manner. With funding from a federal grant, the Board has partnered with Dr. Richard Berk to develop a tool that will be incorporated into decision making. Identifying higher risk offenders, and those likely to reoffend in a violent manner, will allow the Board to target resources to higher risk offenders.

Strategies

Continue to incorporate into the decisional process empirically based analyses of offender risk, type of risk, and to address the needs of the offender that contribute to criminal behavior.

Measures:

Measure	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
Overall percentage of offenders granted parole.	59%	46%	58%

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Objective: Increase the percentage of parolees able to work who are employed.

Why this objective is important:

Employment is an important factor in parole success. Employed parolees are less likely to become involved in criminal activity. Parolees able to work are required to work, search for a job, participate in job training or attend school. They are expected to be contributing members of society who support themselves and can pay restitution owed.

How are we doing:

The percentage of parolees employed has remained essentially stable for the past three years. The Board of Probation and Parole’s desired employment rate for 2010-11 is 67 percent — slightly higher than the 2009-10 rate of 66.5 percent. In comparison, New York’s 2009 parolee employment rate was 39 percent.

The challenge is that individuals with criminal records are barred from certain jobs because of their criminal history. Many parolees are low or unskilled workers who need job training and funding is often not available. With a rising unemployment rate, it is even more difficult for parolees to find jobs.

Strategies

Work with parolees who are low skilled or unskilled and are in need of job training to secure sustainable employment.

Measures:

Measure	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
Employment rate (percentage) of offenders who are able to work	68%	70%	67%

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Subject Area: Incarceration, Rehabilitation and Reentry of Offenders

Objective: Increase the percentage of parolees who successfully complete parole.

Why this objective is important:

Making Pennsylvania safer requires that each offender released on parole be supervised in a manner that increases their likelihood of remaining crime free.

How are we doing:

Of those offenders whose supervision ended in 2009-10, 55 percent completed parole successfully. Those offenders did not have their parole revoked at any time while under supervision. They were successfully managed in the community. The Board of Probation and Parole's target for 2010-11 is 57 percent.

The board faces many challenges to encouraging parolees to act lawfully. When an inmate is released on parole, specialized agents work closely with the parolee during the first 90 days, a critical period for stabilizing the offender in the community. Adequate community resources are needed, such as drug and alcohol treatment, sex offender treatment, mental health services, affordable housing and available jobs. The parole agent works with the parolee on all of these issues, but if the parolee cannot find a job, a place to live and necessary treatment, it is difficult for agents to help parolees change their behaviors.

The board seeks to expand the number of parole agents certified to deliver programs to parolees in order to fill the gap in programming needs. Currently, the board is able to deliver Anger Management, Life Skills, Substance Abuse relapse prevention programming and Employment programming in each district. Other treatment and needs are met by community programs, where available.

Strategies

Expand the number of parole agents certified to deliver transitional programs to parolees under supervision.

Work with local probation departments to develop more post-release programming and transitional support for parolees in regions, such as rural areas, where inadequate services are available.

Measures:

Measure	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
Successful completions of parole as a percentage of monthly cases closed (revocations or successful completions)	54%	53%	55%

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Subject Area: Incarceration, Rehabilitation and Reentry of Offenders

Objective: Maintain 100 percent completion rate for sexual offender assessments ordered by the adult and juvenile courts and the assessments requested by the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole.

Why this objective is important:

By law, the Sexual Offenders Assessment Board must provide assessments to the court within 90 days after conviction for adults and within 90 days after a juvenile's 20th birthday. The assessment provides a professional opinion as to whether or not the convicted offender has a mental abnormality or personality disorder that makes him or her likely to engage in predatory sexually violent offenses. If the judge agrees that the criteria have been met, the court designates the offender a sexually violent predator. The board requests an assessment prior to parole consideration. This assessment is a highly specialized evaluation determining the risks posed to the community. The board's assessment may include recommendations for treatment and supervision in the community.

How are we doing:

In 2009-10, the Sexual Offenders Assessment Board completed all court ordered assessments on time, as required by law. The challenge for the board is that it does not have the complement of investigators needed to meet both the present workload of board-requested cases in a timely manner and the projected workload of court and board requests.

As of July 2010, there were almost 292 board-requested assessments in progress and scheduled to be completed by December 2010. An additional 290 board-requested assessments are in progress and scheduled to be completed between January and June 2011. During this time, more requests will be received. Extensive staff overtime is being used to handle the current workload and there is no capacity for more overtime use. Assessment delays mean that offenders may not be considered for parole. If the offender is not paroled, the offender will complete the maximum sentence in prison and be released without any community supervision, which does not align with best practices of sex offender management and risk reduction.

The board will also continue to identify potential opportunities to electronically obtain relevant data and documents from state criminal justice entities, such as receiving juvenile records from the courts electronically to improve the efficiency of the investigative process.

Strategies

- Continue to identify potential opportunities to electronically obtain relevant data and documents from state criminal justice entities, such as receiving juvenile records from the courts electronically to improve the efficiency of the investigative process.
- Use the complement of investigators and overtime as needed to meet the present workload of board requested cases in a timely manner.

Measures:

Measure	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
Total number of sex offender assessments completed	1,734	2,018	1,797