



**ILLINOIS STATE COMMISSION
ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SENTENCING REFORM**

**Regular Meeting Minutes
Thursday April 28, 2016
1:00 pm to 5:00 pm**

**Adler University
17 N. Dearborn Street
Chicago, Illinois**

Commissioners present: Rodger Heaton (Chairman), Jerry Butler, Senator Michael Connelly, Andy Leipold, John Maki, Dave Olson, Mike Pelletier, Elena Quintana, Honorable Elizabeth Robb, Honorable Stephen Sawyer, Representative Elgie R. Sims Jr., Gladyse Taylor, Greg Sullivan, Representative Scott Drury, Senator Kwame Raoul, Kathryn Bocanegra, Howard Peters, Pam Rodriguez, Kathy Saltmarsh, Mike Tardy

Staff: Chasity Boyce, Lisa Desai

Conference Call - Commissioners: John Baldwin, Brendan Kelley, Representative Brian Stewart, Doug Marlowe

Call to Order: Chairman Heaton called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. A quorum was determined to be present as indicated above.

The meeting focused on Community Corrections.

The Commission expressed gratitude to IDOC's parole division for providing parole agents and to the Chief Judges of Cook and St. Clair County for providing probation officers to share observations and experiences regarding the challenges they face and the actions that are producing success.

Chairman Heaton and John Maki provided introductions for Dr. Michael Jacobson. Dr. Jacobson is a nationally renowned scholar who served both as the Probation Commissioner and later as the Corrections Commissioner in New York City during the 1990's. More recently he has served as the President and Director of the Vera Institute of Justice. Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Jacobson is the author of *Downsizing Prisons: How to Reduce Crime and End Mass Incarceration*

Dr. Jacobson explained that, in general, offenders are on parole too long and should be supervised more closely early on in their supervision period, then be released from the system; or, if low risk, they should be removed from the community corrections

system entirely and perhaps be monitored in a more administrative fashion. He noted that looking at 3 year recidivism numbers; 85% of misconduct occurs in the first year of supervision, and the majority of that occurs within the first 6 months. The first year of observation should be resource intensive. The marginal benefits for each additional month of supervision shrink. Longer periods of supervision only lengthen the time to for technical violations to occur. The solution is to improving outcomes is to direct a large amount of programmatic resources in mental health counseling, job programs, education programs and drug treatment in the first 6, 9, 12 and 15 months. Reductions in supervision periods in New York helped reduce the size of the prison population, downsized the parole population, which left more resources to apply to the remaining parolees.

Dr. Jacobson shared statistics regarding the number of probationers per 100,000 people in New York, and in Illinois, and nationally. He explained that New York's probation population was reduced dramatically from approximately 75000 probationers 20 years ago to a little over 20, 000 now. This occurred even while New York was experiencing a substantial reduction in crime. The resulting smaller case loads for probation officers provided roughly twice as many dollars per probationer for programs or treatment.

Q & A w/Commissioners

Commissioners asked Dr. Jacobson numerous questions regarding how the reinvestment of resources occurred in New York, what the community reactions were to the reduction in length of supervision periods, how early termination was used, and the use of risk assessments.

Q & A Discussion with Current Probation officers and Parole Agents

Chairman Heaton introduced senior parole agents Wayne Stewart and Crystal Young, both of whom have more than 10-years' experience. He also introduced Probation Officer David Bishop of Cook County and (joining by phone) Probation Officer George Chester of St. Clair County.

A lengthy question and answer exchange occurred between the Commissioners and the parole agents and probation officers present. Among other things, there was discussion of their experiences with recidivism during the first year of supervision, their caseloads, the funding issues they face, the frequency of contact with offenders at the different levels of supervision, their case management approaches, and their discretion to change the level of supervision as time progresses and based on the offender's successful compliance and behaviors.

The parole agents also noted the following:

- Offenders need IDs. Lacking one is not only a hindrance for finding employment, but can actually place an offender in a position to get arrested without identification.
- They agreed that the 1st year is the period with the highest risk of recidivism.
- They encourage employment and provide information to offenders about temporary employment agencies.
- All offenders begin supervision at Level 1 for the first 90 days. Subsequently, the appropriate level of supervision is examined by the agent and his or her supervisor.
- Offenders are referred to medical providers where Medicaid cards are accepted because many offenders do not have the resources to complete their mandated treatment and/or evaluations for substance abuse, or anger management classes. It's even more difficult in instances where the offender is not eligible for a medical card. Mr. Stewart added that he refers offenders to a community organization that helps men integrate back into society by providing services beyond the required treatment.
- In response to questions about training needed, the agents expressed a desire for more training for unexpected situations and with control tactics. They noted that IDOC has upcoming sessions scheduled for dealing with parolees who have mental health needs.
- Electronic monitoring and day check are options other than sending an offender back to IDOC that might provide balance to an offender's life and allow him or her to get back in compliance.
- The agents discussed community organizations that provide some additional services to offenders.
- The agents suggested that IDOC representatives should meet with offenders prior to their going home to discuss expectations and have avenues available to help them before their release.
- To obtain early release from parole supervision, an offender must complete at least one half of their parole, remain crime free, drug free, complete required treatment (e.g., anger management) and maintain steady employment.

Chairman Heaton thanked them for sharing valuable insights on parole system in Illinois with the Commission, as well as for their continued service helping ensure the safety of Illinois residents.

Dr. Jacobson added that no one is as good at locating community based resources than parole agents and probation officers. However, he noted that programs should be readily at their disposal, and his view that the only way it will happen is for caseloads to get smaller. He noted that the ability to have different levels of supervision and the ability to step up and step down supervision is very critical. However, in his view, starting all offenders at level 1 for 90 days, is not appropriate, particularly for a low risk, low needs individual.

There was also a substantial exchange between Probation officers Chester and Bishop on a number of topics, including early discharge options, the tools they use to monitor probationers, the difficulty for offenders to find employment, tax breaks for employers, and the basis for probation being discontinued because of unsuccessful completion.

Probation officer Chester noted that St. Clair County has more resources that are targeted for our offenders in the community than some other jurisdictions. He explained that they partner with agencies in life skill development, job training and readiness programs and that they have a list of employers that are ready to hire the individuals once they have completed the 4-week job readiness program. The readiness program includes resume preparation and ensuring that probationers have skills that would make them more employable.

Policy Discussion Topics

There was brief introduction of some high-level topics that might guide discussion at the next Commission meeting to help arrive at specific recommendations. They included:

- Community corrections supervision should be sufficient but not greater to protect public safety--both in terms of length of supervision and conditions imposed.
- Community corrections conditions should be determined solely by individualized risk and needs assessments:
- Technical violations should not result in returns to the Department of Corrections or long periods of re-incarceration in county jail
- Illinois should eliminate the mandatory warrant for an arrest on any Class 3 felony.
Illinois should eliminate mandatory returns to prison for parolees.
Illinois should prevent/discourage the use of probation/parolee "crackdowns."
- Illinois should ensure that community correction officers have appropriate qualifications and receive regular training.
- Community correction agencies should regularly issue public reports on its policies and practices.

Public Comment:

Chairman Heaton called for public comment(s).

- Jean Schneider, from Project 111 spoke in favor of providing earned release for prisoners. They should qualify if they are at least 50 years old and have served 15 years of prison time. They could apply based on risk assessment. Prison Review Board has provided recidivism data over the last 10 years for offenders

who are eligible for parole. Those sentenced before 1978 qualify for the bill. She thanked Chairman Craig Findley and Tracey Buckley of the PRB.

- A representative of Word 1st (Wisdom, Offer, Rectify, Disgrace), spoke in favor of reducing prison penalties for offenders convicted on theories of accountability.
 - A representative who now works for the John Howard organization spoke of his personal experience with mandatory supervised release. Upon release, he was handed a slip of paper with a half-way house address where he was mandated to stay as well as a list of conditions with little or no means of transportation or funding. In his view, release conditions are crafted with little thought on how they will be followed. He received little guidance or support while on MSR. The advances he made were accomplished with hard work and help from family and social service organizations such as Safer Foundation. Instead of helping restore him to useful citizenship, MSR resulted in unnecessary barriers. He gave an example from a random compliance sweep. In his experience, MSR is ineffective, counterproductive and should be reconsidered.
- A person named Arnold spoke about having been on parole for 26 months and who is still at Level 1 supervision. He calls every week and visits every month. He has had four parole agents and none of them has ever addressed him regarding jobs. He believes parole is an oppressive system.
- A person named Gail spoke regarding her husband's parole experience and suggested that the Commission look at the eligibility of parolees for good time credit.
- Mr. Albert Jackson, of TASC explained that we live in a country where offenders are incarcerated, pay for their crimes and get out of prison and continue to pay for their crimes. He suggested that the system identify those persons employed at the time of their arrest (non-violent) and who do not pose public safety risk, be given incentives to keep their job.
- Stephanie Coleman from Northwestern Law School explained her view that there is no reason to reinvent the wheel. She advocated consideration of a 2011 IDJJ report regarding aftercare. She observed that parole agents are trained in law enforcement, not social work. They are not linking people to jobs or to services. They are mandated by PRB orders that are not based on needs assessments. She suggested that while perhaps things have changed drastically in the last four years, the Commission should look at the report she referenced.
- One member of the public, Suzanna, expressed concern about the state's contingency plan if it continues to fail to pay vendors.

Announcement

Special thanks was offered to Adler University, President Crossman and Dr. Quintana for hosting the Commission meeting.

Director Maki announced that ICJIA has partnered with the Swift Certain Resource Center to do a training on swift, certain & fair supervision next Friday at the JRTC.

The next meeting will be scheduled for early June depending on Commissioner's schedules. The time and location will be determined.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 pm.