



POLICY POINTS

from the COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION

October 2009

Pennsylvania Corrections Spending

Facing a massive budget deficit, and with sizeable financial obligations looming, Pennsylvania needs to re-examine how taxpayer dollars are spent. Spending on the Department of Corrections has grown far beyond the rate of inflation. It is imperative for lawmakers to look at ways to control corrections costs while continuing to protect public safety.

THE CHALLENGE

- **Pennsylvania is facing a budget deficit, and corrections costs are a major source of red ink.** One in 28 adults in Pennsylvania was in jail or prison, on probation or on parole in 2007, costing the state more than \$1.8 billion. Pennsylvania's incarceration rate has increased **280 percent since 1982**. Pennsylvania's state prison population has increased 24 percent since 1999 to more than 45,000 prisoners. The state faces an **11,000-bed shortfall** by 2011 if current policies remain in place.

SOLUTIONS

- **Drug Courts.** Drug courts are a proven alternative to incarceration for low-level drug offenders. Drug courts offer intensive judicial oversight of offenders combined with mandatory drug testing and escalating sanctions for failure to comply. The average recidivism rate for those who complete drug court is between 4% and 29%, in contrast to 48% for those who do not participate in a drug court program.
- **Hawaii HOPE Court.** In Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE), drug offenders are ordered to treatment and must call a number every morning to see if they have to report to the court to take a drug test. If they fail, they are jailed for several days and can ultimately be imprisoned for multiple failures. This court has proven (in a randomized, controlled trial) to reduce positive drug screens by 91 percent and cut both revocations and new arrests by two-thirds.
- **Mandatory Probation, Treatment and Work Requirements for First-Time Drug Offenders.** This policy should apply only to individuals caught with small quantities of drugs that are for personal use. By redirecting these first-time offenders from prison, states can save millions in incarceration costs.
- **Graduated Sanctions for Probationers and Parolees.** Nationally, a third to a half of prison admissions are individuals revoked from probation or parole. Using graduated sanctions where each technical violation (not a new crime) is met with a swift and certain response—such as increased reporting, a curfew, or even a shock-night in jail—revocations for technical violations can be reduced.
- **Electronic Monitoring.** Electronic monitoring is an effective alternative for nonviolent offenders. A Florida study found offenders on GPS were 95 percent less likely to return to

prison than those not being monitored.

- **Performance-Based Probation Funding.** In 2008, Arizona implemented performance-based probation funding. Under this market-oriented approach, probation departments receive a share of the state's savings when they reduce their revocations to prison without increasing probationers' convictions for new offenses. Some share of probation funding could also be tied to other outcomes, such as restitution payments and employment rates.
- **Earned Time Credits.** Arizona also enacted legislation that gives probationers good time credit for time served when they fully comply with all terms, such as restitution. By reducing the total number of offenders on probation, there are fewer opportunities for revocations.
- **More Short-Term Beds.** In 2007, Texas solved a projected 17,000 prison bed shortfall in large measure by putting more beds in community corrections facilities and intermediate sanctions facilities. Probationers and parolees who commit a new misdemeanor or technical violations are increasingly diverted from prison and sent to these facilities for an average of 90 days.
- **Geriatric Release.** Geriatric inmates have three times the medical costs of non-geriatric inmates. Studies have shown that offenders over 60 have a minimal recidivism rate.
- **Administrative Sanctions.** Georgia and Delaware have changed the law so probation officers can impose sanctions such as a curfew and increased reporting in response to violations. A Georgia study found reductions of 70 percent or more in the average number of days that violators spent in local jails awaiting disposition of their violation cases.

For more on **State Spending**, visit www.CommonwealthFoundation.org

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This study was prepared for the Commonwealth Foundation by the Center for Effective Justice at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.



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