

A CLOSER LOOK AT RECIDIVISM RATES

Exhibit 1

State Prison Releases and Recidivism Rates

	1999–2002		2004–2007	
	Releases	Recidivism	Releases	Recidivism
Alabama	8,771	36.0%	10,880	35.1%
Alaska*	N/A	N/A	11,619	50.4%
Arizona	13,091	39.6%	15,795	39.1%
Arkansas*	5,663	49.0%	6,244	44.4%
California	126,456	61.1%	118,189	57.8%
Colorado	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Connecticut*	13,950	45.8%	16,100	43.7%
Delaware	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Florida	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Georgia*	16,951	38.0%	18,972	34.8%
Hawaii	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Idaho	1,071	33.0%	1,574	33.6%
Illinois	25,025	51.8%	35,606	51.7%
Indiana	N/A	N/A	13,651	37.8%
Iowa*	2,953	32.4%	3,533	33.9%
Kansas*	5,088	55.1%	5,178	42.9%
Kentucky	7,622	38.8%	10,743	41.0%
Louisiana	12,787	43.9%	13,391	39.3%
Maine	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maryland	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts*	2,860	38.1%	2,299	42.2%
Michigan	10,985	38.0%	14,217	31.0%
Minnesota	3,940	55.1%	5,189	61.2%
Mississippi	5,742	26.6%	8,428	33.3%
Missouri	12,974	48.7%	18,637	54.4%
Montana	906	41.8%	1,253	42.1%
Nebraska	1,612	28.8%	1,846	32.3%
Nevada	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

(continued)

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State Prison Releases and Recidivism Rates *(continued)*

	1999–2002		2004–2007	
	Releases	Recidivism	Releases	Recidivism
New Hampshire*	N/A	N/A	1,082	44.2%
New Jersey	14,034	48.2%	14,039	42.7%
New Mexico	N/A	N/A	3,615	43.8%
New York	25,592	39.9%	24,921	39.9%
North Carolina	23,445	43.8%	22,406	41.1%
North Dakota	N/A	N/A	845	39.6%
Ohio	22,128	39.0%	26,695	39.6%
Oklahoma	7,802	24.1%	8,159	26.4%
Oregon	2,769	33.4%	4,202	22.8%
Pennsylvania	6,844	36.6%	8,750	39.6%
Rhode Island	N/A	N/A	770	30.8%
South Carolina	9,299	26.8%	11,211	31.8%
South Dakota	1,231	33.7%	2,034	45.5%
Tennessee	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Texas*	56,571	32.1%	72,130	31.9%
Utah	2,563	65.8%	3,056	53.7%
Vermont	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Virginia	8,997	29.0%	11,999	28.3%
Washington	5,738	32.8%	8,093	42.9%
West Virginia	N/A	N/A	1,346	26.8%
Wisconsin*	5,206	46.1%	8,501	46.0%
Wyoming	N/A	N/A	705	24.8%
Total	470,666	45.4%	567,903	43.3%

NOTES: The national total for 1999–2002 is not directly comparable to the national total for 2004–2007 because eight states did not report data for the 1999–2002 cohort. The 2004–2007 recidivism rate for the 33 states that reported data in both years is 43.3 percent, but the total releases are 534,270. Data are missing for nine states (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Maine, Nevada, Tennessee and Vermont). Eight additional states provided data for 2004–2007 only (Alaska, Indiana, North Dakota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Rhode Island, West Virginia and Wyoming).

*See the jurisdictional notes in the Appendix for information about this state.

SOURCE: Pew/ASCA Recidivism Survey.

Unpacking the Numbers

Recidivism rates vary widely among the states, and there are a number of potential explanations for the differences. Many deliberate policy decisions, such as the types of offenders sentenced to prison, how inmates are selected for release, the length of stay under supervision, and decisions about how to respond to violations of supervision, can have a large impact on recidivism rates. States differ markedly with regard to these practices, which influence recidivism rates to a strikingly high degree. In other words, the numbers are only one piece of the puzzle. In order to understand the significance of a state's recidivism rate, one must examine the underlying policies and practices that impact the number.

How Does Sentencing Policy Impact Recidivism Rates?

States that send comparatively low-risk offenders to prison are likely to see lower rearrest and violation rates compared with states that concentrate prison space on more dangerous offenders. If, for example, a state incarcerates a large proportion of lower-risk offenders, then its recidivism rate might be comparatively low, because such offenders would be, by definition, less of a

risk to return to prison. A state with a larger percentage of serious offenders behind bars, on the other hand, might experience higher rates of reincarceration when those offenders return to the community.

Oklahoma exemplifies the former example: "A lot of people who might be put on probation or diverted into an alternative program in another state wind up going to prison in Oklahoma," notes Michael Connelly, administrator of evaluation and analysis in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. "These lower level folks aren't as likely to recidivate, so it benefits our overall numbers and makes us look like we're doing an even better job than we're doing." Oklahoma's overall recidivism rate for offenders released in 2004 was 26.4 percent, the third lowest in the country, the Pew/ASCA survey found.

How Does Community Corrections Policy Impact Recidivism Rates?

Few practices can influence a state's recidivism rate more dramatically than its handling of technical violations of conditions of supervision. As a result,

“It is easy to see that we are at a critical turning point in criminal justice policies—one that will hopefully result in smart and tough policies to protect the public.”

Texas State Rep. Jerry Madden (R)
May 11, 2010

taking a close look at a state's management of such violations is key to understanding what its recidivism rate really means.

First, states that have shorter periods of post-prison supervision may have lower rates of revocation to prison, because their offenders must comply with supervision rules for shorter periods. North Carolina is a good example of this policy. Parole supervision in North Carolina lasts between six and nine months, an unusually short period. Not surprisingly, the state had the second lowest rate of technical violators returned to prison among offenders released in 2004—less than 1 percent. If you are not on parole, you are not going to be reincarcerated on a technical violation. By contrast, North Carolina has a relatively high rate of return for new crimes—40.4 percent for offenders released in 2004—placing it in the top third among states by that measure.

Second, the ability of supervision agencies to detect violations and how they respond

to such violations have a substantial impact on recidivism rates. Detection can depend on caseload sizes; the number and complexity of the rules and programs with which offenders must comply; the availability of drug testing and GPS and other monitoring systems; and the strength of the relationships that officers have with offenders' families and communities. Responses to violations are guided by supervision philosophy, and the laws and policies that specify what officers are supposed to do when various violations are discovered.¹⁴ The examples below illustrate a few ways in which management of technical violations can influence the recidivism rate.

In some states, released offenders who break the rules of their supervision are routinely punished with a short prison stay. California, for example, has for years taken this route, an approach that has helped to keep its prison population the highest in the nation. In other states, such as Oregon, the practice is to use prison only as a last resort, and technical violations are instead met with a range of sanctions in the community, sometimes including time in jail. The state that uses prison as a response would have a higher recidivism rate, because a violator's return to prison is counted in the calculation. But that higher rate would not necessarily mean that state is doing a worse job preparing offenders to succeed in the community. Rather, it is merely a reflection of how transgressions are handled.

Another variable in the mix is a state's fundamental parole policy. In some "truth in sentencing" states, where offenders serve 85 percent or more of their prison terms, there are proportionally fewer people on parole, because inmates will have at most 15 percent of their sentence left after release. Fewer parolees translate into fewer violations, and therefore a lower recidivism rate. Arizona, which applies a strict truth in sentencing standard to nonviolent as well as violent offenders, may be a case in point. The Pew/ASCA survey data show that only 11.5 percent of Arizona offenders released in 2004 returned to prison on a technical violation, ranking it in the lower third among states participating in the survey.

California is just the opposite. There, almost everyone released from prison goes on mandatory parole, typically for three years. That is a long time to abide by the often strict conditions imposed on parolees. This partly explains why California ranked second among states in the proportion of released offenders from 2004 who were returned to prison for technical violations within three years, with a rate of 40 percent. The proportion of released California offenders reimprisoned for new crimes, meanwhile, was just 17.7 percent, ranking it in the bottom half of states.

These kinds of differences substantially complicate interstate comparisons, and, much in the same way the Federal

Bureau of Investigation cautions against comparing state crime rates, great care should be used in comparing state recidivism rates. Differences among states certainly should prompt many questions, such as "Why is the rate in my state so much higher than our neighbor's?" But looking at the change within a state over time is more likely to yield a valid sense of the performance of any state's corrections system.

Attacking Recidivism: Examples from Three States

Assessing a state's correctional performance requires linking recidivism rates with the specific policies and practices that impact the frequency with which persons reoffend. Oregon, Michigan and Missouri are three states that took thoughtful and concerted steps to put research into practice. While none of the three would argue it has the perfect system, their stories help illuminate strategies that can help cut reoffending and corrections costs.

“We were frustrated with the revolving door of people moving in and out of the system ... The question was, are we doing the best we can do with the resources we've got?”

North Little Rock (AR) Police Chief Danny Bradley
March 7, 2011



LEADING THE WAY IN OREGON

One state considered a national standout in reducing recidivism is Oregon. For offenders released in 2004, Oregon recorded the lowest overall recidivism rate among the 41 reporting states, a rate of 22.8 percent. Oregon also experienced the biggest decline in recidivism from 1999 to 2004, a drop of almost 32 percent. Oregon officials attribute their success to a comprehensive approach to reform and a commitment to change that reaches across all levels of government—from the supervision officer in the field, to the judiciary, through the state corrections department and up the ranks of legislative leadership.

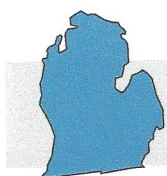
In prison, Oregon inmates receive risk and needs assessments at intake, and targeted case management during incarceration, along with detailed transition planning that begins six months before release. In the community, probation officers use a sanctioning grid to impose swift, certain consequences for violations, creating consistency across offenders and from county to county. In both settings, offender programs are anchored in research and continually monitored and updated to optimize their effectiveness.

The change in the handling of offenders who violate terms of their supervision was striking. In the past, parole and probation violators filled more than a quarter of Oregon's prison beds. Today violators are rarely reincarcerated. Instead, they face an array of graduated sanctions in the community, including a short jail stay as needed to hold violators accountable. Results of the Pew/ASCA survey confirmed this—only 5.9 percent of offenders released in 1999 and 3.3 percent of the 2004 cohort were returned to prison on technical violations.

“It’s pretty rare in Oregon for someone to be violated all the way back to prison,” said Oregon Director of Corrections Max Williams, “so we don’t have that revolving door that puts so much pressure on the prison population in other states.”

A key piece of legislation, passed with bipartisan support in 2003, helped fuel Oregon’s efforts. The bill, SB 267, required that any correctional program receiving state money be evidence-based in its design and delivery.¹⁵

“I think the bill pushed Oregon forward at a faster pace, and forced us to make sure our programs were truly translating the best available research into practice in the field,” Williams said.



TURNING THE TIDE IN MICHIGAN

At the start of the millennium, Michigan did not look like a state on the cusp of inspiring correctional reform. Its myriad problems included high crime rates, a sharply rising inmate population, disappointing recidivism numbers and an economy deeply wounded by the ailing auto industry. By 2002, the state was sinking \$1.6 billion a year into corrections, almost one-fifth of its general fund.

Less than a decade later, Michigan is riding a wave of policy changes that have allowed it to shrink its inmate population by 12 percent, close more than 20 correctional facilities and keep a growing number of parolees from returning to custody.

The cornerstone of the effort is the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI). Launched in 2003 and expanded statewide in 2008, the initiative's mission is to equip every released offender with tools to succeed in the community. MPRI begins at intake, when a prisoner's risk, needs and strengths are measured to develop individualized programming. Prior to parole, offenders are transferred to a reentry facility, and a transition plan, which addresses employment, housing, transportation, mentoring, counseling and any necessary treatment for mental illness or addictions, is finalized in close collaboration with community service

providers. After release, officers use firm but flexible graduated sanctions—including short stays in a reentry center if needed—to manage rule breaking before it escalates to more serious transgressions.

The Pew/ASCA recidivism survey found a mixed picture in Michigan. Recidivism declined by 18 percent between 1999 and 2004 because of a dramatic drop in the reincarceration of technical violators, but returns to prison for new crimes jumped by almost 21 percent during the period. Those numbers, however, do not capture progress that has occurred under MPRI since Pew's observation period ended in 2007.

Overall, post-2007 preliminary figures from the Michigan Department of Corrections show that parolees released through the MPRI are returning to prison 33 percent less frequently than similar offenders who do not participate in the program. A closer look at all offenders released from Michigan prisons reveals that parole revocations for both new crimes and technical violations are at their lowest level since record keeping began 23 years ago. In 2009, there were 195 revocations for every 1,000 parolees—101 were for technical violations and 94 were for new crimes. A decade earlier, that figure was 344 revocations per 1,000 parolees—246 for technical violations and 98 for new criminal convictions.

The trend is particularly significant because Michigan's parole population has grown dramatically in recent years. As MPRI has produced positive results, members of the state's Parole & Commutation Board have become increasingly confident about parolee success, leading to higher parole approval rates. As a result, the state paroled roughly 3,000 more prisoners in 2009 than it did in 2006.

"Although the roots of MPRI were clearly in a budget crisis, it was never only about saving money—it was a belief that doing corrections 'right' would result in a smaller prison system and large savings," recalled former Michigan Director of Corrections Patricia L. Caruso. "We had to change our entire culture to focus on success. It was challenging, but fortunately, it worked."



TACKLING TECHNICAL VIOLATIONS IN MISSOURI

“ I want to be absolutely clear. I am not advocating that we reduce prison populations just to save money. Nonviolent offenders are still law breakers, and they will break laws until they learn their lesson. What I am saying is that we need to do a better job teaching nonviolent offenders the right lessons. That takes more than prison; it takes more than slap-on-the-wrist-probation. Drug and alcohol addiction must be broken; discipline and job skills must be learned. When that can be done better, outside of expensive prison walls, that is what we should do. Results matter, public safety matters, taxpayer dollars matter, saving lives and restoring families matter.”

Chief Justice William Ray Price Jr.,
Supreme Court of Missouri
February 9, 2011

In early 2002, Missouri faced a dilemma familiar to many states: A jump in the prison population had stretched capacity to the limit, yet budget woes and other funding priorities meant there were no dollars to increase prison capacity. The message from the governor's office and General Assembly was clear—no more prisons. Find another way to cope.

In response, Missouri policy makers took a hard look at what was driving their inmate population upward. Longer terms brought on by mandatory minimum sentencing were partly responsible. But the primary contributor was a steep rise in the number of parole and probation violators behind bars. The Pew/ASCA data confirm the diagnosis. In 2004, the state recorded an overall recidivism rate of 54.4 percent—the third highest among the states. Missouri also ranked

highest in the proportion of released offenders imprisoned for a technical violation (40.3 percent). That factor contributed to an overall increase in recidivism in Missouri of 12 percent between 1999 and 2004.

Over the next four years, Missouri mapped out a meticulous plan for managing all but the most serious violators in the community. It began with a work group that analyzed revocations, evolved into an inter-agency team that drafted a vision and set goals, continued through a pilot project and ultimately took flight through new policies and procedures, coupled with extensive parole and probation staff training, in 2006.

Today released offenders in Missouri are subject to “e-driven supervision” (the “e” is for evidence), which uses a new risk assessment tool to categorize parolees and help set supervision levels. When violations occur, officers have a range

of sanctions they may impose, from a verbal reprimand or modification of conditions, to electronic monitoring, residential drug treatment or “shock time” in jail.

“Every possible avenue is tried for that individual before we resort to sending him back to prison,” Missouri Director of Corrections George Lombardi said. “That approach is just part of our culture now.”

The payoff has been dramatic: 46 percent of offenders released in fiscal year 2004, for example, were returned to prison within two years, either for a new crime or technical violation. Since then, that rate has dropped steadily, and reached a low of 36.4 percent for offenders released in fiscal year 2009.

Missouri’s prison population, meanwhile, has held steady at about 30,500 inmates since 2005.