

## Controlling Corrections Costs While Protecting Public Safety

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### The Challenge

- **Most states are facing budget deficits and corrections costs are a major source of red ink.** State corrections spending in real dollars has increased 127 percent from 1987 to 2007. The average prison cost is \$24,656 per inmate plus \$65,000 in capital costs to build every new bed. States are projected to incur another \$27.5 billion in prison costs from 2007 to 2011 due to projected inmate growth. State prison populations are projected to reach 1.72 million in 2011, five times the 319,000 inmates in 1980. However, it is not clear that more spending will produce a commensurate return in lower crime. Over half of all inmates are incarcerated for nonviolent offenses.

### 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 percent and 29 percent, in contrast to 48 percent 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 in 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 be revoked 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

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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 establishing more beds at 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.<sup>1</sup>
- **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.

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<sup>1</sup> Brett Trowbridge, Ph.D. & J.D., "Age and Recidivism: How Accurate are Our Predictions," *Washington Criminal Defense* (Nov. 2004) accessed 28 Jan. 2009, [http://www.trowbridgefoundation.org/docs/age\\_and\\_recidivism.pdf](http://www.trowbridgefoundation.org/docs/age_and_recidivism.pdf).

