



Advocate

OFFICE OF CRIME VICTIMS ADVOCACY
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Serving as a voice within state government for crime victims and their families

The Role for Advocates in the Offender Reentry Debate

As advocates for victims of crime, we may find it challenging to support programs and spending for offenders. However, we should take a keen interest in this issue. Success in reentry means, in large part, that offenders are not re-offending. Lower re-offense rates mean fewer victimizations and safer communities.

In fact, it is important for advocates to play an active role in reentry. Advocates can work to ensure that victims' voices are heard as part of individual offender's release decisions. Advocates can also help shape local, regional and state systems that will hold offenders accountable as they transition back to communities.

Over 93 percent of offenders will be released from prison nationally, with over half returning to prison within three years. In our state, about 8,500 offenders are released from the Department of Corrections every year. Policy changes that have increased sentences have led to an increased need for prison space, and prison spending. Projections indicate the need for three new prisons by 2030. Each prison holds about 2,000 beds, costs \$250 million to build, and \$45 million to run annually.

In response to this situation, policymakers around the country, and in Washington State, have begun to examine alternate strategies to improve reentry. The Washington State Institute on Public Policy was asked to examine a variety of policy options in terms of their cost and effectiveness. The report shows that a combination of evidence based programs could yield a significant benefit for taxpayers, and crucially, in terms of reduced cost of victimization.

The Institute's report was presented last Fall to the Legislature's Joint Task for on

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Offenders Programs, Sentencing and Supervision. After considering the report, among other sources of information, the Task Force made recommendations in key areas. These recommendations formed the basis of legislation in the 2007 Session. Senate Bill 6157 (awaiting the Governor's signature as we go to press), would boost services to offenders who are coming back into the community through:

- Individual Reentry Plans (including over \$1 million)
- Community Transition Coordination Networks (\$288,000)
- Work Release centers transformed into "residential reentry centers"
- Community Justice Centers (\$3.4 million)
- Transitional Housing (\$3.6 million)
- Addressing Education & Employment Barriers

Another proposal, House Bill 1422 also passed, which directs the Departments of Corrections, Early Learning, Social and Health Services, along with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, to examine policies and programs to increase connection between incarcerated parents and their children. This work will be overseen by an advisory committee administered by Community, Trade and Economic Development.

As we examine the issue of offender reentry, it is important to bear in mind programs for juvenile offenders, and programs which might prevent crime in the first place. Seventy-three percent of offenders under 30 who were admitted to prisons in Washington had previously moved through the juvenile court system. As advocates, we should be informed of the best practices available to prevent re-

offense, and we should also help frame the discussion to include a meaningful investment in prevention of all crime – reducing the number of victims and making our communities safer.

For more information on reentry issues, see these resources:

Joint Task Force on Offenders Programs, Sentencing and Supervision: Report and recommendations to the Legislature. Washington State Legislature, November 2006

Evidence-Based Public Policy Options to Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs, and Crime Rates. Washington State Institute for Public Policy, October 2006.

The Victim's Role in Offender Reentry: A community response manual. Office for Victims of Crime and American Probation & Parole Association, 2000.

Did You Know? Offender Reentry

According to a DOC presentation to the Joint Task Force on Offenders programs, Sentencing and Supervision:

64% of the current prison population was convicted of a sex offense or violent crime. The remaining 36% were convicted of drug or property offenses. Among female offenders, 66% were convicted of drug or property offenses.

On average, 100 reported crimes resulted in 26 arrests which resulted in 15 Superior Court filings which resulted in more than 6 felony convictions which resulted in 4 sentences served in the community and 2 sentences served in prison.

HIGH-TECH REENTRY

From GPS tracking units to breathalyzers, high-tech supervision tools are increasingly a part of offender reentry. These tools are generally popular with the public and with policymakers, as they hold promise for maximizing limited resources, increasing public safety and holding offenders accountable. However, the high price tags do not always come with solid proof of effectiveness.

Technology used to manage offenders in the community is wide-ranging, and can be sorted into a few groups: tracking tools, data systems, tools to analyze bodily responses (such as lie detectors) and cameras.

Tracking Tools

These devices track an offender's location. Famously used to keep Martha Stewart and many other low-risk offenders on home arrest, tracking tools are now increasingly used with other populations including sex offenders. GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) systems send a signal from a device on the offender at regular intervals (active) or record the movements for later examination (passive). Some systems also have an "alarm" that is triggered if an offender enters a restricted zone. This same technology combined with digital maps and the Internet is used in the commercial world to track packages and family members (through GPS chips in cell phones, or in cars, where a teen who is driving too fast can now be warned remotely by flashing the lights or honking the horn).

In addition to tracking an offender's movements in the real world, offender supervision also can include tracking movements in cyberspace. The use of spyware, data mining and social network analysis is becoming

more widespread in the effort to monitor an offender's Internet surfing habits, the downloading of restricted materials (for example child pornography) and social patterns (such as going to chat rooms with teens or sex tourism sites).

Data Systems

Information is power. As data technology becomes vastly less expensive and more interconnected, it is possible to collect and analyze huge quantities of information. In the context of offender reentry, data technology is used to register sex offenders and notify the public about their residences, to determine the risk an offender may pose, to match suspects fingerprints or DNA against past "cold cases" and also to notify victims about a change in the custody status of an offender. In addition to official sources of information such as the state patrol or FBI, private companies now allow access to this data so employers or gun stores can check applicants for criminal background (and other information including credit history and other personal information which may or may not be accurate).

Bio-analysis

Lie detectors and ignition interlock devices have long been used in community corrections and offender treatment. New tools reinvent these measures of breath, sweat, pulse or heart rate, erectile response and other bodily responses to provide even greater levels of control over offenders.

Cameras

Video surveillance cameras are becoming ever more widespread in our public spaces. These cameras are billed as a deterrent to crime (someone is watching at all times), as a way to prevent crime and as a means of

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later identifying suspects, or catching escaped offenders. While primarily applied before a crime or during its investigation, camera technology can also be used in offender reentry.

“Convergence” describes the current trend towards the combination of various technologies in one tool or package. For the average consumer this can mean using your cell phone to send a picture you have taken with the included camera. For offender supervision, convergence can mean sending the offender’s blood alcohol reading along with a location via email to a community corrections officer. In sex offender treatment, technologies are being developed which would measure sexual response to images of virtual children rather than actual images of child pornography.

The driving force behind these technological advances is our perception that they will increase our safety. This perception is formed by our expectation that scientific advances can be successfully applied to social problems, and by the innovative work promoted by private companies to policy-makers and the public. As we worry about keeping our kids safe from predators, tools and proposals emerge which offer solutions to our fears.

The downside to the rapid pace of technological innovation is that we often lack conclusive evidence that these new tools work, or that they actually affect in a meaningful way the problems we are trying to solve.

The costs of technological solutions can also be high, especially in times of limited resources. Unfortunately, new tools can often distract attention and resources away from proven, if older, solutions. As the American Probation & Parole Association states, “It is

important to remember, however, that the use of technology with offenders is not a substitute for staff. It should be viewed as a tool to support and enhance the supervision process.”

Beyond our interest in the tools of control as a means of protecting society from offenders, we should also be aware of these technologies for other important reasons. On one hand, these tools often enter society as a means of controlling offenders, and then later find wider use in our public and private spaces. On the other hand, our existing laws offer far more notice to offenders that their privacy is compromised than they do to everyday people.

Perhaps more harmful than either of these issues is the idea that that “the search for stand-alone mechanical solutions also ... points away from examining the social conditions which may contribute to violations and the possibility of changing those conditions.”

As advocates, we should understand the limitations of these tools for increasing our safety, and also understand the ways these very same tools can be misused to undermine safety and privacy for victims and everyday people. We must also continue to refocus the debate about crime prevention to underlying social issues, in addition to the more common crime control strategies.



Proclamation of Crime Victims' Rights Week, April 22-28, 2007



- Whereas, the destruction and loss caused by crime are experienced most directly and acutely every day by those who are its victims; and
- Whereas, justice demands that the rights of crime victims established in our laws and constitution be upheld in every community and throughout our justice system, for **every victim, every time**; and
- Whereas, the services that we have developed to help victims increase their safety, recover from the impact of crime, and rebuild their lives are deserved by **every victim, every time**; and
- Whereas, pervasive crime and violence not only hurt victims, but undermine the health and vitality of communities across the state by:
absorbing large portions of state and local budgets to support the criminal justice system,
interfering with the education of children, the healthy functioning of individuals and families,
and
fracturing any sense of trust and common purpose among community members; and
- Whereas, reducing crime and violence will require a comprehensive commitment, involving partnerships among families, schools, community groups, religious institutions, and government, to:
change attitudes about violence,
promote healthy relationships within families and communities, and
expand opportunities for people to participate in building the safety of our communities; and
- Whereas, the State of Washington takes pride in its leadership role in developing innovative and effective ways to confront criminal behavior and support victims of crime;

Now, therefore, I, Christine O. Gregoire, as Governor of the State of Washington, do hereby proclaim the week of April 22-28, 2007 as

Crime Victims' Rights Week in Washington State and

Recognize and express appreciation of those providers of victim services, criminal justice professionals, and victims and survivors of crime who work every day to breathe life into the Victims' Rights established in our laws and constitution.

INFORMATION

The Office of Crime Victims Advocacy serves as a voice within state government for the needs of crime victims in Washington State.

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Mark your calendar!

OCVA Conference

Every Victim, Everywhere

September 17-19, 2007 Yakima Convention Center Yakima, WA

*Check out our website at
www.ocva.wa.gov
for more details!*

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