

COMMISSION ON ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION
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Presenting Testimony

INTRODUCTION

The Adult Services Division of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is planning for the 2007-2009 biennium. Its Prison and Field Services Divisions have tremendous needs. Additionally, both divisions have embraced the *Transition from Prisons to Community Initiative* where-in both divisions jointly make decisions that assist in managing correctional offenders.

The Field Services Division manages all offenders and programs outside the confines of the prisons in Bismarck, Jamestown and New England. We understand that our principle mission is to protect the public as we deliver supervision and programming to the offenders that we manage.

The population we manage includes nearly 4,200 probationers, 320 parolees, and 130 inmate-status offenders. (Please note that these numbers change daily!) They reside in private homes, in half-way houses, quarter houses, transition beds, or correctional facilities. The division also develops the docket for the Parole Board and Pardon Advisory Board.

THE FIELD SERVICES DIVISION "BLUEPRINT"

1) Transitioning of offenders to community supervision:

The plan to transition offenders from prison to a community program is very important to the department. Proper transitioning reduces the risk that offenders will commit new crimes. Effective transition programming is a "pre-requisite" for the Parole Board to authorize the release of an offender to parole. It is also cost effective.

In the Field Services Division, transition programs include:

- The Tompkins Rehabilitation and Corrections Center. This is a 90-100 day alcohol and drug treatment facility that accommodates 60 men and 30 women.
- The Bismarck Transition Center. This facility prepares men for their return to the community and is set to accommodate 114 men. Approximately 60 men are in a specific transition plan to Bismarck/Mandan, approximately 30 men will be in a probation revocation “assessment status” (effective 04-21-06), and approximately 17 men will be in a parole relapse program (effective 04-21-06). The department does have flexibility as to how it uses the 114 beds and, consequently, the “mix” of offenders is subject to change, based on need.
- Centre Halfway House Program. This facility manages both male and female offenders in a similar fashion as the Bismarck Transition Center. We currently have approximately 45 offenders in halfway houses in Fargo and Bismarck. Males make up about 70% of the population served by half-way houses.
- Centre Quarter-way House Program. Offenders in the Quarter-way house are close to release to the community and are given more freedom of movement than if they were at the Bismarck Transition Center or a half-way house program. We currently manage about 20 offenders in quarter-way house beds in Fargo. 60% of the offenders in the Quarter-way house are female.
- Female Transition Program. We manage 15 women in the “gender specific” transition programming. We are planning for 15 more beds. The additional beds will be available in the summer of 2006.
- Parole Relapse. This program will safely allow the department to return parole violators to the community after they are provided alcohol and drug relapse treatment. As previously noted, the Bismarck Transition Center will accommodate approximately 17 male inmates in a parole relapse program. The MRCC accommodates approximately 13 male inmates in parole relapse programming at this time.

2) Parole Supervision:

Parole supervision has been very successful in North Dakota. This is due, in part, to the success of our transition programming. Our revocation rate for parole offenders remains less than 20%. Of that number, only 16% were returned to prison as a result of committing new criminal offenses. The Parole Board has dramatically increased the number of paroles it has provided to inmates (311 on January 1, 2006 compared to 117 on January 1, 2002). This, in turn, has reduced the overcrowding problems at the prison without jeopardizing public safety. Our successes with parole speak to the joint efforts of the Prison Division and the Field Services Division in preparing offenders for release back into the community; **only 20% of our parolees are returned for violations while the national average is over 50%!**

3) Probation Supervision:

The division manages nearly 4,200 probationers for the State of North Dakota. Probation violators account for nearly 50% of all the new arrivals at our prison. Most probationers are sentenced to the Department of Corrections without the benefit of a pre-sentence investigation. The department believes that mandating pre-sentence investigations would help us manage probationers more effectively.

4) Specialized supervision strategies for the management of parolees and probationers:

- The Field Services Division utilizes validated risk assessment tools/reports to manage the supervision of offenders. The LSI-R is the backbone of all assessment tools. The pre-sentence investigation further allows us to assess the needs and risks of offenders appearing before the court. It also allows us to recommend sentencing options to the court. We utilize a battery of assessment tools when assessing sex offenders to include the MnSOST-R, Static 99, Acute and the Stable 2000.
- Case Planning is the “roadmap” that puts all of our planning together. The information discovered during the assessment process is built into the case plan. The recommendations of the case plan are endorsed by management of both the Department of Corrections and the Parole Board. Officers manage the supervision of parole/probation offenders based on the case plan. Additionally, supervisors review all case plans to assist in managing officer workloads.
- The division dedicates staff time to high risk/need caseloads. When “triaging” the offenders under supervision, the division identifies the most high risk/needy offenders. Specialized supervision is then provided to high risk offenders. Examples include parole, re-entry, drug court, sex offender, gender specific, and gun-crime caseloads.
- Competent staff supervision is critical to ensure that offenders are properly supervised. Supervisors audit case files, do ride-alongs, assist with home visits and, as previously noted, examine the use of assessment tools to determine if the officer has developed a proper case plan. Finally, supervisors review chronological reports to ensure that officers have followed the guidelines set out by the offender case plan.

5) Field Services staffing issues

- The number of offenders under the supervision of the Field Services Division has grown dramatically in the past decade.
- Our staffing has not kept up with the growth of the offender population.
- Supervisory “span of control” problems are also growing.
- Additionally, the division lacks the staff resources to provide a pre-sentence report to the court for every felony case.

- It is very difficult to deliver specialized supervision to our high risk population, given our limited resources.
- The Field Services Division is experiencing problems attracting good candidates for employment. This is especially true in the *Red River Valley*.
- Although our turnover rates remain low, we are concerned that turnover rates will increase in the future. An average parole/probation officer requires nearly 800 hours of training prior to being assigned to a caseload. Simply put, training resources would not be available to us if our turnover rates increase.
- The salary we currently offer to our parole/probation officers is not competitive with local, state or federal law enforcement agencies.
- We need to hire/promote two new sex offender specialists as soon as possible. We must assign the officers to high risk sex offender caseloads in Jamestown and Minot.
- Our institutional program is “maxed-out”. More resources will need to be dedicated to our paroling unit (known as Institutional Offender Support Program).
- We anticipate that we will require additional parole officers in 2007-2009.
- We will need additional FTE’s to accommodate writing a pre-sentence report for each felony offender appearing before district court.
- We will also require an additional program manager to monitor the growing needs of the contract transition programs.

6) Additional contract transitional housing needs:

- The division will require 40-50 additional transitional beds in Fargo during 2007-2009.
- 20-25 transitional beds will be needed in Grand Forks County.
- 15 additional transition beds will be required outside of the counties of Grand Forks, Cass, Burleigh, and Morton.
- We think both contract non-profit providers and county correctional facilities could be used as a resource to deliver the transitional programming noted.

7) Conclusion

The Field Services Division plays a significant role in both alleviating the overcrowding in the Prisons Division and protecting the citizens of North Dakota. Its staff and services allow for the management of over 4,500 offenders in community programs in lieu of requiring that they be managed in prison programs.