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Public Safety Institute Assesses State's Sanctions System for Probationers and Parolees

The Public Safety Act of 2016 enacted by the Tennessee General Assembly authorized the Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) to implement a system of administrative sanctions of probationers and parolees for many of what had been termed technical violations of supervision conditions.

From a policy standpoint, the system is designed to (1) insure swift, certain, and proportionate sanctions rather than facing delays through the court system and (2) reduce the level of our state's prison population made up of individuals re-incarcerated for technical violations of supervision rather than more serious violations, including the commission of new crimes.

In 2017, the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission spearheaded development of a local five-year Safe Community Plan. One of the objectives under the plan is effective implementation of TDOC's administrative sanctions system in Shelby County. Through an anonymous gift to the University of Memphis Foundation, the Public Safety Institute assessed the system's impact on probationers and parolees in Shelby County.

The assessment reveals certain apparent disparate impacts of the system depending on the type of supervision. After implementation of the system in Shelby County, the percentage of

probationers with revoked supervisions was significantly lower. For parolees, though, the percentage with revoked supervisions resulting in re-incarceration was slightly higher after implementation of the system. At the same time, the percentage of probationers who were successfully discharged from supervision but who subsequently returned to probation supervision was much higher after the system's implementation. That was not the case for discharged parolees, though.

Under the sanctions system, it took more time for probationers to be either successfully discharged or revoked from supervision. A system with step-by step sanctions may have the impact of keeping individuals under supervision for longer periods of time without reducing the likelihood that they return to probation supervision once discharged.

This year, the General Assembly enacted legislation which makes significant changes in both probation and parole. These changes include:

1. Reducing probation sentences from 10 years to 8 years;
2. Restricting the amount of time a judge may temporarily revoke and incarcerate a person for technical violations of probation or parole;
3. Establishing a presumption of parole release at a person's parole eligibility date or upon a subsequent parole hearing for those serving time for a Class E or D felony, or a non-violent offense; and
4. Establishing a mandatory re-entry supervision period beginning one year prior to sentence expiration for parole-eligible individuals.

Given the apparent increase in the percentage of parolees with revoked supervision and re-incarceration, at least in Shelby County, it may be important for TDOC to focus on more intensive parole supervision since the percentage of incarcerated inmates placed on parole is likely to increase under the changes in state law. Likewise, more intensive efforts to assist probationers in moving in the right direction would appear warranted given the significant increase in the percentage of those successfully discharged who end up being placed on probation supervision again.

Almost 300 surveys of justice system employees and supervisees were conducted as part of the assessment. From the results it appears that both employees and those being supervised need to have a better understanding of the sanctions system.

The full report and an executive summary are available at <https://www.memphis.edu/psi/research/index.php>.

Public Safety Institute Co-Hosts Forum on Ways to Assist Victims of Domestic Violence

In 2020, there were 17,372 reported domestic violence incidents in Memphis/Shelby County according to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. During the first half of this year, reported domestic violence incidents totaled 8,831.

According to figures from the Shelby County District Attorney's Office, of those charged and arrested for domestic violence, over 20 percent have been charged and arrested for domestic violence previously.



Under a grant from the Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP), the University of Memphis evaluated the effectiveness of services to domestic violence victims in Shelby County. Drs. Angela Madden, Amaia Iratzoqui, and Danielle Fenimore, along with PSI Lead Research Assistant Max Helms, conducted the evaluation. Both the final report and an executive summary are available at <https://www.memphis.edu/psi/research/index.php>.

Jennifer Brinkman, Director OCJP

The evaluation concluded that there is:

1. Widespread frustration among domestic violence victims, criminal justice personnel, and service providers related to the level of cooperation in providing a continuum of services to victims;
2. Challenges related to sufficient collaboration and communication;
3. Lack of funding and services available for the body of victims pursuing social services; and
4. A serious lack of 24/7 services.



As the U of M researchers conducted the evaluation, there was also a sense that there are many resources available or potentially available for domestic violence victims which are simply not being utilized as effectively as they could be.



Various key providers of services to domestic violence victims came together with the U of M Public Safety Institute and the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission to co-host the Forum on Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Violence on October 12th. These service providers included the Shelby County Crime Victims and Rape Crisis Center, the District Attorney's Victim/Witness Unit,

the Family Safety Center, CasaLuz, Kindred Place, the YWCA, the Memphis Area Women's Council, the Domestic Violence Council, the Memphis Police Department and the Shelby County Sheriff's Department.

Common themes were the need for more coordination of service providers and more rapid responses to the need of victims.



Among the speakers were District Attorney Amy Weirich and Shelby County Sheriff Floyd Bonner



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