DUE SOUTH:

Georgia: Data-Driven Reforms to Parole Supervision Practices

MAY 2011

Innovation: Increasing the proportion of people successfully completing parole through leadership and data-driven reforms to supervision

Background: Georgia has one of the country's largest parole populations.[1] In the 1990s, faced with a rapidly growing prison population (nearly doubling from 21,564 people in 1990 to 41,010 in 1999[2]) that was due in part to parole revocations, the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles began to examine how to improve the outcomes for people on parole. To start, the agency realigned its mission to measure success by how well people on parole successfully transitioned to the community and moved to change the culture of the agency to meet this mission.[3]

How it works: Georgia's results-driven parole supervision came in multiple steps.

- *Field Log of Interactional Data (FLOID)*: In 2002, the agency developed a computer case management system that logs every interaction between the parole officer and the person he or she is supervising.[4] The agency then began looking for patterns to determine how best to improve outcomes by focusing parole officers' efforts on places that would have the most positive impact. For example, they found that every day a person was employed reduced their risk of re-offending 1 percent.[5]

- *Behavior Response and Adjustment Grid (BRAG):* With this growing body of

information, the agency developed a system to guide officers in selecting from a range of sanctions and responses to the negative and positive behaviors of people on parole. These responses included graduated sanctions and more programming and treatment for behaviors that previously might have resulted in revocations, as well as positive reinforcements for achievements.
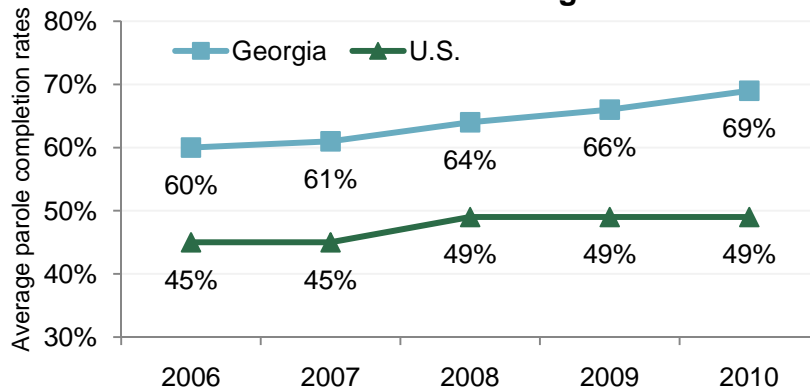
- *Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative (TPCI):* In 2004, Georgia was selected to participate in the National Institute of Correction's Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative, which provided financial and technical assistance to support the state in making reforms.[6]

- *Research and Evaluation:* In 2006, the Parole Board received a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) award to engage in a research project using the data collected in FLOID between 2002 and 2005 – over one million documented activities involving 39,000 people on parole. The project purpose was to identify and evaluate case management and supervision strategies most effective in achieving successful parole outcomes. The evaluation phase included a pilot program to test three new supervision protocols in selected offices. The protocols were applied to 2,000 people newly paroled who were tracked during a 12-month follow-up period. The pilot protocols included improved responses to people who became unemployed; faster referrals to treatment for people who failed a drug test; and cognitive-based

programming for people with multiple technical violations.[7]

Results:

- In FY 2010, the parole completion rate in Georgia was 69 percent – steadily increasing since 2006, and 20 percentage points higher than the national average.[8]
- Only 13 percent of parole revocations were for technical violations.[9]
- With the cost of parole supervision at $4.65 per day vs. prison at $49.35 per day, the state has achieved significant savings.[10]
- In 2010, only 7.54 percent of people in Georgia prisons were incarcerated for parole revocations.[11]
- Through the use of data, Georgia has been able to effectively advocate for the evidence-based programs and services needed to improve outcomes for people on parole. Below are some accomplishments, as identified by in the 2010 annual report of the Board:
  - *Employment:* In 2009, 78 percent of people on parole who were eligible for employment were employed.
  - *Drug Treatment:* A variety of community- and faith-based substance abuse treatment options have been developed, ranging from a six-week residential program, to the "No Turning Back Recovery Program" for people with more involved treatment needs. In the latter program, in 2010, 131 of 146 participants – roughly 90 percent – completed the program.
  - *Housing:* Georgia now has six new 200 bed pre-release centers, eight in-house transition centers, and twelve day reporting centers supervising people

More people complete parole in Georgia than the national average.

Source: *2010 Fiscal Year Annual Report*, Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.

who are considered low-risk. The Re-entry Partnership Housing Program (RPH) provides housing to people recommended for parole who would not have received it due to not having a place to live if released. In FY 2010, 199 people on parole were placed in RPH at a cost of $157,500. Estimated cost savings for the state over keeping these people incarcerated was $5,168,646. Parole also maintains an online database of approved housing resources available to parole staff to assist people on parole in finding housing; this database includes 134 facilities: 26 structured housing, 60 standard recovery residences, and 48 intensive recovery residences.[12]

Through consistent leadership and the involvement of parole personnel at all levels in the reform process, parole officers now view themselves as advocates and service brokers for the people they supervise, and increasingly understand the connection between programs and success on parole. Frequent face-to-face contact between officers and people on parole, conducted where people on parole live and work, ensure that parole staff identify issues as soon as they begin to emerge; with 22,403 people on parole in 2010, there were 477,527 face-to-face

contacts made. More resources are focused on people on parole assessed to be higher risk.

A recent development is Parole Success Advisory Teams, which are voluntary groups of line managers and officers who assist and learn from each other to reduce risk and improve outcomes. Many parole offices conduct orientation sessions, inviting not only people just released onto parole but their families as well, to establish a team approach to success.

Challenges: Funding for programs proven effective continues to be a challenge. Parole officers participating in recent research indicated that even when they had identified someone in need of drug treatment, slots weren't always available. Decreases in the number of parole officers also may impact the effectiveness of reforms that are heavily dependent on personal contacts and relationships. Georgia continues to have an especially conservative approach to parole, which means that many people do not leave prison until the end of the sentence, so they are not able to take advantage of some of the resources that parole offers.[13]

Policy Implications: Georgia demonstrated that changing parole culture can be achieved, but it requires leadership from the top delivering a persistent and ongoing message, patience, and time. Adopting a new way of working with people on parole can improve individual life outcomes, reduce costs associated with revocations to prison, improve public safety, and improve community well-being by helping the economy and promoting positive behavior.

The value of investing in data systems cannot be overestimated. They provide the critical feedback that allows parole and probation departments to align supervision practices with what are shown to reduce recidivism, thus making these departments more effective. Knowing what works guides states to the most promising financial investments for the best outcomes possible. Research shows that drug treatment, housing, employment and education are the most effective at improving public safety and reducing prison populations.

For more information on the Georgia's data-driven parole reforms, please visit: www.pap.state.ga.us.

[1] Lauren E. Glaze and Thomas P. Bonczar, *Probation and Parole in the United States, 2009* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010).
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[2] Georgia, *Department of Corrections Annual Report 1999,*
www.dcor.state.ga.us/Research/Annual/GDC_annual_report_FY1999.pdf
[3] Personal conversations with John Prevost, Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, Assistant Director- Research, Evaluation, and Technology, as well as change in mission statement in annual reports. Also, Danny Hunter and John Prevost, "Improving Parole Outcomes with Performance Leadership and Data: Doing What Works," *Topics In Community Corrections- 2007* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Corrections, 2007).
[4] Tammy Meredith and John Prevost, *Developing Data Driven Supervision Protocols for Positive Parole Outcomes* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).
www.ncjrs.gov/.pdffiles1/nij/grants/228855.pdf
[5] Tammy Meredith, John C. Speir, Sharon Johnson, "Developing and Implementing Automated Risk Assessments in Parole," *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 9, No. 1 (2007):1-24.
[6] Tammy Meredith and John Prevost, 2009
[7] Tammy Meredith and John Prevost, 2009.
[8] *2010 Fiscal Year Annual Report*, Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles.
www.pap.state.ga.us/opencms/export/sites/default/resources/2010_AnnualReportReview.pdf
[9] *2010 Fiscal Year Annual Report*
[10] *2010 Fiscal Year Annual Report*
[11] Georgia Department of Corrections, *Inmate Statistical Profile* (Operations, Planning, and Training Division Planning and Analysis Section, 2010)
www.dcor.state.ga.us/Research/Annual/Profile_inmate_admissions_FY2010.pdf
[12] *2010 Fiscal Year Annual Report*
[13] Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles Frequently Asked Questions.