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## Board Bulletin



# Community Supervision: Street supervision in our communities

By *Oliver J. Bell, Chairman*

When you hear the term “security” associated with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, instinctively you think of prisons, but security’s true meaning is much broader and includes the vital role of street supervision. In recognition of National Probation, Parole and Community Supervision Week scheduled for July 17-23 of this year, this bulletin focuses on community supervision and parole in the Texas criminal justice system.

To start, let’s look at numbers. In Texas, as of August 31, 2010, we had almost 420,000 adults on community supervision and more than 81,000 under active parole supervision. That is more than three times the number of incarcerated offenders, which stands around 156,000. Nationally, as of December 31, 2009, more than five million adults were under parole or community supervision in the United States. That is about one in every 47 adults, with the vast majority (84%) under community supervision.

Community supervision, formerly known as adult probation, is responsible for

the largest percentage of the state’s offender supervision.

Community supervision is a diversionary program allowing eligible participants to be held accountable for a crime committed in the community without having to go to prison. Community supervision is used for low-level offenders who can remain in the community while under supervision without posing a threat to public safety. It is a lower cost alternative to prison and saves the taxpayers of our state millions of dollars annually. A judge determines who will be placed on probation, as well as the conditions the individual must comply with or complete during their probation period. If any of the imposed conditions are violated, the individual is subject to being brought back to the judge and could potentially, depending on the severity of the violation, be sent to jail or prison.

Conditions of community supervision vary based on the circumstances of each case. Terms may include fines, restitution, community service, a required number of visits with a community supervision officer,

or possibly jail time. The tools used by the community supervision officer to supervise and rehabilitate the individual on probation also vary, based on the needs of the individual. They include urinalysis testing, domestic violence programs, education programs, substance abuse or sex offender treatment, electronic monitoring, restitution centers, residential services, or intermediate sanction facilities. The probation population undergoes both “Risks and Needs” and specialty assessments to determine how probationers are best supervised and which programs will benefit each person.

In Texas, there are 121 community supervision and corrections departments (CSCD) serving 254 counties. These departments are organized within local judicial districts; however, the employees work directly for the CSCDs. CSCDs are linked to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice by funding they receive through the Community Justice Assistance Division (CJAD). In addition to distributing state funds to CSCDs, CJAD’s administrative responsibilities include tracking CSCD performance, enforcing commu-

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nity supervision standards, monitoring and reviewing budgets, and training and certification of community supervision officers.

While community supervision serves as a diversionary, cost efficient supervision option prior to incarceration, parole supervises offenders who have been released from prison and are in the community serving out the remainder of their sentence. The decision to grant parole is made by the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP) and the BPP sets the conditions of release. As with probation, if the conditions are violated, a parolee can face penalties to include re-incarceration. Imposed conditions also vary. They can include requiring employment, drug or alcohol treatment, life skills counseling, or any other program or service that will assist the offender to become a productive citizen. One of the goals of parole is to help reintegrate the offender into the community so they may find employment opportunities and seek to become contributing members of the community again by being good citizens, good parents, good neighbors and positive members of the local community.

The supervision of parolees is the responsibility of the TDCJ Parole Division. Parole Officers work in the community with the parolee to monitor activities and compliance with conditions of release, oversee rehabili-

tation, assist in obtaining services such as housing and employment, and conduct work and home visits. Parole officers also investigate release plans prior to release, assess and classify parolees following release, and develop supervision plans based on the needs of each offender.

In addition to released parolees, parole officers also supervise individuals who are released on "mandatory supervision" and "discretionary mandatory supervision." Mandatory supervision is the automatic release from prison to supervision when time served added to good time credit equals the length of the prison sentence. Only certain offenders sentenced prior to September 1, 1996, remain eligible for this form of non-discretionary release. Although release onto mandatory supervision does not require the approval of the BPP, the BPP has discretion to impose conditions on the release.

With discretionary mandatory supervision, the BPP has the authority to deny mandatory releases on a case-by-case basis for an offender whose date of offense is on or after September 1, 1996. If approved for discretionary mandatory supervision release, conditions may be imposed in the same manner as mandatory supervision. Factors considered in approving or denying parole or discretionary mandatory supervision cas-

es include the seriousness of the offense(s), sentence length and amount served, offender age, letters of support or protest, as well as institutional adjustment and prior criminal history and arrests.

In addition to their supervision responsibilities, the community supervision and parole officers are a vital link to the community, ensuring public safety while providing support and protection for crime victims. Their role is essential in our criminal justice system, as they work to ensure our communities remain safe and secure. ●