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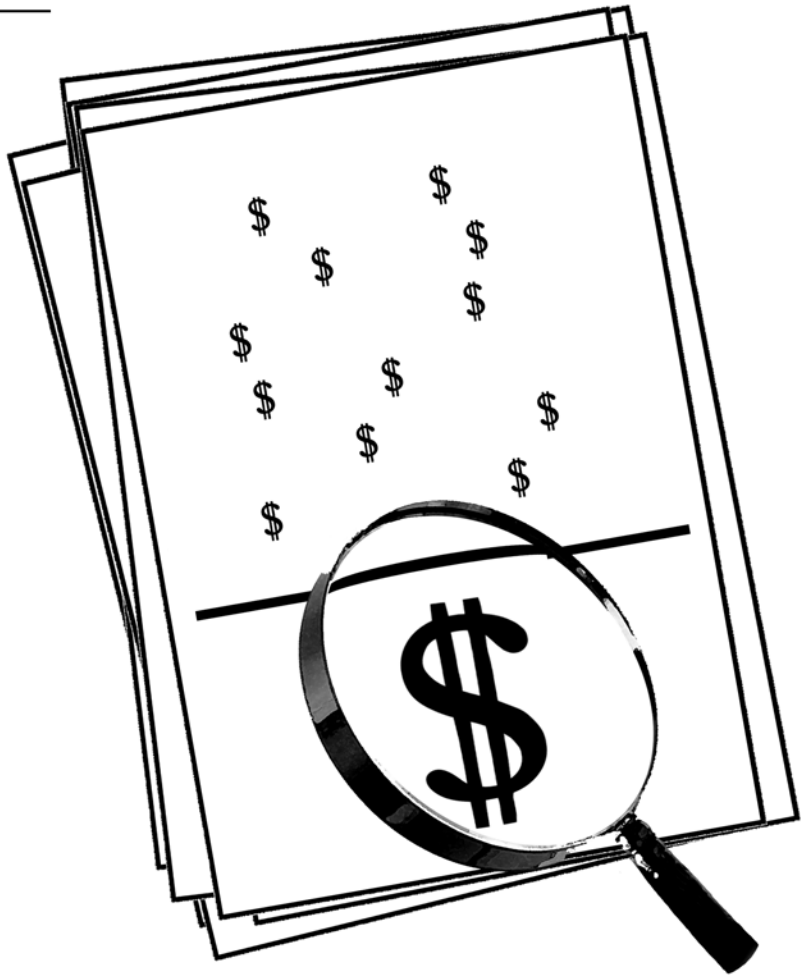
Topics in Community Corrections



Annual Issue 2002

Responding to Budget Cuts: Focusing on What's Critical

Topics in Community Corrections

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See earlier issues of ***Topics in Community Corrections*** on the web at **www.nicic.org**.

Foreword

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, and the recent failings of the financial markets both have had a profound and negative impact on local, state, and federal governments. Because we are all faced with these new challenges, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) is devoting this issue of *Topics in Community Corrections* to the issue of budgets and imposed funding reductions. Well-known and respected executives in nine community corrections agencies and organizations were asked to give their accounts of how agencies are responding to these downturns. Although financial swings and economic cycles come and go, this one is quite different from any experienced in our lifetimes. How governments react will in large part determine their destiny for years to come.

It is a pleasure to invite you to read these very thoughtful pieces addressing the dilemma of budget shortfalls and major cuts to agency funding. These accounts give us a good picture of what is currently happening and what we might expect in the future. Additionally, many of these authors share their strategies and game plans not for merely surviving, but for prevailing and continuing to offer the essential service that the public has come to expect from community corrections: public safety.

Rick Faulkner
Correctional Program Specialist
NIC Community Corrections Division

From Excitement to Despair: Dealing with the Budget Crisis

Dan Richard Beto,
Executive Director,
Correctional Management Institute of Texas

A little more than a decade ago, the National Institute of Corrections produced a monograph entitled *Managing Probation with Scarce Resources: Obstacles and Opportunities*. The authors of this publication were all members of the National Association of Probation Executives and, by most accounts, considered leaders in the probation profession. Since the monograph's publication in January 1992, four of the five authors—Donald Cochran, Barry Nidorf, Gerald S. Buck, and Don R. Stiles—have retired. And the fifth author, Ronald P. Corbett, Jr., ceased direct involvement with the field of probation when he became Executive Director of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

In reading that monograph today, one is immediately struck with two things: first, the vision, wisdom, and breadth of experience of the authors; and second, the similarity of those times and today. In the introductory chapter Ron Corbett wrote about budget shortfalls, eliminating programs, exhausting financial reserves, and laying off or furloughing employees. What he wrote could just as easily describe the financial condition of many states today as it did more than 10 years ago. Many corrections agencies—and particularly community corrections agencies—are, at best, experiencing severe financial challenges, while others, regrettably, are faced with the grim prospect of, using Corbett's terminology, a "financial meltdown."

Before dwelling on the apparent financial crisis facing community corrections, let us go back a couple of years to some happier times.

Brief Excitement: Key Strategies

In 1999, there was an air of excitement in the field of community corrections, and particularly probation, when the Manhattan Institute in New York published *"Broken Windows" Probation: The Next Step in Fighting Crime*. The level of excitement became more intense a year later when the Manhattan Institute followed up on this initial monograph with a more comprehensive publication—*Transforming Probation Through Leadership: The "Broken Windows" Model*. These two publications, written by the Reinventing Probation Council, whose members number among the country's leading community corrections practitioners, acknowledged serious problems associated with probation and offered solutions for remedying its ills.

The message contained in these two publications found a receptive audience in probation professionals who were less than enamored with the anemic state of

community corrections and who were willing to embrace a new probation choreography. And with this receptive excitement, the "reinventing probation" movement became a reality.

Although the focus of these two publications was on probation practices, the strategies identified were just as applicable to parole and other community corrections agencies.

Advocated by the Reinventing Probation Council were a number of key strategies that would move probation from an under-funded, unappreciated, and unknown correctional option to one that would be "at the table" when correctional policy was being crafted and that would play a preeminent role in promoting public safety. Those key strategies included:

♦ A value-driven system;

♦ Emphasis on public safety;

♦ Meaningful supervision;

♦ Rational allocation of resources;

♦ Strong enforcement of conditions and a rapid response to violations;

♦ Meaningful partnerships;

♦ Performance-based initiatives; and

♦ Leadership.

A more thorough examination of these key strategies provides guidance for a reinvented probation and explains the optimism shared by many community corrections practitioners for the future of the profession. These key strategies can also serve as a blueprint for success in times of fiscal difficulties.

Value-driven system. First and foremost, community corrections practices must be driven by a clear and convincing set of values, values that are held dear by the American people. Public opinion polls suggest that the public's desires concerning the criminal justice system are very clear. The public wants:

♦ Safety from crime, and particularly violent crime;

♦ Offenders held accountable;

♦ Offenders to pay back to society, in either actual or symbolic restitution;

- Some form of punishment;
- Meaningful treatment programs based on research;
- A voice that is heard and respected in the justice system; and
- The truth.

Despite the guidance provided by this clear message, it was not until recently that probation practitioners could agree on the mission of probation. That mission is the promotion of public safety.

Emphasis on public safety. In a reinvented probation, practitioners must be mindful of the public's desire for safety. To citizens, crime rates, arrest rates, and conviction rates are not as important as the degree of safety in their own neighborhood or community. More specifically, the public wants to be assured that: they can walk around the block in the evening without fear; their children can play at local playgrounds safely; their schools are safe; if offenders are living in their neighborhoods, they are being supervised closely and being held accountable; and there will be fewer victims in the future.

The only way these concerns can be answered by community corrections is by emphasizing public safety first.

Meaningful supervision. For too long the profession has suffered from "fortress" or "bunker" probation, where supervision took place in the office of probation officers. For probation supervision to be effective, it must take place in the community where the offenders live, work, and recreate. Firsthand knowledge of where offenders live, their families, and their immediate and extended environments is a critical aspect of meaningful supervision. In addition to just being in the community, probation should be highly visible, and the visibility must be positive in nature.

Meaningful supervision also means supervision that is conducted at times not confined to the traditional 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, work day. To be effective, supervision must take place at night, on weekends, and on holidays.

Rational allocation of resources. The rational allocation of resources is especially important in times of diminishing budgets. Probation practitioners must focus on those offenders who are most at risk and on those whose offenses or affiliations pose a public safety risk, such as sex offenders, gang members, drug dealers, and those with histories of violence. The rational allocation of resources is driven, to a great degree, by information concerning the offender under supervision; therefore, probation practitioners should develop as much information as possible on offenders through comprehensive presentence investigation reports, juvenile records, psychological evaluations, and risk/need assessments. In addi-

tion, probation agencies must employ assessments at the front end of the system to make valid placement decisions and continue to use a variety of assessment instruments for specific offenders to regularly monitor their progress.

Probation officers should be strategically assigned to specific geographical areas rather than being randomly assigned to offenders as they are placed on probation. This more rational practice affords probation officers excellent opportunities to develop partnerships with law enforcement officers and area service providers.

Strong enforcement and a rapid response to violations. All too frequently, offenders under correctional supervision in the community have come to expect two or more "free ones" when it comes to dirty urine samples, electronic monitoring violations, refusal to keep scheduled appointments, or failure to comply with a variety of conditions. By allowing these transgressions to occur, probation has become the great enabler; if offenders know they have several "bites at the apple" before they are held accountable, they have reason to feel relatively safe in continuing those behaviors that caused them to be placed on probation. For probation to be meaningful, this permissive practice must be abandoned, and in its place there must be a strong commitment to enforcing all conditions and responding in a timely manner to violations.

A critical part of enforcing conditions of probation is having the cooperation of the courts, where violations are usually addressed. Probation programs that strictly enforce conditions and enjoy a supportive relationship with the courts tend to have fewer problems with offender compliance issues. The key is that the response must be swift and sure. The response to violations need not be revocation of probation, but rather the employment of graduated sanctions, such as a curfew or house arrest, intensive supervision or electronic monitoring, mandatory drug treatment, a brief period of confinement in jail, or placement in a residential facility for an extended period to provide greater structure in the offender's life.

In addition, probation agencies need to be tough-minded and put teeth into apprehending absconders. Many jurisdictions have high absconder numbers and do not aggressively attempt to apprehend their absconders. Failure to actively seek out absconders does not speak well of probation's public safety function and sends a terrible message to offenders.

Partnerships. Crucial to the success of probation are the involvement and support of other agencies, organizations, and interest groups. With this in mind, probation professionals should practice inclusiveness—both formally and informally—when developing policies, initiating programs, crafting supervision strategies, and delivering services.

Collaboration by probation and other agencies will result in an economy of resources. It will also provide more effective service delivery to the community, and it will increase the opportunity for offenders to comply successfully with conditions and complete the period of supervision.

Performance-based initiatives. Information-based decision-making is critical to delivering effective probation services. Evidence-based practices are also essential in rationally allocating agency resources. Because of diminishing financial resources, all probation agencies must make decisions about developing, adjusting, or retaining programs based on performance. In achieving this, strategic planning principles should be employed and good evaluation models developed to measure program effectiveness.

Leadership. In the final analysis, leadership is the key component to drive a probation system that has values, rationally allocates limited resources on programs and strategies that work, provides meaningful supervision and a quick response to violations, practices inclusiveness, is accountable, and emphasizes public safety.

Noel M. Tichy, Professor of Business at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, offers one of the better descriptions of leadership:

> In a broad sense, what leaders do is stage revolutions. They are constantly challenging the status quo and looking around to see if they are doing the right things, or if those things can be done better and smarter. And most importantly, when they do spot something that needs to be changed, they do something about it.

Shortly after the release of the Manhattan Institute's initial monograph—*"Broken Windows" Probation: The Next Step in Fighting Crime*—a significant number of community corrections administrators, excited by the prospect of probation assuming its rightful role in crafting criminal justice policy, stepped up to the plate of leadership and began implementing the suggested strategies. In Tichy's terms, they began to "stage revolutions."

The Decline Into Despair

In 2001, much of the excitement and optimism of the past 2 years began to erode, primarily as a result of serious budget constraints. States began to project budget shortfalls, and the language of reinventing probation was being replaced with talk of laying off staff, eliminating programs, dealing with unfunded mandates, lowering standards, closing offices, reducing the emphasis on staff training, and increasing caseloads.

Compounding the budget crisis were the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001, by foreign terrorists. As a result of the events of that tragic day, dollars in already strained federal and state budgets were, and continue to be redirected to address homeland security issues. Further compounding the problem is the decline in the stock market, driven by company failures, corruption, and a growing distrust in corporate America. According to the Wilshire 5000 index, which tracks every publicly traded domestic company in the United States, between March 24, 2000, and July 18, 2002, "the market has lost more than $7 trillion in value and shed more than 1,000 companies." As a result of this decline, many state-operated pension plans have lost billions in investments.

Because of shortfalls in budget projections and the need to focus on homeland security issues, questionable corporate practices, and other pressing concerns, it is doubtful that probation and parole agencies—despite the fact that they are responsible for supervising more than 4.6 million offenders, or 70% of the entire correctional population—will be found in the top half of the list of funding priorities when legislative bodies meet to parcel out tax dollars.

Avoiding Lost Opportunities

Despite the lean years ahead, community corrections executives should not adopt a mentality of "woe is me" and surrender to the plight they face. With crises come "windows of opportunity" that probation and parole executives should be ready to open. Budget constraints may provide community corrections administrators with opportunities to:

- ♦ Eliminate organizational "dead wood";
- ♦ Reorganize the agency and reassign duties;
- ♦ Challenge the status quo mentality;
- ♦ Consolidate services;
- ♦ Discard programs of dubious merit that are not supported by research;
- ♦ Shift responsibility for unfunded mandates;
- ♦ Engage partners;
- ♦ Refocus organizational philosophy;
- ♦ Identify and eliminate obstacles; and
- ♦ Improve efficiencies.

Management guru Peter Drucker suggests that agencies and organizations routinely conduct self-assessments to provide focus and direction, and this is particularly important during hard times. More specifically, use of Drucker's deceptively simple self-assessment tool, which follows, could serve as a prelude to a formalized strategic planning exercise:

- ♦ What is our mission?
- ♦ Who is our customer?
- ♦ What does the customer value?

♦ What are our results?

♦ What is our plan?

Thoughtfully responding to these five questions will provide guidance in dealing with challenges and periods of difficulty. Taking the process a step further, applying the responses to the key strategies suggested by the Reinventing Probation Council should lead to community corrections programs and initiatives that are rational and worthy of support by the public and policymakers.

In addition to Drucker's five questions, there is a sixth question probation and parole executives should ask and be prepared to answer: "What do we want people to say about our agency in 1, 2, or 5 years?" Revisiting that question on a regular basis should keep us focused on the tasks at hand.

This Issue of *Topics in Community Corrections*

Contained in this publication are articles describing how community corrections agencies have responded to budget cutbacks and shortfalls. Contributing are some of the leaders in community corrections in North America. Themes found in their articles include:

♦ The rational reallocation of resources;

♦ Improved efficiencies;

♦ Damage control strategies;

♦ Technology's role in times of fiscal constraints;

♦ Workload equalization;

♦ Evidenced-based practices;

♦ Strategic planning;

♦ Reductions in expenditures; and

♦ Organizational change strategies.

The authors of the articles contained herein are to be commended for their contributions to the body of knowledge on community corrections management. Too, gratitude is extended to the National Institute of Corrections for commissioning this publication and making it available to the field. ■

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Budget Cuts in Arkansas: When the Heat's On, Fire It Up and…Get Cookin'?

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Recent budget cuts in Arkansas state government are pushing the Department of Community Correction (DCC) to another level of innovation. In May 2001, just prior to the beginning of a new biennium budget cycle, the DCC suffered an $800,000 budget cut in general revenue funding, followed by two subsequent cuts of $125,000 and $276,454 during the first year of the biennium. An additional reduction of $828,877 is also expected in FY'03. Although this amount may not seem like much, for a state the size of Arkansas (with approximately 2,673,400 people), the cut is substantial. During the same period of time, the Arkansas Department of Correction, our sister agency, suffered a $22 million budget cut.

The DCC, the state's community corrections agency, administers a $40 million budget to supervise and manage more than 40,000 adult offenders under probation and parole supervision or in community-based correctional facilities. Staffing exceeds 800 non-union employees. The agency's mission is "to promote public safety and a crime-free life-style by providing community-based sanctions in a cost-effective manner, and enforcing state laws and court mandates in the supervision of adult offenders remanded to the Department of Community Correction."

About a year ago, prior to the budget cuts, the DCC and four or five other agencies developed a strategic plan as the first step in participating in a new performance-based budgeting system. Although budget crunches came at an inopportune time, the agency still managed to obtain American Correctional Association accreditation for Parole and Probation and Residential Services. The budget cuts will increase throughout the biennium, but DCC expects to survive by being much more conservative in making decisions that require funding.

Impact of the Cuts

Perhaps the most severe impact of the budget cuts was the agency's inability to fund the Career Ladder Incentive Program (CLIP). This program is a state system that provides monetary rewards (through promotions or bonuses) to classified employees for exemplary job performance, subject to available funding within each agency. Generally, bonuses range from 1–8% in lump sum payments that don't affect an employee's base pay or retirement benefits. Promotions, which are added to base pay and retirement, can be 6% or 8%, depending on the number of pay grades increased.

Although many employees worked all year to become eligible to receive these promotions or one-time bonuses, the funding was simply not there, because the

agency had no resources for this worthwhile effort. Understandably, the loss of the program this fiscal year affected the morale of some staff. However, when faced with whether to invoke a layoff or fund CLIP, the DCC decided that the CLIP incentives were a necessary sacrifice.

Management continued to be committed to tapping into all options available to secure funding for the program this year and in upcoming fiscal years. Thus, the DCC asked the Department of Finance and Administration to fund the program through a pool set aside for such purposes. The request was approved, allowing management to provide some level of financial incentives for their star employees. The incentives ranged up to 3.5% for bonuses and promotions of 6% to 8%.

Cutting the Budget While Maintaining Services

Prior to the budget cuts, the DCC had already made an effort to do business more efficiently. With the news of the budget cuts, agency leaders came together to brainstorm ways to cut costs immediately while still maintaining an accredited level of services. During regular management and other meetings, the staff developed viable options that increased efficiency and prevented the need for layoffs or the disruption of major activities.

As a result, the agency has:

- Invoked a hiring freeze on vacant, non-essential positions and a minimal waiting period before filling vacant essential positions, to create salary savings;
- Applied for reimbursement of 40% of the purchase costs of bullet-proof vests for field staff;
- Consolidated probation/parole offices, reducing maintenance and operations costs, and reassigned staff to maintain supervisor-to-officer ratios;
- Centralized the economic sanctions collections component and redefined staff roles and assignments to enhance program integrity while increasing productivity;
- Established a desirable supervision fee collection rate and incorporated it into the job performance standards of supervision officers;
- Purchased additional vehicles to reduce maintenance and travel reimbursement costs;
- Centralized purchases for the remainder of the budget period, limited purchases to emergency items only, and eliminated all conference travel;
- Increased grant search activity;

- Re-negotiated service contracts for drug testing and electronic monitoring;
- Made policy changes regarding supervision standards, the violation process, and technical violators;
- Assumed operation of out-patient substance abuse counseling in place of contracts that cost almost twice as much;
- Implemented an employee recognition policy that rewards employees for superior performance; and
- Consolidated caseloads and reassigned cases to use staff resources more efficiently.

In addition, the Arkansas Legislature passed a Drug Forfeiture Act, which earmarks 2% of all funds received through illegal drug activity for the DCC. The DCC received an initial $800,000 during 2001 under this law. These funds were used to establish seven drug courts that would have been funded through the $800,000 in general state revenues lost prior to the new biennium budget year.

The Final Results

In summary, when the "heat is on," the DCC gets "fired up" and "gets cookin'!" In many ways, the budget cuts helped the agency develop more efficient ways of operating and enhanced its ability to respond to its legislative mandates. The cuts will not affect the agency's ability to supervise and provide services to offenders under its jurisdiction, nor is it anticipated that the cuts will have a negative impact on recidivism, violations, revocations, or restitution. Staff satisfaction has increased, and taxpayers' dollars are being well spent—in the best interest of the citizens of the Great State of Arkansas. ■

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Avoiding Budgetcide

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What is budgetcide? It is cutting your own throat during difficult budgetary times. Administrators need to think through the implications of their reactions to tough fiscal times to be sure that they develop strategies that maintain their own value and belief structures as well as strategies that position them well for the future, when fiscal times are better.

Budgetcide is doing the wrong things for immediate or short-term gain without thinking about the long-term implications. One of the costliest lessons to be learned is that "doing nothing is doing something." If you fail to develop a good plan to pull you through tough times, then that omission also constitutes doing something—something that leaves you at the mercy of other planners and puts you at risk for losing control of your environment.

With that in mind, it is important to understand what is going on in your political environment. Is this just hard fiscal times, or is it also an attempt to roll back your budget and permanently cut staff? It could be both, so you could help downsize your agency permanently while believing that you are only proposing short-term fixes. Because of this risk, you may not want to reveal all your cost-cutting or revenue growth strategies. Often the reward for being innovative is to have whoever controls your purse strings decide that more fat can be trimmed from your budget because you have found other means to manage.

Always ask for flexibility in managing your own budget. If you are handed a budget reduction number and told to eliminate a certain number of positions that will be lost forever, you are in a very difficult situation. It is always preferable to manage a reduction of a certain dollar amount or a percentage of the budget, so it is important to ask for the flexibility to use your experience and administrative skills to manage the budget. This will allow you to employ your own strategies and give you more options and flexibility. Remember:

- Layoffs and furloughs are better than permanent staff reductions.
- Managing vacancies is better than using furloughs and layoffs.
- The opportunity to develop new revenue streams could ease your problem by allowing you to keep needed staff.
- The flexibility to manage your own budget gives you the opportunity to craft solutions or take the reductions where you can best absorb them.

The Importance of Perception

Another aspect to keep in mind is others' perceptions of your actions. First, what will staff perceive is important to you? If you have been telling staff that assessments, responsivity, and clinical supervision are very important, but you let them go during a fiscal crisis, staff will easily conclude that these approaches are not important to you. They will all just seem like one of those "here today and gone tomorrow" programs that staff prefer not to be burdened with. If you are running programs that are important to you and they constitute the right thing to do, then you must stand by them.

Another aspect of perception involves legislative or fiscal bureau oversight. Policymakers will watch very closely to see what is really important to you, and they will remember these priorities in future budget cycles. One hard lesson all administrators learn over the years is that promise-makers cannot always deliver on their promises. It's like the police detective who promises the criminal he can go home after giving a statement, only to come back and blame the lieutenant for over-riding him. The same can happen with budgets. The world is full of unkept promises.

Take Positive Steps

The previous comments about what to look out for are good starting points for avoiding budgetcide. Simply turn them into positive action steps:

- Avoid getting trapped into political downsizing.

- Do not give up your own strategies to manage internally. If you showed items as fees at the beginning of the fiscal year, they may be taken as budget offsets now. If you hold them close to the vest to manage your budget situation during the year, you will later look like a good fiscal manager.

- Be mindful of what you want others to perceive as critical programming for your department. If you don't think these programs are critical now, they probably won't be seen as critical later.

- Always manage alarming information effectively, and always provide consistent, accurate, and straightforward information. Do not provide inaccurate information to your staff, or the staff's confidence in your ability to manage will be eroded. It is frequently the case that those making decisions at other levels of fiscal management unintentionally provide you with misinformation and then correct it later. It is always best to sit on information for a day or two until the dust settles. When you are sure it is accurate, it can be disseminated to staff. It is critical that staff do not perceive a vacillating administrator when their jobs may be on the line.

What are some strategies to manage budget cuts that can help you maintain operations that are consistent with the values and beliefs of your department? Here are a few:

- Increase revenues by raising costs for services or increasing fees. There are probably many things that you have never charged for that you could. The possibilities include fees for community service, pretrial or pre-sentence investigation services, certain course offerings, drug testing, or enhanced treatment or supervision of sex offenders.

- Cut the cost of treatment contracts. This can be done in a number of ways. You could use the contract money to keep staff employed and assign them to work with a special offender group. It is also possible that the treatment agencies will be willing to cut their contract amounts (even by half) to continue a valued working relationship.

- Manage the vacancy factor, but be careful you do not lose critical positions.

- Delay large purchases, especially capital items such as vehicles.

- If you have the ability, use any year-end savings to buy contract services, urinalysis supplies, or other things for next year. This approach can help offset next year's budget.

- If you can pay any of next year's costs now, do so rather than revert the money at the end of the fiscal year. Such costs might include rent payments, contracts for equipment such as computers, or any other type of sinking fund. This approach will provide a cushion for the next fiscal year.

It is worth stating again that anything you can do to offset your fiscal liability after your budget has been set will allow you to maintain operations that are consistent with the values and beliefs of your department and will avoid (or minimize) the need to furlough, lay off, or terminate staff.

That brings us to another key point: Do everything in your power to retain the hard-working staff who have done their best to help weather the storm. If you ever had a thought of being remembered as an effective leader, this is your big chance. Let staff know that letting them go is not a choice you want to make. The only personal comment I will make in this article is that I have never (through all the worst of times over 30 years) furloughed, laid off, or terminated staff. I believe they are the best resource we have.

Managing Vacant Positions

Another issue that needs attention is how to manage vacant positions and point the agency toward recovery. To simply allow vacant positions to sit without managing them is a serious mistake when there are good strategies for doing otherwise.

- Know how long you are allowed to keep positions vacant before someone thinks they are not needed and wants to eliminate them altogether. If the answer is 6 months or a year, plan accordingly.

- Can you make a paper move to show these positions as funded by some other income source besides general fund dollars? Grants, contracts from other agencies, and new revenues from increased fees are some options.

- Practice first in, first out. A position that has been vacant the longest is the one you should reactivate. Leave the just-vacated position open. That way you can keep all FTEs on the books for a longer period of time.

- As you practice the above, reclassify all positions to "mission critical" positions as you fill them (i.e., reclassify a volunteer coordinator to a probation officer). This accomplishes two things. First, it will not be as tempting for someone reviewing your budget to want to eliminate "mission critical" positions. Second, an agency with vacant "mission critical" positions will get refunded more quickly than one with vacant positions that are not "mission critical." Here is a likely scenario: A volunteer coordinator position has been vacant 11 months. Think first in, first out and reclassify this position (ID number and all) as a probation officer and fill the position to replace a probation officer position just vacated. The probation officer position just vacated (ID number and all) is your new "mission critical" vacancy.

Positioning for Recovery

In positioning your agency for recovery, be aware of options you may have for freeing current or future revenues.

Refinance. If you have been paying on the purchase of large capital items, especially buildings or property, it might be a good time to take advantage of lower interest rates and refinance. Some advantages include:

- Refinancing should lower your monthly or yearly payments and allow you to budget the same amount to meet other shortfalls.

- By refinancing, you may extend the life of the purchase agreement. That may be a benefit. It is possible that if the balance is paid during difficult fiscal times, the dollars that were dedicated to the payment would be reduced in a subsequent budget. If the same were true in healthy fiscal times, you quite likely would be allowed to keep that money for new capital projects or to develop new treatment options.

- Any expense that has the potential to end during a fiscal crisis will be seen as an easy place to get budget cuts.

It is hard for anyone to disagree with saving the taxpayers money, so your chances of getting approval to refinance should be very good. The worst-case

scenario is to make your last payment this year and then have those who control your purse strings decide that those funds would make a good start on next year's budget cuts.

Create a non-profit foundation. Another suggestion is to create your own private, non-profit foundation, if your state allows you to do so. This approach is generally easier in states where probation is not under the courts, but it can also be done in other states through special legislation. Advantages include:

- The possibilities to seek other grant opportunities are greater. You can have your own public/private partnership.
- You can contract with the foundation to provide services at lower costs than some current providers charge.
- The foundation may provide your department with grants. You can develop new revenue streams and ventures that realize revenues.
- Your own employees, who can't volunteer or work additional part-time hours for the department because of FLSA, can do so for a private foundation.
- You can also rehire just-retired public workers immediately.

In addition, the foundation can operate special programs like batterers education, cognitive programming, cultural specific programs, and others at a lower cost than other non-profits because it has a lower or no-profit margin and the best-qualified personnel. I practice what I preach here; our Community Corrections Improvement Association is now 11 years old.

In many communities there are already in place "community foundations" linked by a national association. Short of starting your own foundation, you may want to approach your local community foundation to see if it would help support your needs.

Seek support from another non-profit agency. Another option is to find another friendly non-profit that would assist with your needs. In some instances, several non-profits that normally serve offenders and their families have created umbrella partnerships with public agencies such as probation or community colleges to create "Partners in Accountability." These become a great vehicle for developing a public/private venture to deliver holistic or wrap-around services.

Political Realities Are Key

This has been just a quick study in some strategies to manage your budget during difficult fiscal times. As we all know, there is more to this problem than can be covered in such an article. In conclusion, remember the importance of understanding the politics of managing the budget:

- Do not make managing the budget look too easy. If you can cut certain areas of the budget, make it hurt. If you can raise additional revenues, make it difficult.

- Do not reveal all your strategies at the onset. Keep your cards close to the vest. If you present these options too soon, they may just offset additional budget cuts.

- Avoid the appearance of fluff. Do not keep positions that are not "mission critical" if other departments are down to the bare bones.

- Protect your staff. Manage vacancies effectively (first in, first out) and keep them as "mission critical."

- Maintain the values and beliefs of your department when the chips are down.

- Remember that some options are too hard for policy-makers to cope with. For example, closing residential facilities may have too much impact on public safety or prison crowding. If you can demonstrate that is the only way to meet your budget, you may be spared some cuts.

- Always think of how to position your department to recover in the next year or two. There will be better days ahead. Those who can demonstrate the most critical needs will get priority funding.

- Manage the flow of information to staff so that only accurate information gets to them. Misinformation can have a devastating impact on morale. It can erode confidence in management.

- Watch the unintended messages you send to community partners. If you have asked them to reduce contracts during this critical time, be frugal in other matters as well. Ask staff to be mindful of what they say.

- If you are managing by increasing revenues, expect to see future budget offsets or be able to demonstrate why this is only an effective interim step.

By the way, I do have other strategies, but I would never write them down where someone who controls my budget would see them. If you have a need, call me! ■

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How to Achieve More with Less: Managing Probation When Facing a Reduction in Resources

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Any discussion of how an agency responds to cutbacks and shortfalls in its operating budget can best be understood within the context of its organizational structure and its articulated vision and mission. In Connecticut, the Judicial Branch operates adult and juvenile probation services as part of a statewide unified system. The Judicial Branch's Court Support Services Division (CSSD), which was established in 1999, is responsible for the day-to-day management of all probation services.

From July 1992 to July 1999, the number of adult probation cases in Connecticut increased by approximately 20%, while over the same period of time, the number of adult probation staff decreased by 15%. After the creation of the CSSD, a strategic planning process was initiated that resulted in the state legislature establishing 60 additional adult probation officer positions. In addition, 25 new juvenile probation officer positions were created through a federal grant. At present, there are 300 adult probation officers and 135 juvenile probation officers in Connecticut, and there are approximately 48,000 adults and 2,700 juveniles under probation supervision.

Since the formation of the CSSD, both adult and juvenile probation services have undergone extensive study and review. Relying heavily on the latest empirical research on the effectiveness of correctional treatment interventions, we are confident of the following evidence-based conclusions concerning crime causation and treatment:

- **Recidivism can be predicted.** Offender recidivism is predictable, and it can be reduced by using validated risk assessments to identify and address "criminogenic needs"—those needs that we know lead to or cause crime and delinquency.

- **Risk factors for re-offending can be identified.** Offender assessment instruments that identify criminogenic needs are inextricably linked to offender rehabilitation and public protection.

- **Recidivism can be reduced.** If an offender's criminogenic needs are addressed and positively changed, he or she will be significantly less likely to recidivate.

Connecticut's Probation Risk Reduction Program

As a result of this review, the Judicial Branch in Connecticut is developing a comprehensive risk reduction program for juvenile and adult probation. This program comprises four elements that will ensure continuous improvement of CSSD services to the Connecticut courts and communities.

1) Risk/needs assessment and classification system—CSSD has identified and implemented new risk/needs assessment tools for adult and juvenile probation, along with corresponding probationer classification and supervision standards. Findings from these instruments will provide critical information that will help the Judicial Branch increase public safety by improving program services that can reduce recidivism for both adult and juvenile probationers.

2) Center for Best Practices—CSSD has recently established a Center for Best Practices. The purpose of the Center is threefold:

- Evaluation of evidence-based research concerning effective correctional programs.
- Collaboration with private, non-profit (CSSD-funded) agencies to determine how their programs and services can best respond to client and community needs.
- Development and implementation of standardized program models and treatment interventions that incorporate the principles of effective correctional programs.

3) Community-based probation—CSSD is committed to the statewide development of community-based probation. Probation officers will be working in the community in close collaboration with community organizations, schools, the courts, social service agencies, program providers, and law enforcement agencies.

4) Three-year longitudinal study of adult and juvenile clients—CSSD has contracted with a private consulting firm to evaluate the programming initiatives that will result from the Probation Risk Reduction Program.

The principles of the Probation Risk Reduction Program are to supervise and treat the offenders under probation supervision according to the risk they pose to public safety; to match the degree or level of supervision and treatment to their level of risk; to identify appropriate targets of evidence-based rehabilitative programming that addresses the offender's assessed criminogenic needs; and to employ modes of treatment interventions that are consistent with the ability and developmental level of the offender.

Connecticut's Probation Risk Reduction Program is being developed through the hard work and commitment of CSSD managers and line staff. It is our shared

vision that, when fully operational, adult and juvenile probation in the state of Connecticut will reflect the following:

- ♦ A validated assessment and classification system will provide probation officers with the ability to adjust the level of supervision and treatment to the risk and needs of each probationer.

- ♦ Empirically supported treatment services and programs will be available to address the identified criminogenic needs of offenders under supervision, reducing the probability of future criminal behavior.

- ♦ Probation officers and service providers will be skilled in Motivational Interviewing and will use the skills when interacting with clients and peers.

- ♦ Probation officers will be trained in cognitive-behavioral interventions and will be conducting treatment groups for targeted offenders under supervision.

- ♦ Teams of probation officers will be assigned geographically to serve specific neighborhoods and communities.

- ♦ Probation teams will be working in collaboration with each other and will develop partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, service providers, and community institutions and associations.

- ♦ An automated case management information system will be in place that is linked to law enforcement agencies and service providers.

- ♦ A comprehensive quality assurance and evaluation system will be in place to improve supervision and treatment services.

Deploying Resources Within the Context of Risk Reduction

Often when it is projected that a state or county is going to be facing budgetary shortfalls, a freeze is placed on hiring, and staff vacancies cannot be filled. When this occurs, agency administrators need to clearly articulate, within the context of the agency mission, how they will respond to the freeze and how they will distribute the inevitable increase in staff workloads.

The CSSD is currently faced with a hiring freeze as well as a reduction in our overall operating budget. As a result, what we are communicating to elected officials, other state agencies, our staff, and the community is that we will deploy our available probation resources in accordance with the principles of our Probation Risk Reduction Program. Our staff will allocate their time and effort to probationers who have been assessed as having the highest probability of engaging in further criminal activities. Therefore, they will prioritize their supervision efforts using established supervision standards based on the client's assessed risk, from

highest to lowest. Although this may result in more probationers having minimal or no face-to-face contact with their probation officer, during a period of diminishing resources it is a responsible public safety approach.

In a time of declining resources, an agency needs to state its priorities and be honest about what it can and cannot do. We need to be careful not to deceive ourselves or the community into believing that we will continue to provide the same level of service as before. If a reduction in privately contracted treatment resources becomes necessary, offenders will continue to be placed in available services based on their level of risk and need. The CSSD is committed to providing services consistent with what the current research supports and to conduct agency practice in a manner that is accountable. It is therefore our intention to make any future reductions in programmatic resources based on our Center for Best Practices' evaluative data on "what works."

Workload Equalization

With the prospect of more offenders being placed on probation with fewer staff, we recognize the importance of equalizing our probation officers' workloads—not caseloads. Staff are often willing to do more when they believe that the distribution of work is fair and the "pain" is being equally shared. Probation officers in Connecticut are assigned cases geographically based on an offender's level of risk. Work units have been established for each risk level, and workloads are balanced among officers as much as possible. Each officer's work units are calculated monthly and available to all probation staff, thus making workload equalization visible for everyone to monitor.

This process takes on an added importance during times of staff shortages. Again, if staff believe that they are being treated fairly and if the agency makes them feel important and cared about, they will usually rise to the occasion and do their part to respond to a cutback in resources.

Managing Staff in a Period of Budget Cutbacks

Agency employees want administrators to recognize their work as important, and they want to know that the agency cares about them. It becomes even more important for administrators to communicate their appreciation when operating budgets are decreasing, the number of clients is increasing, and employees are asked to do more with less. It is essential for administrators to communicate this positive message to staff through what they say and, even more importantly, to demonstrate their commitment to staff by what they do.

One way to let staff know that they are the agency's most valuable resource is to invest in their own growth and development by not cutting staff training programs during difficult economic times. The message that is sent to staff about their importance will be as valuable as the training itself. It is also important not to reduce or to fail to maintain staff safety equipment; to do so would send all the wrong messages to staff at a time when their workload is likely to increase.

Keeping a Budget Crisis From Becoming a Personnel Crisis

When probation officers' workloads become unmanageable, or are believed to be unmanageable, staff attitude and performance can deteriorate. Staff can feel so overwhelmed that they become powerless and start to lose faith in the purpose of what they are doing. In reality, they may not be working harder, but they believe that they are putting more into their work than they are receiving in return. The personal gratification and self-fulfillment that they once felt become a faint memory of their "good old days." They begin to believe that the job has become so impossible that they cannot do it—and so they stop trying to do it. What was a budget crisis becomes a personnel crisis that over time can negatively affect the organizational culture.

When this occurs, the agency's attempts to provide direction and re-establish staff accountability are viewed as both unrealistic and uncaring. Having traveled down this road before in my career, I am hopeful that the straightforward and honest approach we are taking in response to having to manage with fewer resources will prevent this from happening in our agency.

In the final analysis, it is often not what we do but rather how we do it that determines whether we succeed or fail. When we face a potential budget crisis, it is a time for action. We should not circle the wagons but charge ahead. It is not a time to require less, it is a time to require more. It is also an opportunity to reaffirm what is important, what our values are, and what we believe in. It is a time to stand up and be counted, to move forward with conviction and determination to achieve the agency's vision and mission. ■

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Georgia's Experience with Budget Cuts: The Value of Planning

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The state of Georgia enjoyed dramatic growth during the 1990s, propelled in part by tourism and preparations for the 1996 Olympic Games. The state's population blossomed by 26%, an increase of over 1.7 million people. Georgia's correctional system also experienced unprecedented growth during the 1990s as a result of get-tough sentencing laws and changes in parole policy that restricted releases for many serious offenders.

Despite the booming economy and increasing tax revenues, the Georgia Parole Board received little in the way of funding increases during the entire decade. The vast majority of new tax revenues were devoted to improving teacher salaries and other educational improvements. The governor was committed to raising the standing of Georgia's educational system, whose students had remained near the bottom in standardized test scores.

In 1991, using existing but unfilled positions, the parole board established an in-house drug counseling program. However, a move to privatize state services required the board to disband the program in 1995. Forty-three positions were thus abolished, but the agency was able to retain almost $1 million in personnel funds to contract for counseling services. This money would later play a role in budget cuts.

A History of Working Under Lean Budgets

The State Board of Pardons and Paroles is a relatively small agency under the executive branch. The board has sole responsibility for making all clemency decisions, including commutations of death sentences. The agency also supervises inmates released by the board to the community. Approximately 500 of the agency's 810 employees work in 60 field offices supervising 21,000 offenders. The agency's original budget for FY 2002 was $54 million.

The parole board's budget had changed little over the last decade except to fund salary increases approved for all state employees. Despite lean budgets, several factors helped the board thrive.

- Senior managers were very knowledgeable about the details of the agency's budget as a result of the justification requirement under the state's "zero-based budget" process.

- The agency's budget director was highly skilled at winning legislative approvals to make end-of-the-year transfers of funds, which provided the seed money for establishing many of the agency's important programs.

- The board's strategic planning process identified projects, subsequently funded with year-end money, that continue to have a far-reaching impact on agency efficiency.

These factors enabled the board to weather the 2.5% reduction in the FY 2002 budget and an original 5% cut in the budget for FY 2003. This reduction was followed by cuts totalling an additional 3%.

Budget Priorities Established Through Strategic Plans

The parole board prepared its first strategic plan in 1993 and has updated the plan annually. Strategic goals focusing on electronic communication and case management have given the agency methods to help manage budget cuts.

The goal to improve communication led to the development of the agency's wide area network (WAN), a computer system that electronically connects each of the board's work sites. With the network in place, e-mail was implemented, improving communication and drastically reducing postage costs. In addition, the thousands of reports created each month by field investigators, which had previously been printed and mailed in bulk, could be sent electronically. The WAN provided the backbone for a computerized case management system, which was developed for parole officers in 1998 to document supervision activities and more effectively track and analyze outcomes. Using this system, known as FLOID (Field Log of Interaction Data), a parole officer has the entire caseload on a laptop computer, which facilitates working "untethered" from the parole office.

Parole officers can use the laptop to dial in on any phone line and connect to a central computer that sends new information to the officer's computer and receives information collected by the officer. This system provides managers with continuous access to the parole officer's electronic case files, allows quick two-way comments via e-mail, and eliminates the cumbersome practice of paper documentation in bulky three-ring binders.

The development of electronic communication and case management systems laid the groundwork for other efficiency improvements and generated ideas among staff that are being adopted as the agency copes with budget cuts. The board's strategic plans have also included goals to improve efficiency in parole decision-making and to broaden the range of options for managing offenders in the community.

Cutting an Already Tight Budget . . . Ask Staff

Declining revenues in the fall of 2001 forced Governor Roy E. Barnes to ask every state agency for a 2.5% budget reduction. For the parole board this amount was almost $1 million. The board's chairman quickly made it clear to all

employees that reductions would not include layoffs, although 82% of the agency budget was in personnel services costs. He also insisted that cuts sacrificing the quality of supervision would be a last resort. There was very little that could be eliminated.

The Board of Pardons and Paroles has broad flexibility to manage its budget, and state law does not permit agencies to enter into contracts with terms longer than 1 year. Since Georgia is not a collective bargaining state, the board is also not required to negotiate with unions on salary or layoffs.

Staff at all levels throughout the agency were encouraged to offer ideas on the most effective ways to reduce the budget. With the budget year well under way, many expenditures had already been made or were contractually committed. The final recommendations to the board included freezing 41 vacant staff positions. The agency continued to employ a strategic approach of careful monitoring to determine which positions to fill so that field caseloads remained balanced and manageable, and clemency processes continued to flow smoothly.

The agency renegotiated rental agreements at many field offices, reduced office supply budgets, deferred the purchase of some equipment and motor vehicles, and froze uncommitted funds under the contract budget line. Half of the budget savings for FY 2002, a total of $500,000 over 6 months, came in the form of a $10 increase (doubling the fee to $20) in the monthly parole supervision fee, which is set by the board. This increase was recommended after a comparison study revealed that Georgia's fee was one of the lowest in the nation.

Role of Strategic Planning

The projects that had been identified and completed through years of strategic planning played a significant role in enabling the agency to make budget cuts. Although caseloads will increase, the negative effect of staff losses will be largely mitigated by improved operational efficiency. The case management system has vastly improved supervision practices.

Statistical reports allow staff to quickly identify parolees who are unemployed, not attending programs, or testing positive for drugs. Parole officers spend their time on high-risk cases. Supervision reports, warrants, investigative reports, and routine memos numbering in the hundreds each day are a small part of the agency's business that is now created and delivered electronically. These reports previously had been printed, copied, placed in envelopes, and mailed each day from every agency work site.

Parolee supervision summary reports that previously required hours to produce by hand are now generated automatically, using data created by parole officers in the case management system. A query tool known as "Thelmalou" allows parole officers and managers to run, within seconds, hundreds of reports that provide data detailing supervision activities.

The technology infrastructure in place has allowed for the conversion of other processes with only marginal increases in maintenance costs. Employees must submit a request for reimbursement if they use personal vehicles for work or incur other business travel expenses. Hundreds of these travel reimbursement requests are submitted by parole officers each month. An electronic travel reimbursement application has now been implemented that requires no additional time to complete but saves an enormous amount of time in the agency's fiscal unit, where travel expenses are processed. The submission process includes a scan for math errors and omissions before the form is sent electronically to the manager for approval. Expense payments are then sent electronically and automatically deposited in the employee's bank account.

Employees' pay checks are also deposited electronically, and pay stubs were recently converted to an electronic process, saving time in sorting and hand delivery. Management of the agency's fleet of 160 vehicles has been streamlined through conversion to a computer application.

FY 2003 . . . Additional Cuts

The board originally had to absorb a 5% budget reduction of $2.6 million for FY 2003. Declining revenues have increased that total by 3%. Under these reductions, staff have played an integral role in determining where savings will be achieved. Almost 40% of the savings will be met not through cutting, but through a continuation of the $10 increase in the parole supervision fee, raising a total of $1 million in new state revenue, which will go directly into the state's general fund.

Enhancing supervision, a goal in the first strategic plan, led to the implementation of electronic monitoring (EM). Along with agency-funded EM, the agency experimented with offender-funded EM. For FY 2003, the board contracted to move the entire EM sanction to an offender-paid system, eliminating the $700,000 expense of state-funded EM. The financial burden offender-funded EM places on parolees, many of whom are employed in low-wage jobs, has recently prompted the board to rethink this strategy.

Other reductions will be made in supplies and in purchases of new vehicles and equipment. These cuts will result in additional down time for repairs, which will have an impact on productivity. However, since the agency pays a per-mile fee for maintenance, the vehicle operational budget will not increase.

Other savings include reductions in real estate rental realized in contracts renegotiated for FY 2002 that will carry over to FY 2003. Many contracts for cleaning of field offices will be ended and replaced with work by parolees, who will clean the offices as community service. This cost savings measure is already being questioned as agency field staff report spending inordinate amounts of time monitoring parolee workers. Three parole offices have been consolidated. Computers that allow field staff to work independently of the parole office may allow for

additional consolidation if more budget reductions are required. The staff positions left vacant in FY 2002 will remain in place for FY 2003.

Much of the agency's services for offender drug counseling is obtained through contracts with local providers. Inasmuch as this budget item is also being reduced, it will result in an immediate and negative impact on the ability of parole officers to effectively address this criminogenic factor. The board is therefore seeking grant funding to fill this gap. Fortunately, the agency's strategic process and research on evidence-based supervision practices led to the training of many parole officers as facilitators for a highly effective thinking skills program. The program is delivered by parole officers as part of their supervision practice to targeted groups of 10 to 12 parolees.

Contract money for research and analysis has also been reduced substantially, drastically slowing work on several projects. Fortunately, agency staff can temporarily assume some of the project work. The agency's training budget will receive cuts in trainee travel expenses. This reduction is being reached by eliminating one large annual agency training function. The board's field division, however, is accredited by the American Correctional Association, which requires 40 hours of staff training each year. In order to comply with this requirement, trainers will travel to field offices to deliver training. The agency is also investigating how the communications infrastructure can be used to deliver computer-based training to parole officers.

Reaching a Limit

Cutting budgets is never easy, but the process has brought agency staff closer together to preserve the integrity of the vital work of changing offender behavior through the application of evidence-based strategies and practices. Working with a bare-bones level of resources creates additional stress in a profession that is already stress-filled. The board is deeply concerned that morale and effectiveness will begin to suffer if additional reductions are mandated.

Reductions in other agency budgets also affect the Board of Pardons and Paroles. Georgia's drug treatment system is cutting its budget, which was already inadequate under normal circumstances. Research documenting "what works" is clear. If community corrections is not able to deliver the supervision and programming necessary to change offenders' behavior, high-risk offenders will assuredly cycle back into the system, increasing correctional costs far more than the temporary savings from today's budgets cuts. ■

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Going Beyond "Administrative Efficiency": The Budget Crisis in the State of Washington

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The state of Washington has a biennial budget process. FY02 was an "off" year for the biennial budget, but as in other states due to a declining economy accelerated by the events of September 11, Washington lawmakers were faced with a revenue stream that did not match their planned expenditure assumptions. The problem appeared to be in the $700 million range, but it grew to a $1.5 billion shortfall by the time the legislature began its session.

The state's budget problem was exacerbated by the events of September 11, but there were other factors at play as well. Prison and community corrections caseloads were rising at levels beyond previous budget assumptions, and medical costs were increasing for all state agencies. The budget problem would have to be faced in this off-year session if the books were to balance by the end of the biennium.

The Washington State Department of Corrections (WDOC) is an integrated agency, responsible for both of the primary correctional functions, prisons and community corrections. Our total budget for FY02 was just over $0.5 billion.

In the face of the overall state budget crisis, all general fund state agencies were asked to develop plans for a 15% across-the-board cut. For the WDOC, the target amount for the reduction exercise was $78.8 million.

Implementing Efficiencies Not Enough

Like many other jurisdictions, the WDOC has been through years of identifying administrative efficiencies when budget reduction time rolled around. We have found those efficiencies and implemented them, sometimes with painful results as we tried to "do more with less." This time, we knew we could not come up with nearly $79 million in efficiencies. We had been to that well one too many times before. We would have to take a different approach.

The department's extended executive management team met, discussed, and articulated our core services. We decided that whatever we proposed, those core services would have to remain intact, with sufficient resources to continue to perform them at a level consistent with good business practices. We invited the governor's senior policy advisor and budget advisor for corrections to join us in these discussions, and they did. We all believed that we could not in good conscience propose that such a whopping budget reduction be taken in administrative efficiencies alone. In order to achieve a nearly $79 million reduction, fundamental service delivery would have to change.

Guiding Principles

As a result of this exercise the WDOC adopted four principles to help guide our development of a plan to reach our targeted budget reduction:

- A priority be given to incarceration of violent offenders in safe and secure environments;
- A priority be given to the management of high-risk offenders in institutions and in the community;
- A priority be given to evidence-based interventions that mitigate the risk of re-offense; and
- Reductions do not shift the burden of incarceration or supervision to local government.

After we went through the process of brainstorming ideas to consider for possible budget reductions, we viewed each suggestion through the lens of these four principles to determine whether or not the idea would remain on the table for consideration. Because our ideas often addressed the "size of the pie" the agency would be expected to serve, our (very patient) budget staff went through innumerable calculations for us as we debated, refined, and worked the possibilities.

In the end, our plan fell into three categories—1) administrative efficiencies; 2) changes in the number of offenders the state would incarcerate; and 3) changes in the number of offenders we would supervise in the community.

Administrative Efficiencies. The final proposal for administrative efficiency totaled $4 million in reductions and encompassed the following areas:

- Changing prison food service staffing levels;
- Eliminating a prison mental health contract;
- Consolidating prison education contracts from 12 to 1;
- Changing the staffing in our work release facilities to allow for more privatization;
- Reducing the number of pre-sentence investigations to only those required by law; and
- Reducing staff training (one of our worst ideas, but necessary to achieve the $79 million total).

Changes in Number of Incarcerated Offenders. To reduce the number of offenders the state incarcerates, we proposed a variety of choices for lawmakers to consider, totaling just over $50 million in annual budget reductions. These options included:

- Reducing the sentence length of certain non-violent offenses by changing the state's determinate sentencing grid;
- Changing the "good time" law to increase what could be earned by non-violent offenders from 33.3% to 50%; and
- Releasing early from prison certain low-risk offenders.

If these ideas were adopted, the prison ADP would drop by nearly 2,000 offenders.

Community Corrections Changes. For community corrections, we proposed reducing the number of offenders by redefining who the agency would supervise, for a savings of approximately $24 million. In order of priority, we suggested eliminating community supervision for:

- Monetary-only offenders;
- Low-risk offenders;
- Medium-low-risk offenders; and
- Any offenders who had not been to prison (in other words, the elimination of probation).

It was this last proposal that most concerned us, because it clearly violated our principle of continuing to provide supervision of high-risk offenders in the community. As we prioritized our total, this item was clearly our last choice (right after our other stupid idea of reducing training) and was clearly highlighted as in violation of the principles we used to guide this overall activity. Nevertheless, we could find no other way to achieve our targeted total but to carry this idea forward.

The result was not a pretty list by any means, but at least it was one that carried some internal logic and would highlight for the policymakers the tough choices they would have to make if they actually expected to achieve the desired reduction in the state's corrections budget.

What Actually Happened

In the end, much of the above did not even make it into the governor's budget proposal. However, the process we went through was so transparent (including the involvement of staff from the governor's office) that our legislative oversight committees were very aware of the kind of decisions that would have to be made

to trim $79 million from the WDOC's budget. I believe that the exercise we went through and the public discussions that ensued were important in creating an understanding of the dire straits of the state's budget. Our approach of re-articulating our core services and then presenting how they might be modified on the basis of risk created the opportunity for public officials and the public to understand better what we are asked to do.

I recall going to a hearing in December 2001, just before our legislative session was to commence, to explain to the Senate Law and Justice Committee what it would mean for us to take $79 million worth of reductions. Going into the hearing I did not know what to expect. Would we be blasted for even suggesting that we must reduce the "size of the pie"? Would the anti-government forces find a way to blame us bureaucrats for the state's budget problem?

I am happy to say nothing of the kind happened. From that first opening hearing of the session, legislators were, for the most part, genuinely and sincerely focused on the true nature of the problem and understood that more "efficiencies" were not going to be the answer.

That is not to say the pressure to continue to find such "efficiencies" has gone or will be going away any time soon. The powerful chair of one of our Senate oversight committees proposed during the last session that ALL employees of the department either carry a portion of a caseload or work as a correctional officer. In working with the senator we were successful in explaining that not much of a meaningful budget reduction would be achieved if such a proposal were implemented, but his idea was a strong statement about where the agency priorities need to be. I would not be surprised to see a related line of thought pursued in the next session.

Few Sentencing Changes Adopted

In the end, the agency received only about a $7 million budget reduction. Most of the administrative efficiency ideas for cuts were taken, but very few of the sentencing changes were adopted. There was some reduction in drug sentences that included a trade-off for more community treatment in exchange for less incarceration. We believe this is good public policy. We hope that it will chart the course for discussions about a more rational approach to criminal sentencing in the future. It is clear that the politics of appearing soft on crime (even if the aim is to be "smart") remain a difficult challenge for most elected officials.

Aside from that $7 million reduction, the final budget that passed the legislature actually contained an increase in the agency's budget. An increase to the prison population was funded, as was the increased caseload in community corrections funding. However, the growth in the community corrections population required more than 100 new positions in order to keep pace with the forecasted growth in community corrections.

The state of Washington is very lucky that over the years we have developed, with our budget writers, agreed-upon formulas that guide our funding levels, whether the forecasts go up or down. Should those formulas and agreements be abandoned at some point in the face of mounting budget pressure, it will be a sign of how bad things have gotten. As it stands today, though, we take these increases in budget in such difficult times to be an affirmation and vote of confidence by our elected officials—a sign that the citizens of the state of Washington value the work done by our staff.

What's Ahead

As I write this article, we prepare for another round of cuts. We expect the same kind of revenue shortfall to impact the development of our FY 04-05 biennial budget and have already begun the brainstorming process. We have reaffirmed that the four principles we used the last time around will guide us again.

The truly difficult choices are left to the elected officials. Confronted with the need to make cuts somewhere within a government that has already plucked the low-hanging fruit of "administrative efficiency," there are no easy choices. The needs of children, the poor, the elderly, and those who cannot help themselves are pitted against the ever-increasing demand for public safety. It is our difficult assignment to articulate the public value of the services we provide, recognizing the competition that exists for a resource base that continues to shrink. ■

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The Cook County Adult Probation Department Responds to a Reduced Budget

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Operating under the Office of the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, the Cook County Adult Probation Department (CCAPD) administers a wide range of programs covering both standard and specialized probation supervision as well as pretrial services. Most department resources are dedicated to probation supervision. The department receives an average of nearly 20,000 new probation cases each year and has an active caseload of about 32,000 probationers, 94% of whom have been sentenced for felony offenses. Approximately 90% of probationers are assigned to standard supervision, while 10% are in specialized programs designed for specific offender populations. The average standard probation caseload is 130 probationers, and caseloads in specialized programs range from 35 to 80. The department also supervises 8,000 pretrial defendants annually and completes over 5,000 presentence investigations each year. Working out of 17 office locations, CCAPD has approximately 800 employees (about 500 of whom are probation officers) and an annual budget of $43.7 million.

This year, for the first time in recent history, CCAPD's budget was reduced. Although the budget reductions being experienced by CCAPD may not be as severe as those facing other departments, they are nonetheless affecting operations. To continue to provide meaningful services in this environment, the department is adjusting strategic plan goals and intends to more vigorously pursue alternate sources of funding.

Overview of Budget Cuts

The department's FY2002 budget was almost $750,000, or 1.7%, less than what was allocated for FY2001. However, from 1997 through 2001, CCAPD's budget rose an average of 5.4% annually. These increases were necessary to merely maintain the department's status quo by meeting personnel costs associated with anniversary pay increases, cost of living increases, and health benefits. No new positions were acquired nor were operational changes made that carried major fiscal implications. In this context, the 1.7% decrease for FY2002 assumes an even greater impact.

In addition to the reduced FY2002 budget, CCAPD will be facing a decrease in state subsidies that pay for 36% ($12.6 million) of the department's personnel appropriations. Subsidies are being reduced by 11% ($1.4 million), which represents another 3% of the total budget and 4% of personnel costs. Probation departments throughout Illinois will be facing similar reductions in state subsidies.

Effect of Budget Cuts

These cutbacks are affecting CCAPD operations, and they may be just the beginning of what could be a long-term trend in the reduction of services throughout the county and state. The areas of operations to be most affected by this initial round of cuts include staffing, services for probationers, and training.

Staffing. The anticipated decrease in state subsidies will prohibit the department from filling a considerable number of vacancies at all levels for an indefinite period of time. Because of this, workloads are increasing, with specialized programs being hardest hit. It is becoming more difficult to maintain the smaller caseloads that are an essential component of programs that target high-risk populations such as sex offenders, perpetrators of domestic violence, offenders with serious mental illnesses, and chronic substance abusers. Establishing administrative caseloads so that resources can focus on "the more serious offenders" is not a consideration because 94% of probationers supervised by CCAPD are felons, and most have had previous involvement in the criminal justice system.

The department is trying to balance difficult choices and, where possible, address the consequences of the decisions that are made. For example, the sex offender unit does not have the capacity to handle all sex offenders in the department. Even with established eligibility criteria, there are still too many cases department-wide. Offenders not in the unit are therefore being assigned to a select group of standard caseload officers who have received specialized training. These offenders are also being supervised at the highest level within the guidelines of standard probation. Domestic violence cases are being handled in a similar matter. This is enabling the department to keep the integrity of these specialized units while providing a degree of enhanced supervision to offenders who are not in the units. This structure is also conducive to research. The department hopes to compare outcomes of similar populations of those who are receiving specialized supervision and those who are not. Findings could be an important tool for leveraging more funds to support the specialized programs, or they could indicate the need to restructure programs.

Services for probationers. A second and very serious effect of budget cuts is reduced access to services for probationers. Decreased funding within CCAPD as well as in other government and service agencies throughout the city, county, and state will make it even more difficult for probationers to access mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, and educational/vocational programs. The need for these services is higher among offenders than in the general population, and research has shown that these types of services are critical to the rehabilitation process, as monitoring strategies alone cannot bring about meaningful change in offenders' behavior.

In CCAPD, budget cuts are placing further restrictions on the number and size of contracts the department has with outside agencies that provide services for probationers. The department must now use probation fees to pay for services previously funded largely through the department's budget. Hence, to continue

the same level of services, CCAPD will have to substantially increase the collection of probation fees. With 57% of those supervised having annual incomes of less than $10,000, it will be challenging to ensure that probationers receive necessary services such as sex offender treatment, domestic violence counseling, substance abuse treatment, and educational/vocational services.

Training. A third area affected by budget cuts that could impact operations is staff training. The department's training budget was reduced by 24% in FY2002. To try to offset this, CCAPD will work more closely with other criminal justice and social service agencies within and outside the county to conduct joint training sessions. Sharing training costs with other agencies that have similar needs makes sense in any climate, but it has become particularly important given the current economic circumstances. The department will also be looking to develop and better utilize in-house trainers.

Other Changes

To meet the challenges presented by budget constraints, CCAPD is also shifting the focus of department goals. For the most part, CCAPD will shift from creating new programs and services to increasing accountability and efficiency within existing programs, including doing a better job of defining and tracking outcomes. Having research that shows the positive effects of our work can be an important tool for leveraging funds. Likewise, programs having minimal positive effects must be identified and either redesigned or discontinued. Also, consistent with the "Broken Windows" model of probation, the department will establish more partnerships in the community to collaboratively address the many challenges of supervising probationers and of helping them make positive changes in their lives.

The few new programmatic initiatives that are being pursued will be planned so that no additional resources are needed. One example in CCAPD is the female caseload pilot program called POWER (Promotion of Women through Education and Resources). Officers in this unit will not have reduced caseloads, but they will receive special training and will run peer-support groups that will replace individual face-to-face contacts with an officer every other month. By having this structured group reporting, which will have educational and social support components, the department hopes to improve the quality and effectiveness of officer interactions without spending additional money. The unit will also seek assistance from other service providers to help with the groups and to form stronger links to services for the probationers.

Another CCAPD strategy to mitigate budget cuts will be an increased effort to collect probation fees. In addition to paying for services for probationers, revenues can be used for staff training and equipment. The department's strategy of sending letters to probationers who are delinquent in payments will be enhanced with efforts to better inform the judiciary about the importance of ordering fees. Currently, fees are only assessed on approximately 40% of cases in CCAPD. The department also plans to do more tracking and benchmarking of

collection rates by supervisory unit as opposed to simply looking at collection rates in the department as a whole.

Probation fees provide a significant source of funding and play a role in offender accountability, as well. Although probation fees should be assessed and collected, it is important to remain wary of the potential problem of becoming too dependent on fees and losing a focus on what probation should be about. Acting as a collection agency at the expense of other probation duties defeats the purpose of collecting the fees in the first place. Another danger that departments must be wary of is setting probationers up to fail by ordering fees they cannot afford. This is not only counterproductive for the probationer but can be costly in terms of the time and resources it takes to conduct violation proceedings. However, when a balance is maintained and fees are judiciously assessed, probation fees can be an important means for improving services and the effectiveness of supervision.

Grant funding is another alternate source of support that will be more aggressively targeted by CCAPD, although this has its drawbacks as well. One limitation is that many grants require matching funds, which can be problematic in the context of tight budgets. Another and perhaps a bigger roadblock is that most grants want recipients to be able to demonstrate sustainability. Hence, to get funding, an agency may need already to have considerable resources. Even if demonstrating sustainability is not required by the grant, the value of receiving money that can establish but will not continue a program is questionable. Given the budget constraints facing Cook County, CCAPD will not pursue grants that pay for staff positions but will focus its attention on grants that can be used to supplement existing programs and structures.

Budget cuts facing CCAPD may not be as severe as those being faced by other departments, but they are affecting operations and may be long-term. In an effort to continue providing effective services, the department is adjusting goals and pursuing alternate sources of funding, including probation fees and grants. Current goals do not include the development of new programs that require additional resources. Instead, emphasis is being placed on collaborating with other agencies and on increasing efficiency and accountability, which includes defining, measuring, and reporting outcomes. These outcomes must be a measure of how the department's work is enhancing public safety and improving the quality of life for probationers, their families, and the community as a whole. ■

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Managing the Correctional Resource: The Three R's

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The terrorist attacks of September 11 and the more recent Wall Street scandals have all played a role in the decline in tax base revenues. The change in economic outlook has required governments to adjust their spending priorities. The result in most jurisdictions has been to curtail new monies and, in some cases, to reduce allocations to existing correctional budgets.

In an early response to projected revenue shortfalls, agencies froze budgets, cut travel, and made across-the-board percentage cuts to budgets. This was a crisis response rather than a strategic response to the problem. If we are entering a new era of restraint management, an era that might last a decade or more, we need to consider more strategic responses. I intend to outline in this article how jurisdictions outside of the U.S. are responding to budget cutbacks. I hope that by doing so I can give the reader a different perspective and, by contrast and distance, a sense of what he or she might do locally. The article will examine restraint management principles, re-allocation of budgets, and re-positioning strategies.

I should make clear at the outset that, from an international perspective, the agencies I have contacted have not seen the same degree of cutback to their community corrections budgets as U.S. jurisdictions have experienced. In fact, in some cases, their community corrections budgets have actually increased as a result of some strategic decisions made by these agencies.

Restraint Management

Governments today are caught in an enormous vice that continues to squeeze budgets as revenues fail to match increased demands. As this happens, administrators are required to manage cutbacks, program contractions, program terminations, and the freezing or elimination of privileges that had been regarded as non-negotiable rights and entitlements.

Managing well in a restraint environment requires learning to handle organizational change. What this has meant in the past was learning to do more with less—maintaining current levels of service with fewer resources; but eventually, in some circumstances, it has meant cutting services because of lack of money and staff. It is this aspect of restraint management that is difficult. One reason for this is that cutbacks, while painful for any organization, are especially hard for organizations that are labor-intensive and are driven by ideological goals—such as most probation and community corrections departments. As one interviewee from Ontario, Canada, noted, "There is inevitably some negative reaction on the

part of many staff who genuinely believe that budgetary reductions will reduce the quality of services that they have spent a lifetime working to develop."

Restraint management involves making difficult decisions regarding staffing and service delivery in a context of scarce resources. In a restraint environment, the staff's acceptance of change is made more difficult because the usual rewards offered to gain consensus are unavailable. Organizational change is much easier to accomplish when staff have something to gain by the change. Other constraints facing administrators are imposed by professional norms and collective bargaining agreements.

All these pressures add up to another problem surrounding restraint management: the management of staff morale. Low staff morale makes it difficult for managers to compensate for staff layoffs by increasing the productivity of remaining staff. Because most correctional agencies are labor-intensive, cutback management usually means reductions in staff numbers. There is often a fall-out from staff reductions, of course. In some of the jurisdictions examined, the reductions have been at management levels, but this decision may eventually create a morale problem as well, as individuals have nowhere to go in the organization. You can sustain staff reductions in the short term, but there is no question that cutbacks threaten the morale of staff who are working harder for less.

A sign that an agency is using restraint management techniques is the imposition of a hiring freeze and ceilings on staffing levels. Currently, in Canada at both the provincial and federal level, restraint management is being used in the short term, while the agencies attempt to apply more strategic approaches to the problem.

Faced with budget reductions, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is also adopting an aggressive strategic planning approach based on creating scenarios that emerge from an extensive environmental scanning exercise. The idea is to think about the environment in 2017 and then work backwards to the current situation—but always focused on what the correctional service would need to be and look like in 2017. Out of this process, they hope to develop a plan that will be a vehicle to translate goals, principles, and legislative mandates into specific and clear program directions. This process is still being worked on, and there are no concrete actions regarding the budget reductions yet. However, changes are expected in the next funding cycle; the hope is that these changes will meet short-term exigencies without violating long-range plans.

Because a major cost to the Canadian correctional system is related to rates of incarceration and parole revocations, it is apparent that if some gains can be made in reducing either of these, a substantive savings is likely to occur. In the planning process, CSC is exploring ideas related to the following:

- Improvements to community-based alternatives to incarceration;

- Improvements in the efficacy of parole supervision; and

- An increase in the availability of community programs promoting behavioral change in offenders.

Based on the results of its own research and the research of others, CSC believes that programs and services that successfully integrate offenders into the community share the following traits:

- The programs have been developed with or by community agencies.
- The programs are multi-disciplinary in their approach.
- The programs are evidence-based and have demonstrated their role in reducing re-offending.
- The programs are flexible and can be responsive to the offender's situation in a community setting.
- The programs provide a continuum of support for the offender.
- The programs don't operate in isolation, but build on existing programs and services.

Behind the approach being attempted by CSC is the notion that cooperative community correctional initiatives are the key to success. This approach combines solid, evidence-based programming with proactive supervision, and it invites the active participation of community and social service agencies.

Involved in this approach to restraint management are the following strategic components:

- Clear vision and defined mission of the agency;
- Reliance on partnerships;
- Formal standards and policy directives;
- Programs and activities based on research and best practices;
- Optimization of resources and workload monitoring; and
- Development of required tools and techniques.

Whether CSC can meet the short-term budget reductions and maintain a fixed focus on the longer term will be determined by the outcome of the current planning sessions. Nevertheless, CSC's experience provides at least a glimpse into how one

jurisdiction is attempting to manage a restraint approach in responding to current cuts in appropriations.

Reallocation of Budgets

Other correctional systems are facing not budget cutbacks but an entirely different dilemma. In a sense, the correctional system is being asked to do "more with more." In this scenario, corrections agencies are given more funds and, in a results-oriented environment, are expected to deliver tangible reductions in the use of expensive prison space. Here the government wants to gain more value from its expenditures in the correctional arena. This I call the "reallocation of budget" approach. A prime example of this approach is the one taken by the State of Victoria in Australia. In this model, the government has found funds from other sources (probably other departments) and channeled them to the correctional department for specific purposes.

The Victoria government has put a massive injection of additional money into corrections—a total of $334.5 million (Australian dollars) spread over the next 4 years. The funds are intended to pay for a new 600-bed maximum-security prison, a 300-bed dedicated prison for programs, and a 120-bed minimum-security prison. These monies are partly designed to increase capacity, but mostly they are intended to replace three existing smaller, outdated prisons. The funds also include nearly $70 million to develop rehabilitative and diversionary programs, plus $42 million to revitalize community corrections.

From discussions with officials in Victoria, it appears that their government hopes to cap prison bed capacity at approximately 3,700. However, given the growth in prison populations over the past 5 or 6 years, the government has also acknowledged that community corrections needed a significant boost if the hoped-for savings from diversionary approaches were to be realized. Prior to this, it had become clear that the utilization rates for community corrections sentencing options in the State of Victoria were the lowest in Australia—although it must be acknowledged that Victoria also has the lowest rate of imprisonment in Australia.

One thing community corrections administrators achieved was to get accurate information on what was happening at the court level. One of their findings was that about 60% of all court dispositions resulted in a fine as the sanction. Because of problems in another part of the system, however, the fine defaulters were not being picked up. This resource issue had an impact on the Community Corrections Division (probation in Victoria is called "community corrections"). When a fine is defaulted, the Sheriff's Office executes a warrant to bring the defaulter back to court, where he is usually placed under community supervision. Because the Sheriff's Office was not picking up the fine defaulters, however, community corrections caseloads had declined. Although these low caseloads were initially seen as a result of the court's lack of confidence in Community Corrections, accurate information about the situation eventually made clear that the low caseloads were actually a result of the Sheriff's Office's failure to pick up defaulters. Thus, one immediate lesson for administrators is the need for a good

management information system so that you can be sure that the results that are being asked of you in a resource re-allocation context can be realized.

The funding of community corrections redevelopment in Victoria is predicated on achieving targeted front-end diversion from prison of 350 beds over the 4-year life span of the redevelopment initiative. This specific goal may present problems, especially if the information on which the decision was based turns out to be faulty. In addition, this goal does not take into account the actions of judges. If judges have little or no confidence in the supervision and services being provided, they might make decisions that make it difficult for Community Corrections to meet the targeted goal. Similarly, if Community Corrections successfully persuades the court that it has or is building capacity, the agency might find itself with increased revocations, thus defeating the original intent of the funding. This is the tightrope the current Community Corrections administration is walking.

The leaders feel that they could make better use of the resources and achieve targeted results if they could persuade their own correctional system that they have a greater capacity to influence prison numbers at the back-end of the sentence. For example, their research has shown that some offenders' parole is delayed for lack of an effective parole plan. This suggests that the creation of additional specialist staff to work on throughcare preparation and post-release support should have a positive impact on release rates.

The Victoria Community Corrections administrators also believe that they have a much greater capacity to influence outcomes in the way they manage offenders who fail to comply with supervision conditions. In Victoria, 70% of all breaches are for non-compliance with conditions rather than for re-offending. Traditionally, many staff have seen it as their duty to send cases back to court at the first sign of instability or non-cooperation. The department is trying to negotiate a range of intermediate sanctions through a carefully crafted discretion policy, which the courts would endorse, allowing the agency to manage minor breaches without going back through the courts. Since imprisonment for minor breaches of supervision orders uses an expensive resource, they believe it is worthwhile to invest in intermediate sanctions before invoking a prison sentence.

Currently, the daily average population of offenders in Community Corrections in Victoria has increased by about 200 compared to a year ago. Although it is a little early to judge the results, it appears that the strategy of re-allocating resources to Community Corrections may be having the desired result. The main lessons to learn from this particular approach are as follows:

- The importance of a good management information system;
- The need to develop a relationship with the courts;
- The importance of developing an understanding with institutional corrections;

- The value of discharge planning and support for offenders returning to the community;
- The use of intermediate sanctions for minor breaches of conditions; and
- The importance of targeted goals and a results-oriented approach.

Re-Positioning Strategies

Finally, the last approach that seems to be in use as a means of managing budget reductions is also a macro-level approach. I call this the "re-positioning strategy." In a number of countries, following the lead of the U.S., governments have turned their attention to domestic security in light of the terrorist threat. This has led some jurisdictions to consider either aligning or amalgamating police and correctional departments into public safety or security agencies and giving them added responsibilities to respond to domestic threats. Here, governments are attempting to get more value for public safety expenditures by saving on infrastructure costs; merging police and correctional resources can reduce administration costs. They know that it is easier from a political point of view to make money available for security services than for offenders. In this approach, the upper management levels are more at risk for reductions than front-line staff.

This is the approach apparently taken by the Government of Ontario in Canada. It recently combined the Ministry of the Solicitor General (with oversight over police, fire, and emergency measures in the province) with the Ministry of Correctional Services (responsible for provincial jails, prisons, and adult and juvenile probation). This merger made possible a reduction of one cabinet minister and a deputy minister and a reduction in administrative and support staff and services.

It is a little early to determine the outcome of this approach, but it is seen as facilitating the government's public safety agenda. In terms of probation, the merger will strengthen initiatives that were already under way. These initiatives included the development of a new service delivery model that attempts to operationalize the research finding that indicates the importance of intervening more with higher-risk offenders than with lower-risk offenders. Part of the strategy for dealing with higher-risk offenders was not only to provide more program opportunities but also to develop police/probation partnerships. The police/probation partnerships were designed to enhance supervision of the more serious offenders, including sex offenders and those convicted of crimes against a person.

Another initiative under development is a fairly extensive electronic monitoring program for offenders sentenced to conditional sentences. (Conditional sentences in Canada are specifically intended for an offender that the judge would have imprisoned if this sanction was not available to the court.) The judges had not been using this sanction because they feared that current supervision approaches were not rigorous enough. The Ministry is attempting to respond to this issue, and if the judges respond appropriately, admissions to provincial prisons should be reduced. The goal is to secure public safety and to achieve reductions in the cost of imprisonment.

This re-positioning strategy is also being used in a number of different ways at more micro-levels in other jurisdictions. For example, the shift to a public safety agenda is a way of re-positioning traditional probation to meet new expectations. In many parts of Europe, where there has traditionally been a social work orientation to probation, there has been a re-positioning in recent years of the mission of probation to include a stronger emphasis on public safety and victims' rights. This change opens the door to new stakeholders who can help support probation and community correction agencies in the budget battles.

Potential lessons to glean from this approach point to the importance of:

- Developing closer alignment with community sentiments;
- Developing new alliances with traditional criminal justice partners;
- Cultivating new stakeholders; and
- Realizing savings from reduction in infrastructure and overhead administrative costs.

Conclusion

All three of these models for coping with budget changes are in use in varying degrees of intensity in many places. By far the most dominant model is the restraint management model, but the other two offer the possibility of creating a hybrid model to suit local needs. Regardless of the models adopted, administrators and managers are likely to find themselves asking the same basic questions:

- What things can we stop doing?
- What things can we get others to do?
- What things can we do more efficiently and effectively?
- Where can we use lower-cost or no-cost labor (i.e., volunteers or community contracts with voluntary agencies)?
- Where can we substitute capital/technology for labor?
- What skills and knowledge do we need in our workforce now and in the future?

The ways in which community corrections administrators answer these questions will determine how successful they will be in managing in a period of budget cutbacks. ■

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Florida's Community Corrections: How We've Survived Three Years of Budget Cuts

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In February 2001, an arsonist set fire to a Department of Corrections probation office located in the northwest Florida city of Chipley. The building was destroyed, as were supervision files, furniture, and equipment. Because it happened in the middle of the night, no one was injured. The probation officers assigned to that office responded by setting up shop in the parking lot of the probation office. They established makeshift offices by using folding chairs and storing files and supplies in the trunks of their cars. They shared laptop computers. A nearby prison, Holmes Correctional Institution (CI), offered temporary office space, and the local Washington County Sheriff's Office allowed probation officers to meet probationers in its office space. Staff moved into their own temporary building 2 months later. There was no interruption in service or the supervision of offenders throughout this ordeal.

Then the unthinkable happened. The arsonist struck again in August. This time the losses were greater, though there was still no loss of life. More than half of the office files were destroyed, and all of the furniture was burned. Staff launched back into action, setting up shop again at Holmes CI. Four months later, they were back in a temporary building. Again, there was no interruption of service or supervision of offenders. In fact, the Chipley probation office later won a statewide Davis Productivity Award for its hard work and innovative approaches to solving the unexpected problems that came with these disasters. Particular note was made of the officers' flexibility in dealing with adversity and their willingness to do whatever it took to carry out their duties.

Responding to the Unthinkable

I tell this story because it is a good analogy for the last 3 years of budget cuts that the Florida Department of Corrections' Office of Community Corrections has endured. While these cuts may not have been as unexpected as the fires, they have devastated us in some ways and made us stronger in others. They have also forced us to be innovative in solving the unexpected problems that accompanied them.

The Florida Department of Corrections is responsible for more than 73,000 inmates and almost 153,000 offenders on community supervision. Offenders may be on probation, parole, community control, electronic monitoring via global positioning satellite (GPS) and radio frequency, sex offender supervision, drug offender supervision, or under other forms of supervision. Their offenses range from petty theft to murder.

On August 30, 1999, we had 2,617 probation officers supervising about 150,000 offenders. As of May 5, 2002, we had 2,335 probation officers supervising 153,000 offenders. In the current fiscal year (FY 2002-03), 181 vacant Community Corrections positions have been cut, saving $7.5 million.

Focusing on Our Goals

The cuts have forced us to make some difficult decisions, but they have also helped us to focus on our goals: ensuring public safety, keeping caseloads manageable, and avoiding layoffs, if possible.

We knew that a reduction in positions was a possibility, so we prepared for it before the first cuts were announced by not filling vacant positions. Thus, when the first cuts became a reality, we didn't have to lay off anyone, though we did lose those positions. In fact, to date we have lost more than 290 certified correctional probation officer positions and have had our budget reduced by several million dollars. Our officer-to-support-staff ratio has gone from 3:1 to 7:1, requiring officers to spend more of their time filing, typing, entering data, and answering phones.

In the wake of budget cuts, officers collected and disbursed over $31 million for victims of crime. Recently officers were asked to begin collecting DNA samples for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement from statutorily designated offenders. Once again our officers accepted the challenge and to date have collected more than 8,000 samples.

As the budget cuts took effect, we began dealing with the reality that we had more work, fewer staff, and less money. We asked the field staff statewide to give us ideas on how we could cut back without reducing services. Based on their responses, we compiled a survey to solicit input from all staff. The results turned out to provide very useful information. More than 90% of the staff's ideas have been used to ease workload and offset the effects of the budget cuts. The only ideas not used were those prohibited by state statute or that might have the effect of compromising public safety.

Ideas that were implemented include:

- Eliminating the requirement—later reinstated—to re-verify residence and employment of probationers every 90 days (except for sex offenders and certain other groups);

- Eliminating investigative functions that were redundant and not required by statute;

- Using electronic transfer request and response instead of the U.S. Mail;

- Having Probation and Parole Specialists enter intake and sentence structure information directly into the database while interviewing offenders;

- Automating the process of completing risk and needs assessment forms;

- Automating the process of coordinating information for prison post-sentence investigations;

- Eliminating an outdated and time-consuming post-sentence investigation, conducted by probation officers after an offender's commitment to prison (our officers continue to assist prison classification staff when they need more information to classify an inmate, but they now have more time to supervise offenders); and

- Eliminating officers' completion of the Criminal Punishment Code score sheet—Community Corrections assists the State Attorney's office by giving them access to our database and training on the use of our computer screens.

It is interesting that the majority of staff statewide soundly rejected several ideas that field staff had suggested to management, even though these ideas would have reduced the amount of paperwork officers had to do. Their reasoning was that, although officers do not enjoy certain paperwork, the suggested changes could have compromised public safety.

Dodging a Bullet

In addition to the budget cuts we were already experiencing, we faced another crisis recently when the Florida Legislature considered cutting more than 400 Community Corrections officer positions. This would have resulted in layoffs of almost 200 officers, so it was an unexpected setback for most officers and severely affected their morale. For some time, staff found it hard to concentrate on work, as the anticipated layoffs represented almost all the officers hired statewide in the last 3 to 4 years. Agency directors and Community Corrections regional directors traveled around the state to visit with staff. They set up a centralized rumor hot line and a suggestion line to ensure that accurate information was disseminated to all staff. Electronic mail messages, staff meetings, and telephone calls were used to keep staff informed of the situation.

The union that represents Florida probation officers and supervisors launched a campaign to help save the officers' positions by lobbying the governor's office and the legislature. In the end, the legislators kept the cuts in their budget, but the governor, who is strongly backed by the officers' union, vetoed the budget line item and restored the funds to retain most of the officer positions. More importantly, no staff layoffs were needed to achieve the budget reduction.

During the budget cutting process, the entire Department of Corrections consistently used a collaborative process, bringing together staff from the secretary's office, budget office, legislative office, and Community Corrections to develop scenarios that would meet the budget requirements and still maintain supervision services as close as possible to normal and ensure public safety. These

ad-hoc meetings, along with regular management meetings and town hall meetings with line staff, have been helpful in keeping everyone focused.

Focusing on Big-Ticket Items

The changes suggested by staff were helpful in cutting back on paperwork and giving officers more time in the field, but we knew we had to make additional, substantial changes to accommodate our shrinking budget. We focused on four areas: leases, courtroom officers, equipment, and overtime.

- **Leases.** We began consolidating staff in offices as leases expired. This has saved money and boosted officer morale, because the alternative was moving to the squad room concept, which tends to be a noisy, open area that lacks privacy for the officers and offenders. Officers said they preferred traditional offices, even if their workspace had to be smaller.

- **Courtroom officers.** We reassigned full-time certified officers from the courtroom and put them in the field, while shifting their administrative duties to paraprofessional support staff. This has produced a mixed result. Although it makes better use of certified officers, it has lessened our impact on the court process and hurt some judges' feelings. The judges had come to rely on our staff for their expertise, and their presence generally resulted in higher credibility for the department's role in the criminal justice system.

- **Equipment.** We cut back in purchasing equipment and software. As a result, not all officers have their own PCs, which limits their access to department databases and software applications designed to streamline their workload.

- **Overtime.** We virtually eliminated overtime, except for emergencies.

Innovative Ideas

Once we had cut expenses as much as possible, we knew that we had to get creative in order to maintain our standards of supervision with fewer officers. This realization led to some innovative approaches.

- **Fugitive Apprehension Coordination Team.** We created the Fugitive Apprehension Coordination Team (FACT), a team of five officers assigned to the Office of Community Corrections. FACT coordinates and tracks down offenders reported as absconders from supervision. (Absconders are offenders whose whereabouts are unknown by the officer despite an exhaustive search.) In the past, field officers attempted to locate absconders on their own. Now the field officer calls or e-mails FACT officers when he/she has an absconder, giving the FACT officers suggestions for locating the absconder. The FACT officers tackle the cases involving violent offenders and sex offenders first, using several databases to cull additional facts about the absconder. They, in turn, give this information to local, county, state, and federal law enforcement to facilitate apprehension of the absconder. The statewide absconder population decreased from 46,381 in February 2001 to

45,003 offenders on March 31, 2002, which means there are 1,378 fewer cases for field officers to deal with now.

- **Officer training.** All officers are required to complete 40 hours of retraining annually. In the past, this was done piecemeal throughout the year, and it was time-consuming and expensive to arrange the officers' time off and travel. To save time and resources, we implemented a "block" delivery system, which provided the entire 40 hours of training in 1 week at one location. Officers also will soon have the option of using a job-training book, a pocket-sized training notebook that contains all training information. Whenever the officer has some down time, he or she can train individually, on the job.

- **Law enforcement support.** We also looked to our law enforcement neighbors for assistance in supervision and surveillance of offenders to supplement our own offender contacts. Partnerships that were being developed before the budget cuts have increased as the need to "do more with less" has affected both our agency and law enforcement agencies. These partnerships are positive for both entities. Supplementing visits by correctional probation officers with visits by police and sheriff's deputies to offenders' houses saves time and doesn't compromise supervision. Sex offenders, violent offenders, and those on community control are generally the focus of visits from law enforcement officers.

- **Coordination with related agencies.** The Office of Community Corrections works closely with the Florida Parole Commission in the development of procedures for the release, supervision, and revocation of offenders on various types of post-release supervision. We also work closely with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in the areas of sex offender identification, career criminals, and DNA collection. Recently several agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation visited Florida to audit the process by which information was entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system. The agents commented that seldom do they find the kind of cooperation between agencies that they found between the Florida Department of Corrections and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

- **Interstate Compact.** We have also shifted and centralized the monitoring of all Interstate Compact cases statewide from the field to the central office level, freeing up the field staff to concentrate on supervision.

Technological Innovations

Given almost daily changes and upgrades in technology, we also took a close look at how we could improve by using the latest technological innovations. Improvements have been steady, enabling officers to perform more tasks electronically and making the gathering of information less dependent on site visits, for example, to the clerk of court offices.

We have made significant progress in several areas of focus:

- Our electronic monitoring programs, including the GPS, are viable and staffed appropriately.

- Staff safety is always a concern, so safety and communication equipment such as cell phones, pagers, and police radios continues to be available.

- Geo-mapping technology is being employed in several circuits to ensure that sex offenders are not living too close to schools, day care centers, or parks. This technology also frees officers from having to spend valuable time measuring the distances from these areas in person.

- An automated risk classification system has been developed to streamline the task of assessing the potential risk of probationers.

- We are conducting a modified operational review of all the circuits in the state, using the offender database system and reports generated by our Bureau of Research and Data Analysis to analyze 17 key areas of operations that have related review standards. This review is now accomplished by four staff members; it had required more than 25 staff dedicated to each circuit for an entire week. Measurement reports were created for key areas, enabling our Bureau of Research and Data Analysis to detail how well an officer is performing duties that directly relate to safeguarding the community.

Good News/Bad News

Despite the negative impact of budget reductions, there has been some good news—and one lucky break. The lucky break is that the supervision population has remained static in recent years and even decreased in some areas, negating some of the impact of position reductions. Current caseload ratios are reasonable in most areas, although caseloads in certain areas are rising above normal levels because vacant positions have been left unfilled for longer than 1 year. This situation has been addressed by looking at contact standards for minimum-risk cases only; serious offenders remain under the same standards. Contacts with "less risky" offenders have been reduced to concentrate on the serious offenders.

In other good news, travel dollars for operations and supervision have not been reduced, and state vehicles have been made available for supervision purposes in limited circumstances. All mandatory and statutorily mandated training is intact. On the downside, fewer dollars are available for travel to conferences, which reduces networking opportunities and the education value of training sessions conducted at conferences. However, Community Corrections itself is now providing more specialized training (e.g., in officer safety) using agency staff, which has led to more consistency statewide. Less training has been scheduled that requires expenditures of travel and expense dollars.

Internal and External Constraints

As with any large organization, we face constraints in our budgeting process. Perhaps the biggest internal constraint faced by Community Corrections has been our lack of autonomy in making budget decisions. Decisions on training, travel (non-offender related), administrative reassignments, vacant positions, and changes in procedures are in our control, but they are generally made after receiving the available funds from the Budget Division of the Department of Corrections. Position cuts are determined by unit cost as much as by operational value. Surpluses and deficits alike must be shared among various divisions to ensure the good of the agency as a whole.

Some external constraints we face are the statutory limits on caseload ratios and services and collective bargaining rules. For example, officers with a caseload of sex offenders may supervise no more than 40 cases at any time, compared to most other type of caseloads which are much larger. Such statutory limits restrict the areas available for cutting. Personnel rules related to the officers' union contract sometimes make it difficult to move staff to areas in need. In addition, the state's large geographic area can make lease decisions difficult when choosing where to cut dollars. Finally, there is a limited amount of money within the Community Corrections budget that can be shifted from one funding category to another. Funding for specific classes of offenders is legislatively mandated.

Measuring the Effect of Cuts

The Office of Community Corrections has a number of mechanisms in place to measure recidivism, violations, revocations, and restitution, but the budget cuts and related effects are too recent to be effectively measured at this point. However, our agency continues to closely monitor legislation that may impact the workload of probation officers, as well as budget actions that may affect positions. We are reviewing monthly and quarterly statistical reports, which monitor admissions, losses, investigation workload, and caseload ratios in all areas of the state, to ensure logistically sufficient allocation of resources. Our Bureau of Research and Data Analysis also publishes an annual report entitled "Five-Year Trends in Community Corrections." The Office of Community Corrections works closely with other government oversight agencies, such the Criminal Justice Estimating Conference and the Florida Corrections Commission, in providing information that they use to develop proposals for the legislature and governor's office.

While we may not have seen the end of budget cuts, we recognize that we have been lucky in some respects. We have avoided laying off staff while maintaining our quality of supervision and public safety. This agency has not been hit as hard as some other agencies in Florida, which have actually been divided or abolished, and for that we are grateful. And like the officers in the Chipley office, who demonstrated tremendous grace under fire when an arsonist burned down their office—twice—we, the Florida Department of Corrections Community Corrections department, plan to be equally innovative and committed to getting the job done, regardless of the obstacles. ■

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