

Community corrections can improve public safety, reduce costs, and promote justice, according to report

December 8 2016, by Doug Gavel

There are approximately four million people on probation or parole at any given time in the United States, nearly double the number of people incarcerated in the nation's jails and prisons. Yet, despite the fact that community supervision offers the most obvious alternative to incarceration, community corrections agencies receive little attention in the national conversation about criminal justice reform and mass incarceration.

A [new report](#) released today from the Harvard Kennedy School's Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management and the National Institute of Justice seeks to change that, taking seriously the role of community corrections as a crucial component of [criminal justice](#) reform. The starting place for strong community corrections agencies that can increase safety, reduce crime, and promote justice, the authors argue, is legitimacy.

"We know that our officers can help promote positive change in our clients' lives," said Wendy Still, a co-author of the report and Chief Probation Officer in Alameda County, California. "But a prerequisite for that change is a relationship built on trust. It's a cultural shift, to have faith in people's ability to change, to treat people with dignity and respect, to recognize that our clients are members of our communities – and we know that cultural shift is foundational to our officers' wellness, to the success of individuals on our caseloads, and to healing for

survivors of crime."

Barbara Broderick, report co-author and Chief Probation Officer in Maricopa County in Arizona, added: "In probation, we're really focused on achieving good outcomes. Our clients are in the community, so it matters not just to us and them, but to the health and safety of the community, that they succeed. In order to get those good outcomes, the culture must be rehabilitative, not punitive, and our officers have to be able to focus on the high-risk, high-need clients who need their attention."

Their report, coauthored with Steven Raphael and entitled, "Building Trust and Legitimacy Within Community Corrections," outlines six core principles for producing success in community corrections:

1. Treat each justice-involved individual with dignity and respect, offering predictable incentives to promote positive—and discourage negative—behavior;
2. Realign incentives in the criminal [justice system](#) to favor the most effective sanction, not just incarceration;
3. Impose the least restrictive sanctions necessary, and minimize collateral consequences that impede successful reentry;
4. Use the justice system to restore communities and reintegrate individuals into their neighborhoods;
5. Reduce institutional bias to ensure fair and equal access to the justice system;
6. Evaluate programs, expanding those that work and abandoning those that do not.

Both academic research and innovative state and local reforms support the report's recommendations. California, for example, realigned their fiscal incentives around youth incarceration, when they began requiring counties to pay a larger share of the costs for youth commitments. This

contributed to a substantial decline in youth commitments.

Steven Raphael, a co-author of the report and professor at the Goldman School of Public Policy at U.C. Berkeley, explains: "We know that perverse incentives exist at many levels of the criminal justice system. There's ample opportunity to develop clear and predictable incentives that encourage good behavior, and to realign cost incentives so that probation or rehabilitation—rather than incarceration—are the most affordable options for county justice systems. By realigning those incentive structures, we can achieve much more positive outcomes overall."

Provided by Harvard University

Citation: Community corrections can improve public safety, reduce costs, and promote justice, according to report (2016, December 8) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-12-safety-justice.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.