

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT AT-A-GLANCE

Community Corrections

What is Community Corrections?

Community corrections is an enhanced form of probation. Instead of incarceration, individuals are sentenced to intensive services and supervision in the community. In Massachusetts, the Probation Department provides these services through a network of 17 Community Corrections Centers. The centers perform risk/needs assessments and develop an individually tailored service plan for each client.

Judges sentence offenders to report to these centers several days each week. Individuals sentenced to incarceration may also be sentenced to a period of community corrections probation, which they serve after completing their prison sentence.

Why Community Corrections is central to Justice Reinvestment?

Community corrections is far less expensive than prison and it reduces the collateral costs of incarceration to individuals and their families. To the extent that prison may make some individuals more likely to recidivate, avoiding incarceration when appropriate can reduce crime. When adequately resourced and effectively administered, community corrections can be a cost-effective response to criminal behavior. However, research shows that many jurisdictions have struggled to provide evidence-based community corrections models necessary to produce these benefits.¹

The failure to administer community corrections effectively is particularly problematic for high-incarceration rate neighborhoods that stand to gain the greatest benefits from avoiding unnecessary incarceration. Studies consistently demonstrate that many high poverty minority communities have reached a tipping point where the consequences associated with incarcerating so many residents now surpass the crime reduction benefits of removing offenders from the neighborhood.²

How are we doing in Massachusetts?

Massachusetts Sentencing guidelines suggest judges should consider placing individuals in Community Corrections in lieu of incarceration for offences that fall in Level 3 and Level 4 of the sentencing grid. These crimes include Breaking and Entering, Assault and Battery (low or moderate injury), Larceny from a Person, and Larceny (up to \$50,000).³

In FY 2013, the most recent year for which data are available, only 15 percent of individuals convicted for offenses in Levels 3 and 4 of the sentencing grid were diverted to Community Corrections in lieu of incarceration. Community Corrections sentences were even less common in Suffolk County, which is home to some of the state's highest incarceration rate communities. In Suffolk, only about one in ten individuals with offenses where Community Corrections may have been appro-

FAST FACTS

- > In FY 2013, the most recent year for which data are available, only 15 percent of individuals convicted for offenses sentenced where community corrections may be appropriate received community corrections as an alternative to incarceration.
- > In Suffolk County, which is home to some of the state's highest incarceration rate communities, only about one in ten individuals with offenses where community corrections may be appropriate received Community Corrections as an alternative to incarceration in FY 2013.
- > Between FY 2009 and FY 2016, state funding for community corrections fell by 25 percent; in contrast, state funding for incarcerations received level funding over this period.
- > Since 2009, Massachusetts has closed nearly one-third of its community corrections centers.

appropriate received this alternative to incarceration in FY 2013 (see table below).

While Massachusetts is working hard to move away from counterproductive tough on crime criminal justice practices, the Commonwealth has not placed significant focus on Community Corrections. Between FY 2009 and FY 2016, state funding for Community Corrections Centers fell by 25 percent (\$28.6 million to \$21.3 million); in contrast, state funding for incarceration in both Department of Correction and Houses of Correction received level funding over this period. Since 2009,

Massachusetts has closed nearly one-third of its Community Corrections Centers.

Because so few individuals are diverted to Community Corrections, the centers that remain open are often significantly underutilized. As Massachusetts examines opportunities to cost-effectively reduce crime through justice reinvestment, strategies to deliver more evidence-based Community Corrections services, especially in high incarceration rate neighborhoods, merit greater focus.

Grid Level 3 and 4 Offenders Sentenced to Incarceration vs. Community Corrections, FY 2013

COUNTY	SENTENCED TO INCARCERATION	SENTENCED TO COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS	% DIVERTED	NUMBER OF COMMUNITY CORRECTION CENTERS	
Barnstable	423	85	17%	1	1
Berkshire	427	67	14%	1	1
Bristol	1,431	173	11%	3	2
Dukes	24	23	49%	1	1
Essex	1,549	497	24%	3	3
Franklin	178	2	1%	1	0
Hampden	1,430	124	8%	2	1
Hampshire	230	84	27%	2	1
Middlesex	1,169	176	13%	2	1
Nantucket	13	0	0%	0	0
Norfolk	617	157	20%	1	1
Plymouth	796	257	24%	2	2
Suffolk	1,374	172	11%	3	1
Worcester	2,039	256	11%	3	2
Total	11,700	2,098	15%	25	17

Source: MassINC data request to MA Sentencing Commission and MA Probation Department

NOTES

¹ Peggy McGarry and others. “The Potential of Community Corrections to Improve Safety and Reduce Incarceration” (New York, NY: Vera Institute for Justice, 2013).

² Todd Clear. “The Effects of High Imprisonment Rates on Communities” Crime and Justice 37.1 (2008).

³ The Sentencing Guidelines were set forth by the Massachusetts Sentencing Commission in 1996. These guidelines were never formalized in legislation. As a result, many judges many not utilize them to inform their sentencing decisions. Nevertheless, they provide a useful rubric for evaluating sentencing outcomes and for that reason the Sentencing Commission produces an annual Survey of Sentencing Practices relative to the guidelines.