

Lessons for Michigan from North Carolina Justice Reinvestment

In 2014 the Michigan Legislature will consider justice reinvestment legislation. The current policy proposals aim to reduce crime and recidivism by focusing on the state's large probation population with increased resources and attention to recidivism reduction programs and more effective violation sanctions. In considering these policies, Michigan may find it useful to consider policy changes enacted in North Carolina's Justice Reinvestment Act (JRA).

Overview:

The North Carolina JRA is built around strengthening supervision, increasing the number of people supervised after release from prison, and investing in substance abuse treatment.

- Since passing legislation in 2011 the state has closed nine prisons and is projected to save \$48 million in FY2014, in addition to avoiding \$500 million in projected construction costs.
- With some of those savings, the state has invested in 175 more probation and parole officers, as well as cognitive behavioral interventions and substance use treatment for high-risk offenders.

Transforming Probation Supervision:

Current proposals in Michigan create more certainty and accountability in how probationers are supervised by implementing swift and sure sanctions in response to technical violations statewide. The North Carolina JRA provided confinement sanctions to respond to violations of supervision.

- Probation officers can impose a 2-3 day jail sanction in response to minor violations.
- Offenders who repeatedly violate their supervision terms (but who are not convicted of new crimes or absconding) may be confined for up to three months.
- This overhaul of probation supervision has reduced the number of probationers being revoked to prison by 35 percent since FY2011.

Crafting a win-win for Counties and the State:

Michigan's sheriffs are concerned about impacts on crowded county jails and counties are concerned about unfunded mandates. In North Carolina, A feature of the JRA was the collaboration between local partners and the state to create the Statewide Misdemeanant Confinement Program (SMCP).

- The SMCP is operated by the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association and provides funding to local jails that volunteer to house short-sentenced offenders who previously would have gone to prison.
- According to Edmond Caldwell of the North Carolina Sheriffs Association, "[The SCMP] been an extremely successful program for the state, the counties, and the whole criminal justice system—and even for the inmates."

Improving Reentry Supervision:

In Michigan, many high-risk felons are sentenced to jail without a period of post-release supervisions. Facing a similar problem, North Carolina established new requirements to address the problem of people leaving prison without any post-release supervision.

- As part of the JRA, every person with a felony conviction must receive 9 or 12 months of post-release supervision.
- In FY2011, only 16 percent of people who had been convicted of felonies received post-release supervision after leaving prison; by FY2014, that number increased to 57 percent and will continue to grow.
- Current policy proposals in Michigan would encourage judges to add a period of post-release supervision after jail confinement, to enhance public safety.