

# Community Safety

## Enhancing safety and quality of life in community

When crimes occur and the offenders are located and prosecuted, communities want to be assured that the criminal justice system will work to reduce the repetition of future offenses by these individuals. Nearly all offenders return to live in the community, some nearly immediately under field supervision (such as probation or intermediate sanctions) and a smaller group after a term of incarceration. Applying resources effectively and efficiently to control and manage the risks from those offenders to their neighbors and communities is the principal activity of the Probation & Parole offices. Since all offenders are not equally likely to reoffend, important tools to assess risk are used, both in initial Court sentencing and sanctioning and in later case management by the DOC and the Vermont Parole Board.

The principal measures of “community safety” related to offenders are the negative measures of failures to maintain supervision and to avoid future offenses. Some observations about these measures are:

- Escapes from incarceration are very rare. Failures to Return (for a scheduled appointment with DOC) or being Out of Place (and therefore cannot be found to supervise) occur with 5-7% of the intensively supervised Reentry offenders.
- Persons being supervised by DOC are responsible for about 17-24% of the charges filed in District Court. Most charges are filed against persons who have never been in DOC custody with a sentence and/or conditions to meet. In a year, about 12-14% of supervised offenders have charges filed against them. Not all charges lead to convictions (nor lodgings pending adjudication), but this is an early indicator that the criminal justice system is responding to an offender’s misbehavior.
- The DOC uses lodgings at facilities (and other non-incarcerative sanctions) to respond to failures of field

supervised offenders to comply with their management agreements. While committing a new crime is a major violation of such agreements, there are also technical violations of disallowed conduct restrictions which are not crimes. Graduated sanctions often employ non-incarcerative sanctions to hold offenders responsible for correcting their behavior, but for more serious (or repeated) violations, short stays in jail (up to 14 days) are authorized. Lodgings (as detainee) may also relate to police arrests for persons no longer under supervision agreements with DOC.

- Traditionally, DOC has used a recidivism-reconviction measure to look directly at the question of whether new crime was committed (and affirmed by Court conviction) to separate the case management issues about the use of lodgings from the public safety issue of crime.
- In order to compare Vermont integrated system for prison, jail, and detention to other states’ measures of recidivism, the Vermont Legislature defined a recidivism measure restricted only to prisoners (such as most state prisons handle and report). This “prisoner reloading” measure includes consideration of both lengthy returns (90+ days) and the evidence of either the Courts convicted the offender of a new crime or there was a revocation of a previously granted furlough or sentence suspension resulting in the lengthy stay,
- The assessment instruments used in Vermont do validly aid in distinguishing levels of risk amongst populations. Nonetheless, individual’s future behavior may well differ from the predictions for a group of apparently similar offenders. System management may be based on population behavior, but case management is tailored to the individual ability to accept opportunity and responsibility.