

The Rebound Act

THE PROBLEM

Georgia has the highest “justice-involvement” rate in the country, largely because the ranks of people on community supervision—i.e., probation and parole—have exploded in the past several decades. Georgia’s probation rate of 6,161 per 100,000 is the highest in the country—more than four times the national rate. One in every 18 adult Georgians is on community supervision, as compared to 1 in every 55 nationally. Probation sentences in Georgia are far longer than those imposed in comparable states, averaging 6.3 years and ranging from about 5 to 7½ years.

Yet, community supervision too often fails in its primary goal of rehabilitating offenders and reintegrating them into society. The result is a cycle of crime and punishment for many of Georgia’s justice-involved people. In 2017, more than one-third of prison admissions were the result of a supervision violation, at an annual cost of \$194 million. As of 2018, 43 percent of the state’s prison population had been incarcerated in Georgia at least once before. It’s time to transform probation and parole into institutions that more effectively rehabilitate people, keep our communities safer, and avoid costly reincarceration episodes.

THE CONTEXT

Two major causes of the exploding justice-involved population are long probation sentences and re-incarcerations of people on community supervision.

- First, there is no evidence that longer supervision sentences increase public safety, which is why more than 30 states have capped probation at 5 years.
- Second, other states have taken creative approaches to ending the cycle of re-incarceration that many probationers and parolees experience. One promising variety of community supervision reform is “Performance Incentive Funding” (PIF) which rewards probation and parole departments for successfully rehabilitating people on community supervision.

THE SOLUTION

We recommend that Georgia caps probation terms. Most supervision failures occur in the first year or two, and there is no evidence that extending supervision terms beyond that period reduces recidivism.

We also recommend that Georgia establishes performance-incentive funding for probation and parole offices.

- An incentive program would entitle probation or parole offices to additional funding if they reduce the percentage of felony probationers/parolees they return to prison for technical violations or reoffending compared to the historical rate for that jurisdiction.
- Successful offices would get a percentage of the projected savings on each individual not returned, based on the estimated marginal cost of the time that person would have spent in prison.
- Those savings would then be re-invested to better fund rehabilitation programs, hire more officers, or even give bonuses, ideally promoting a virtuous cycle where the best methods can be expanded upon.

By capping probation terms and realigning incentives so that probation and parole offices are rewarded for reducing re-incarceration rates, Georgia can help thousands stay out of the justice system and start productive new lives, while saving taxpayer dollars.