

# Tennessee Community Supervision Reform

## Overview of Tennessee

Tennessee has the twelfth highest incarceration rate in the nation. The state spends over \$1 billion to oversee its 107,000 justice-involved people. A record-high felon population has brought the state corrections system to 94% capacity. Recidivism and community supervision revocations both contribute substantially to this growing problem, with 47% of offenders recidivating within three years of release. Supervision revocations have consistently made up nearly 40% of prison admissions over the last decade.

There are 58,000 Tennesseans on felony probation and 11,000 on parole. Another 8,000 people are in community corrections programs, which are locally operated. Probation and parole are both administered directly by the Department of Corrections (TDOC). Overall, community supervision has a completion rate of 60%, and 40% of supervised people are sent back into jail, prison, or diversion programs while under supervision. But many others commit crimes after they complete supervision. The total recidivism rates for parole and probation are 50% and 60%, respectively. Compounding these problems, supervision caseloads are increasing and there is high officer turnover. Low pay has made it challenging to hire and keep new probation and parole officers.

## Breakdown of Parole and Probation Authority

- There are three probation and parole regions: East, Middle, and West Tennessee. Each is headed by regional correction administrators. Probation and Parole Correctional Administrators oversee 2–4 of the 17 total districts. Specialized Caseloads Administrators oversee special cases like sex offenders in those districts.
- There are 45 district and field *offices* across those the 17 *districts*, overseeing a number of counties, usually 1–3.

## Our Proposal

We propose a performance incentive funding model that offers localized incentives to the district and field offices working directly with parole and probationers. Our basic funding model looks like this:

- Calculate the historical baseline return-to-incarceration rate for each of the 17 districts. Alternatively, calculate for each of the 45 parole and probation district and field offices.
- If a district reduces the return-to-incarceration rate below the baseline in a subsequent year, that district is entitled to 45% of the annual savings based on the projected marginal cost of incarceration.
- Of the savings allocated to successful districts, some percentage will go towards evidence-based rehabilitation, and some percentage will go towards hiring new personnel and reducing caseloads.
- Because of Tennessee's employment regulations for corrections and supervision officers, it might be possible to offer part of the incentive funding as bonuses to the highest performing officers. Bonuses could relieve Tennessee's challenges in hiring and retaining parole and probation officers. Supervision officer vacancy rates have more than doubled since 2016 to 10.6%.

**We estimate that adopting this model will avert over 12,000 people from being re-incarcerated over the next decade and save the state nearly twelve million dollars annually.** This reform is an opportunity for Tennessee to become a national leader in criminal justice reform, while keeping communities safer, reducing costs for taxpayers, and giving justice-involved people a real chance at improving their lives.