



Modernizing Parole Supervision to Enhance Workforce Outcomes

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Executive Summary

Parole offices can play the role of the coordinating body for workforce development to improve public safety and employment outcomes. By improving access to tangible resources and services for their caseloads, parole offices enhance their ability to promote attachment to protective factors like employment and housing, reliably reduce recidivism, and correspondingly increase public safety ([Bowman and Travis](#); [Goldsmith and Eimicke](#); Visher et al., 311; [Western](#)). In addition, technological advances across the nation can modernize parole supervision to reduce technical violations and increase rates of successful parole completion.

Released Populations: Overview

In the United States, many individuals in state prisons are released to some form of criminal justice supervision, typically state parole, to complete their sentences in the community. This supervision is used both as a form of surveillance as well as encouraging the uptake of social service-related programming—such as mandated substance use disorder treatment services—to reduce criminogenic risk ([Solomon et al., 1](#)). As of year-end 2016, approximately 874,800 adults were under parole supervision, which represents about 19 percent of the 4,537,100 adults under community supervision—the other 81 percent being on probation. The total represents a rate of 1 in 55 adults under supervision ([Kaeble, 1](#)).

The population under parole supervision in the United States is overwhelmingly male at 87 percent of the adult parole population in 2016 ([Kaeble, 24](#)). Those on parole come from various ethnic populations, with 44 percent identifying as non-Hispanic white, 38 percent as non-Hispanic black, and 15 percent as Latino/Hispanic. Women comprise 13 percent of the parole population. Most under parole supervision have been sentenced to one year or more and will have completed time in state prison.

Individuals who are released and not placed under community supervision are sometimes referred to as having “maxed out” of their term of incarceration or may also be referred to as “unsupervised releasees.” In this paper, the term “max out” will be used to describe an individual who was not released on parole and instead is leaving prison with no form of community supervision. Despite the high number of individuals under supervision, the rate of individuals “maxing out” their term of incarceration without any form of supervision has risen over the past several decades, particularly for those with non-violent convictions. The Pew Charitable Trusts reported that 1 in 5 U.S. inmates maxes out their prison term, and that the rate of maxing out actually increased by 119 percent between 1990 and 2012 ([Pew 2014, 5](#)). Research done by the Urban Institute indicates that max-outs tend to be slightly higher-risk than their paroled counterparts, with higher average incarceration lengths and rates of violent offenses ([Solomon et al., 5](#)).

Key Points

- Parole requirements can be barriers to employment, and system alignment and modernization are needed to address these barriers.
- Parole offices are uniquely situated to assist parolees in accessing employment and training opportunities.
- Identification and driver's licenses are important for employment opportunities, and parole offices and policymakers must prioritize access to these for parolees.

Technical Violations and Recidivism

Pew analyzed New Jersey parole data and determined that although individuals on parole are “less likely to be rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated for new crimes” than those who max out from state prison, they still return to prison at similar rates ([Pew 2013, 1](#)). Using this data, max-outs are 36 percent more likely to recidivate than parolees when recidivism is measured by the commission of a new criminal offense ([Pew 2013, 2](#)). When problematic behavior, such as drug use, results in a return to confinement, there is no available data for distinguishing whether this recidivism led to the behavior being charged as a new crime for max-outs or a technical violation for those on parole.

This can be an issue because despite the difference in recidivism rates as measured by Pew, both the supervised and max-out populations returned to prison at similar rates due to a failure to abide by parole conditions, which are often seen as technical violations. Of course, some technical violations such as failing to report to a scheduled appointment or being in the presence of alcohol are not in and of themselves criminal offenses but can lead to parole revocation and reincarceration. However, in the case of drug use, the underlying recidivistic behavior by parolees and max-outs can be the same, but the max-out is jailed for the commission of a new criminal offense, while the parolee is jailed for a technical violation.

The [Council of State Governments Justice Center](#) determined that 45 percent of all state prison readmissions are the result of probation and/or parole failures, with technical violations accounting for a full 25 percent of prison admissions. Only 57 percent of people under parole supervision complete the term successfully and go on to exit the criminal justice system, suggesting the system is performing poorly ([Horowitz et al., 9-11](#)). Parole supervision typically entails regular meetings with the parole officer or agent, drug and alcohol testing, and requirements to comply with occasionally contradictory supervision conditions including maintaining employment, stable housing, reporting to the office regularly, and paying supervision fees. As a practical matter, although “often reasonable when considered individually, in the aggregate, the sheer number of requirements imposes a nearly impossible burden on many offenders,” including infringing on employment opportunities ([Klinge, 1035](#)).

Community supervision that is tailored to the parolee and optimally deployed can increase individual success and enhance public safety, in addition to improving the parole office’s outcomes. Pew reported that 37 states have simultaneously lowered their community supervision and crime

rates from 2007 to 2016, which “often followed the adoption of evidence-based sentencing and corrections reforms that aim to improve public safety while ensuring accountability and controlling taxpayer costs” ([Horowitz et al., 14](#)). A study examining offenders in Ohio found that continuing to incarcerate lower-risk individuals for technical violations in state prison settings may actually increase their level of criminogenic risk and recidivism rates, contributing to an intractable cycle of recidivism where the bar for incarceration in a state facility is lowered for those under community supervision ([Lowenkamp and Latessa, 5](#)). Indeed, when low- and high-risk individuals are incarcerated together, or where low-risk individuals are subject to active interventions, the criminal risk for the low-risk groups actually increases (Andrews and Bonta, 48). A targeted use of supervision and intervention is thereby essential.

Regional Differences

The rate of individuals leaving correctional facilities without supervision varies significantly by state. For example, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio, South Carolina, and Utah, among others, reported max-out rates of over 40 percent in 2012 ([Pew 2014, 1](#)). In contrast, Louisiana, Michigan, Oregon, and Wisconsin, as well as over 10 other states, reported max-out rates under 15 percent as of 2012. Oregon has a determinate sentencing structure but has established requirements for post-release supervision that vary by offense type for crimes committed after 1989, leading to a max-out rate of only 0.4 percent by 2012 ([Pew 2014, 5](#)). In Florida, parole has also been largely eliminated, and the common mandatory minimum sentences are generally completed behind bars, leading to the highest max-out rate in the country. In 2012, this translated to 21,000 individuals being released from Florida Department of Corrections facilities with no parole supervision or direct support, representing an increase of almost 200 percent from 1990 to 2012. Although both Oregon and Florida eliminated parole, divergent state policies illustrate differing approaches to the use of community supervision ([Pew 2014, 3-5](#)).

Non-violent crime is a driver of rising max-out rates, particularly because truth-in-sentencing laws passed from the 1980s into the present day often require people serve 85 percent of their maximum sentences, correlating with high max-out rates. These laws, associated with the rapidly rising imprisoned elder and chronically and/or terminally ill population, dramatically raise costs in the long term. State prison admissions for people aged 55 or older have grown from 6,300 in 1993 to 25,700 in 2013, and inmates aged 50 and over comprised the fastest growing segment of the federal prison population from 2009 to 2013 ([Carson and Sabol, 13](#), [Office of the Inspector General, 1](#)). The net impact of this growth is that prison systems are called upon

to serve as hospices and skilled nursing facilities, at great cost to the states. However, optimized and effective release systems can help reduce costs where the sentencing laws permit parole.

Individuals under parole supervision are generally more stable in the community with better outcomes than those who max out of custody ([Pew 2014, 14](#); [Solomon et al., 13-15](#)). Part of this is due to parole serving as a potential payer for services, housing, or treatment, and/or enhancing connectivity to services that can aid in meeting those essential post-release needs. For example, recent research demonstrates that access to substance use disorder treatment is correlated with reduced criminal activity in the same geographical area as the treatment ([Bondurant et al., 131-32](#)) and parole regularly refers and/or pays for this type of treatment in recognition of this significant correlation ([Chandler and Fletcher, 18](#)). Allowing parole to become a hub for employment services, as it often is with substance use treatment, will enhance success for individual parolees and their families, the parole system, the employers in the community, and the broader community.

Using Legislation and Technology to Reduce Barriers

States should empower parole offices to accommodate parolee schedules and use technology where appropriate and consistent with public safety. Innovative parole reform can take many shapes. Perhaps the most straightforward and significant piece of recent legislation was H.B. 387 signed by Gov. Bryant in 2018 ([HB 387](#)). First, H.B. 387 addressed a common issue where parole appointments conflict with employment obligations. The law mandates that a parole (or probation) officer “shall set the times and locations for meetings that are required for parole or probation at such times and locations that are reasonably designed to accommodate the [person’s] work schedule” ([HB 387, 303-305](#)). Second, it allowed the use of technology for parole/probation officer meetings, which will help prevent missed appointments ([HB 387, 307-317](#)). In Mississippi, parole (and probation) officers “may utilize technology portals such as Skype, FaceTime or Google video chat, or any other technology portal that allows communication between the individual ... and the parole or probation officer, as applicable, to occur simultaneously in real time by voice and video in lieu of requiring a face-to-face in person meeting” ([HB 387, 308-313](#)).

Obtaining a valid form of state-issued identification as a parolee is a perpetual and particularly Kafkaesque problem.

In 2019, Louisiana passed a concurrent resolution requesting the correctional agency study the feasibility of improvements to parole as well as methods to report “in lieu of in-person meetings” in recognition of the challenges reporting can create with other obligations ([LA HCR 79, 1](#)). Louisiana is studying these methods in an effort to make its parole system more innovative and user-friendly. Other states have utilized different forms of technology, such as reporting kiosks ([Bauer et al., 16](#)) and voice recognition technology ([GDC, 2-3](#); [VADOC, 2](#)).

Workforce Development: Parole as the Hub

Parole can be an effective vehicle to connect individuals leaving prison to needed services and resources during the period immediately following release. That said, the more that is done to promote work readiness during incarceration, the more productive the parole term will likely be. Two

major issues affecting work readiness involve identification and workforce training, and effective and seamless connections between parole offices and state departments of labor can improve success.

Parole offices are uniquely situated to serve as a hub for services and workforce development because they can address not only employer needs but also streamline solutions to resolve barriers to employment. As a practical matter, the standard conditions of

parole generally require that the client maintain employment or participate in education and/or vocational training. Some research, and much practical experience, suggests that those in reentry sometimes participate in the dark economy due to lack of legitimate employment options ([Harer, 52](#)). Given this and the protective role of stable employment against criminal involvement, helping the individual to meet parole conditions is a logical next step that supports parole, parolees, and the community by linking parole activities to factors most tightly correlated with increased public safety and successfully exiting the criminal justice system.

Ideally, connections to training and job opportunities should occur during incarceration, ensuring better access during the critical days and weeks after release. However, in states without viable connections, parole can connect parolees to training opportunities and coordinate private sector partner and potential actors.

Identification: The Ticket to All Jobs and Services

Obtaining Identification

Obtaining a valid form of state-issued identification (typically from a department of motor vehicles [DMV]) as a

ISSUE

Many prisons do not provide a valid state identification or driver's license upon release. This prevents parolees from accessing resources, services, or obtaining legal employment during the critical post-release period.



SOLUTION

Departments of Corrections (DOC) and parole boards are sometimes in the same organization. In those situations, parole boards or offices should work collaboratively with their DOCs to meet anticipated parole conditions before release.



In states where parole boards are separate from the DOCs, MOUs should be established and executed with relevant government stakeholders, and conditions should be amended accordingly to accommodate those obligations.

STAKEHOLDERS

- Parole Board
- Department of Corrections
- Department of Vital Statistics
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- U.S. Social Security Administration



parolee is a perpetual and particularly Kafkaesque problem and is particularly difficult for those born outside their state of incarceration. To obtain state-issued identification, a person must have a series of identity documents that prove who they are and where they live. As such, the challenge begins with obtaining the identity documents, such as birth certificates, social security cards, or other documents. An individual who does not have identification cannot legally work in the United States as they cannot complete employment eligibility forms for an employer. They are also rendered effectively ineligible for workforce training, to rent an apartment, obtain health insurance or non-emergency treatment, and other life necessities. In addition, if they do not have enough identity documents to prove their identity to a DMV, they will be unable to obtain an identification card. As just one practical matter, the high percentage of individuals leaving prison on prescription medications will have no method to continue their medication, even if payment presented no barrier, due to this lack of personal identification.

Identification issues are not simply limited to the ability of parolees to access a DMV and, as mentioned above, require multiple identity documents, many of which can be difficult for someone to obtain pre- or post-incarceration. A person who wants to complete an I-9 form who does not have

a passport will require one document establishing their identity and one establishing employment authorization ([USCIS](#)). Some departments of corrections make prerelease efforts toward securing birth certificates, social security cards, and even non-driver identification. If done correctly, parolees will experience fewer barriers to reintegration in the community and will be more rapidly connected to protective factors such as employment, housing, social support, healthcare, and other essentials. However, these departments face major challenges in executing policies around identification, which automatically creates challenges for parole offices and parolees.

In states where departments of corrections have not provided identification to exiting inmates, parole offices can still tailor conditions and obligations to the individual. This would be a case-specific determination but, at minimum, would relax the timeframes for the parolee to complete any condition that requires identification. In addition, parole boards and offices should enter into cooperative agreements, codifying them as memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with key offices to expedite and, if possible, provide fee waivers for vital documents. For example, an MOU with a state office of vital statistics can expedite birth certificate requests for parolees born in that state. For out-of-state birth certificates, accommodations must be made for expected processing delays. Parole offices can form relationships with their local SSA offices to assist parolees in obtaining these documents ([RM 10225.145 - Processing SS-5](#)). Similarly, parole boards and offices can establish MOUs with the state department of motor vehicles to waive fees and serve as a point of contact to clear existing obligations that prevent the parolee from obtaining a driver's license.

Drivers' License Restoration (Fines, Fees, and Warrants)

Assuming a parolee has enough identity documents to secure a non-driver identification card (or obtains the card from their department of corrections), a series of other barriers must be overcome before obtaining a driver's license. For example, "44 states and the District of Columbia still suspend, revoke or do not allow a person to renew their driver's license if they have unpaid court debt" ([Free to Drive](#)). The person may be ineligible due to owed (and often very old) fines, fees, and warrants for nonpayment. This issue is so prevalent that many parolees will not enter a department of motor vehicles office to even try to find out what driver's license barriers exist because, if an old warrant surfaces, they will go to the county jail directly from the office. The issue is circular—a person cannot/does not pay a fine/fee or does not appear in court (even if they are in prison and unaware of the issue) and his/her driving privileges are then suspended. That suspension generates new

finest or fees and typically an arrest warrant. The barriers to legitimate reintegration compound themselves ([Holik and Levin, 2](#)).

The obstacles to building a successful career as a parolee are thorny, and, as a result of the issue of fines and fees, individuals with criminal histories cannot pursue particular careers, such as commercial driving, until the fines and fees are paid or otherwise addressed. Transportation companies will, generally, consider individuals with criminal histories for positions at or well above a living wage if they have a commercial driver's license (CDL). Of course, a person cannot possibly obtain a CDL without a valid basic driver's license. Similarly, most building trades unions require an applicant to have a basic driver's license before he or she can even take the entrance exam. As a result, parolees can be barred from the fields they could attain success in, and, in the worst cases, they face violations for failing to secure employment or meet financial obligations unless they pay these fines and fees.

Parole and the Department of Labor: Partnerships for Success

To maximize success for parole agencies and parolees, parole boards and offices and the state department of labor should work together seamlessly. Indeed, there is a wealth of opportunities for training and job placement through the state departments of labor.

Parolees, classified as "ex-offenders" by the U.S. Department of Labor, qualify for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds based on this status, although they may qualify under multiple criteria ([29 U.S.C. § 3102\(24\)\(F\)](#)). WIOA defines an ex-offender as an adult or juvenile—

- who is or has been subject to any stage of the criminal justice process, and for whom services under this Act may be beneficial; or
- who requires assistance in overcoming artificial barriers to employment resulting from a record of arrest or conviction ([29 U.S.C. § 3102\(38\)\(A\)](#) and (B)).

Nationally, approximately 50,536 ex-offenders received some type of WIOA service from April 2017 to March 2018 ([U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, 1](#)). These can take the form of basic career services, individualized career services, or professional training services ([U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, 1](#)). However, only 13,935 ex-offenders actually received professional training services during that same period. This is because a person can receive initial WIOA services without progressing to professional training services.

ISSUE

Parolees typically lack valuable, appropriate vocational training or employment opportunities that lead to career pathways and living wages with benefits.



SOLUTION

- Connect incarcerated persons and parolees to American Job Centers.
- Ensure follow-up services through parole conditions.
- Connect the business community to a job-ready population, led by the parole offices.
- Incentivize the business community via on-the-job training and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit



STAKEHOLDERS

- Parole Board
- Department of Corrections
- State Department of Labor
- Local Workforce Development Boards
- U.S. Department of Labor
- Private sector



The OJT program is a federal labor program in which employers agree to hire workers from disenfranchised groups and, in turn, the state department of licensing (DOL), using U.S. Department of Licensing (USDOL) funds, reimburses 50 percent or more of an employee's wages for a specific period of time. This program can incentivize the business community to consider prospective employees in a controlled setting before permanently hiring the most qualified candidates at a competitive wage. USDOL-funded services that emphasize direct placement in the workforce are under-utilized for the reentry population. Few states publicly claim to be effectively leveraging OJT contracts for individuals with criminal records. An employee subject to an OJT contract should be learning new technologies, production or service procedures, or may be upgrading to new jobs that require additional skills, workplace literacy, or other appropriate purposes ([20 C.F.R. § 680.70\(c\)](#)).

Any unemployed or underemployed person can sign up for job training or placement at American Job Centers (AJC). Although they may go by other names across the country, this paper will use the term "AJC" to refer to these local DOL offices. AJCs often supervise and verify "work activity" compliance for people receiving social service benefits (SNAP, GA, Medicaid, etc.). AJCs provide a number of services that include online job search tools, resume assistance, and the ability to pay for training programs and/or OJT programs. They also assess the person's reading and math

levels for training eligibility, often by administering the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). All training programs are intended to result in at least one industry-recognized credential and subsequent job placement. OJT programs are employer-focused, and the AJC pays a percentage of a person's salary as they learn while they work. Other employer-focused programs funded by U.S. DOL offered at AJCs include federal bonding and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

Halfway houses, which often contain many parolees who are simply residents, are also an opportune setting for this type of employment pipeline. Residents and employers can vet one another in low stakes settings with the opportunity for full-time employment once the probationary period has ended. This also gives the employer the opportunity to groom the trainee toward the expectations of the organization and work culture. This arrangement can be mutually beneficial, offering the parolee financial stability, hard and soft employment skills during their transition, and offering employers qualified candidates with specific skill sets.

It is in this space where parole offices can help parolees access vocational training or temporary employment while incentivizing the business community through the OJT process. First, finding employment is a near-universal parole condition. As such, parolees without jobs could be mandated to participate in state DOL services through the local AJC to promote engagement. Second, parole offices, in partnership with the AJCs, can streamline the process for

business hiring incentives by connecting reentry-friendly employers to the AJCs. Third, there is a high probability that the parolee can increase access to other services, including those listed above, through the AJC. Fourth, parole offices can connect parolees in halfway houses to AJC services to maximize successful transition.

Conclusion

Reforming community supervision is part of reducing mass incarceration and lowering high recidivism rates. This means working to reduce those technical violations that have little to do with rehabilitation, as well as supporting parolees' ability to work, seek vocational training, obtain needed treatment, secure safe housing, and access other necessary and protective resources. Parole supervision and conditions should focus on building resources to address critical areas of need at the point of release and remain stable post-release despite the ubiquitous presence of collateral consequences. Although one example of this is parole reform around supporting parolees in obtaining and maintaining stable employment through alignment with USDOL and the employer community, parole reform should not be limited to workforce development. Mississippi, and now Louisiana, have recently proven themselves to be front-runners in modernizing supervision to allow access to protective, recidivism-reducing resources such as employment, and may help other states consider similar reforms to make parole a system that supports, rather than inhibits, workforce development and corresponding socioeconomic mobility. ★

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Koufos has been widely recognized for his professional advocacy and was previously certified by the Supreme Court of New Jersey as a criminal trial attorney. His reentry work has been recognized by President Trump, and he works with the public and private sectors to build partnerships designed to lead to better employment outcomes and safer communities. Koufos' work began in New Jersey, where he helped the Christie administration and five former governors implement effective, evidence-based reentry services. He designed New Jersey's nationally recognized legal program, combining staff lawyers with approximately 70 pro bono lawyers to help the reentry community clear old tickets and warrants and restore drivers' licenses, removing roadblocks to job acquisition. Koufos' lived experience on all sides of the criminal justice system makes him a credible spokesperson.



Shae Cali is a senior fellow with Safe Streets & Second Chances, a policy initiative of Right on Crime at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Cali has been working on criminal justice reform and behavioral health services for over a decade. In 2014, Cali helped build the New Jersey Reentry Corporation to implement effective, innovative, and humane evidence-based reentry services across nine counties. Cali was involved with NIH-funded studies on health-seeking behaviors in men and women returning from periods of incarceration, and she worked with the Prison Visiting Project at the Correctional Association of New York.

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