PRISONER REENTRY: PUBLIC SAFETY AND REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES

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Changes in sentencing practices, coupled with a decrease in prison rehabilitation programs, have placed new demands on the U.S. parole system. Nearly 700,000 parolees are "doing time" on the streets. Most have been released to a parole system that provides few services and imposes conditions that almost guarantee failure. This article examines the state of parole in today's corrections environment—from indeterminate and determinate sentencing policies to investing in prisoner reentry programs. Specifically, the article analyzes the following collateral consequences involved with recycling parolees in and out of families and communities: community cohesion and social disorganization, work and economic well-being, family matters, mental and physical health, political alienation, and housing and homelessness. The future of parole is also discussed, and the author urges a rethinking of discretionary parole release.

State prisons admitted about 591,000 people in 1999 and released almost the same number—about 538,000. If federal prisoners and those released from secure juvenile facilities are included, nearly 600,000 inmates—about 1,600 a day—arrive on the doorsteps of communities throughout the country each year.

Virtually no systematic, comprehensive attention has been paid by policy makers to deal with people after they are released, an issue that has been termed *prisoner reentry*. There are a few studies of various parole innovations, some research on distinct populations such as sex offenders, and some evaluations of programs such as drug treatment systems that link prison-based and community-based interventions. But, as a general matter, we know very little about correlates of success and failure in the process of reintegration. Failure to better understand the ingredients of successful integration is critical, and the crime reduction gains made in recent years may erode unless we consider the cumulative impact of tens of thousands of returning felons on families, children, and communities. Failure to pay attention to parole ser-

vices is unfortunate from another standpoint as well because at the point of release, most inmates have an initial strong desire to succeed.

Of course, inmates have always been released from prison, and officials have long struggled with how to help them succeed. But the current situation is decidedly different. The numbers of releasees dwarf anything in our history, the needs of parolees are more serious, the public and parole system is less tolerant of failures, and the corrections system retains few rehabilitation programs—either in prison or in the community.

A number of unfortunate collateral consequences are likely, including increases in child abuse, family violence, the spread of infectious diseases, homelessness, and community disorganization. And with 1.3 million prisoners, many more people have real-life knowledge of the prison experience. Being incarcerated is becoming almost a normal experience for people in some communities. This phenomenon may affect the socialization of young people, the ability of prison sentences to scare and deter, and the future trajectory of crime rates and crime victimization.

PAROLE IN THE UNITED STATES: MANAGING MORE PEOPLE, MANAGING THEM LESS WELL

Changes in sentencing practices, coupled with a decrease in availability of rehabilitation programs, have placed new demands on the parole system. Support and funding have declined, resulting in dangerously high caseloads. Parolees sometimes abscond from supervision, often without consequence. It is not surprising that most parolees fail to lead law-abiding lives and are rearrested.

Determinate sentencing means automatic release. Parole in the United States has changed dramatically since the mid-1970s, when most inmates served open-ended indeterminate prison terms—10 years to life, for example—and a parole board, usually appointed by the governor, had wide discretion to release inmates or keep them behind bars. In principle, offenders were paroled only if they were rehabilitated and had ties to the community—such as a family or a job. This made release from prison a privilege to be earned. If inmates violated parole, they could be returned to prison to serve the balance of their term—a strong incentive not to commit crimes.

Today, indeterminate sentencing and discretionary release have been replaced in 14 states with determinate sentencing and automatic release (Tonry, 1999). For example, in California, where more than 125,000 prisoners are released each year, no parole board asks whether the inmate is ready

for release because he or she *must* be released once the prisoner has served the determinate term imposed by the court. Offenders receive fixed terms at the time of their initial sentencing and are automatically released at the end of their prison term, usually with credits for good time. In 1990, 39% of inmates were released to supervision by parole board action and 29% by mandatory release; by 1998, those figures had been reversed, and 26% were released by parole board decision and 40% by mandatory release. With widespread adoption of truth-in-sentencing statutes, we can expect these trends to continue, so that release by the parole board will become a vestige of a bygone era, retained in some states and, in others, reserved for an aging prison cohort sentenced under the old regime.

A parolee must generally be released to the county where he last resided before going to prison. Because offenders overwhelmingly come from poor, culturally isolated, inner-city neighborhoods, those are where they return. The greatly expanded use of incarceration in the United States has a particularly acute impact on communities that are already characterized by great concentrations of disadvantage. According to recent research, in some communities, up to 15% of the young Black males are incarcerated on a given day (Lynch & Sabol, 2001), up to 13% of adult males enter prison or jail in a given year (Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services [CASES], 2000), and up to 2% of all residents enter prison in a given year (Rose, Clear, & Scully, 1999).

Indeterminate sentencing was abolished because of its discretionary quality. Studies showed that wide disparities resulted when the characteristics of the crime and the offender were taken into account and were influenced by the offender's race, socioeconomic characteristics, and place of conviction. But most corrections officials believe that *some* ability to individualize is necessary because it provides a way to take account of changes in behavior that occur after the offender was incarcerated. Imprisonment can cause psychological breakdown, depression, or mental illness or reveal previously unrecognized personal problems, and the parole board can adjust release dates accordingly.

More parolees have unmet needs. State and federal incarceration rates quadrupled between 1980 and 1996, and the U.S. prison population now exceeds 1.3 million persons. If one includes people in jail, there are now 2 million individuals behind bars. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has calculated that an African American male has a 29% lifetime chance of serving at least a year in prison—a rate six times higher than for Whites. Sentences for drug offending are the major reason for increases in admissions—accounting for approximately 45% of the growth. Aggravated assault and

sexual assault are also major contributors to growth (Blumstein & Beck, 1999).

Not only are more people entering prison, but they are also serving longer sentences. The average time served for releasees has increased from 22 months in 1990 to 27 months in 1998. This trend is expected to continue and means that reentering prisoners who spend more time in prison will be more distant from the community life to which they are returning. Recent analysis by Lynch and Sabol (2000b) found that there was a big increase in the amount of time served by persons in releases from 1991 to 1997. The "long stayers" almost doubled from 12% to 20%. They conclude, "If time spent in prison severs inmate's ties to society, then the cohort coming out will be less integrated and, therefore, more difficult to deal with." States and the federal government have allocated increasing shares of their budgets to building and operating prisons. California, for example, with the largest prison-building program, has built 21 prisons since the mid-1980s, and its corrections budget grew from 2% of the state general fund in 1981-1982 to nearly 8% in 2000-2001. Similar patterns exist nationwide, and prison spending was the fastest-growing budget item in nearly every state in the 1990s.

Increased dollars have funded operating costs for more prisons but *not* more rehabilitation programs. Fewer programs and a lack of incentives for inmates to participate in them mean that fewer inmates leave prison having participated in programs to address work, education, and substance use deficiencies. In-prison substance abuse programs are expanding, but programs are often minimal, and many inmates do little more than serve time before they are released. The Office of National Drug Control Policy reported that 70% to 85% of state prison inmates need substance abuse treatment; however, just 13% receive any kind of treatment in prison (McCaffrey, 1998).

Lynch and Sabol (2000a, 2000b) also compared 1991 and 1997 prison release cohorts in terms of their participation in vocational training, educational programs, and prerelease programs. They found that there had been a decrease in participation in vocational training from around 32% in 1991 to around 27% of the cohort in 1997. Participation in educational programs dropped even more, from around 42% in 1991 to around 34% in 1997. Participation in prerelease programs does not decrease in this period—only about 12% of either the 1991 or 1997 release cohort participated in *any* prerelease program. Lynch and Sabol conclude that neither the resources nor the participation in preparatory programs has kept pace with the quantitative increase in the size of reentry cohorts.

These program reductions come at a time when inmates need *more* help, not less. Many have long histories of crime and substance use, are gang members, and lack marketable skills. Deinstitutionalization has also led to a

greater number of mentally ill people being admitted to prisons and jails. A recent survey revealed that nearly one in five U.S. prisoners report having a mental illness (Ditton, 1999). Psychologists warn that overcrowded and larger "supermax" prisons can cause serious psychological problems because prisoners in such institutions spend many hours in solitary or segregated housing, and those who study prison coping have found that greater time in isolation results in depression and heightened anxiety (Bottoms, 1999).

Gangs have become major factors in many prisons, with implications for in-prison and postprison behavior. Racial tensions in prison mean that inmates tend to be more preoccupied with finding a safe niche than with long-term self-improvement. Gang conflicts started (or continued) in prison get settled after release: "There is an awful lot of potential rage coming out of prison to haunt our future" (Abramsky, 1999, p. 33).

Parolee supervision replaces services. On release, 80% of parolees are assigned to a parole officer. The remaining 20%—including some of the most serious—will "max out" (e.g., not have received any credits for good time) and will receive no supervision. The offenders *least* willing to engage in rehabilitative programs are often *not* subject to parole supervision and services. About 100,000 parolees (about 1 in 5) left prison in 1998 without any postcustody supervision (Beck, 2000).

Parole officers are charged with enforcing conditions of release, including no drug use, finding and maintaining employment, and not associating with known criminals. The number of parole agents has not kept pace with the increased number of parolees. In the 1970s, one agent ordinarily was assigned 45 parolees; today, caseloads of 70 are common—far higher than the 35 to 50 considered ideal. Eighty percent of all U.S. parolees are supervised on "regular" rather than intensive caseloads, which means less than two 15-minute face-to-face contacts per month (Petersilia, 1999). Despite the evidence that more serious offenders are being released, just 6% of the parole population is on intensive supervision (Beck, 2000). Supervision costs about $2,200 per parolee, per year, compared with about $22,000 per year, per prisoner. Those arrangements do not permit much monitoring, and the *Los Angeles Times* recently reported that parole agents in California have lost track of about one fourth of the 127,000 parolees they were supposed to supervise in 1999 (Associated Press, 1999). Nationally, about 9% of all parolees have absconded (Bonczar & Glaze, 1999).

Most parolees return to prison. Persons released from prison face a multitude of difficulties. They remain largely uneducated, unskilled, and usually

without solid family support systems—to which are added the burdens of a prison record. It is not surprising that most parolees fail, and rather quickly—rearrests are most common in the first 6 months after release.

Fully two thirds of all those released on parole will be rearrested within 3 years. Parole failures now constitute a growing proportion of all new prison admissions. In 1980, parole violators constituted 18% of all admissions, but recent years have seen a steady increase to the point where they constituted 35% of all new admissions in 1997 (Beck & Mumola, 1999).

THE COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES OF PAROLE RELEASE

Recycling parolees in and out of families and communities has unfortunate effects on community cohesion, employment and economic well-being, democratic participation, family stabilization and childhood development, mental and physical health, and homelessness (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999).

Community cohesion and social disorganization. The social characteristics of neighborhoods—particularly poverty, ethnic composition, and residential instability—influence crime. There are "tipping points" beyond which communities are no longer able to exert positive influences on the behavior of residents. Norms start to change, disorder and incivilities increase, out-migration follows, and crime and violence increase (Wilson, 1987).

Elijah Anderson (1990) vividly illustrates the breakdown of social cohesion in socially disorganized communities. Moral authority increasingly is vested in "street-smart" young men for whom drugs and crime are a way of life. Attitudes, behaviors, and lessons learned in prison are transmitted into the free society. Anderson concludes that as

> family caretakers and role models disappear or decline in influence, and as unemployment and poverty become more persistent, the community, particularly its children, becomes vulnerable to a variety of social ills, including crime, drugs, family disorganization, generalized demoralization and unemployment. (p. 4)

Prison gangs have growing influence in inner-city communities. Joan Moore (1996) notes that most California prisons are violent and dangerous places, and new inmates search for protection and connections. Many find both in gangs. Inevitably, gang loyalties are exported to the neighborhoods. The revolving prison door strengthens street gang ties. Moore commented, "In California . . . frankly I don't think the gangs would continue existing as

they are without the prison scene" (p. 73). Moore also found that state-raised youth, whose adolescence involved recurring trips to California juvenile detention facilities, were the most committed to the most crime-oriented gangs. She warns that as more youth are incarcerated earlier in their criminal careers, larger numbers of youth will come out of prison with hostile attitudes and exert strong negative influences on neighborhoods.

Recently, Rose et al. (1999) explored the direct effects of offenders going to prison and returning to their home community after 1 year in prison. They theorized that the aggregate impact of high levels of incarceration would damage networks of social control and decrease the legitimacy of formal social control. In their model, when public control occurs at high levels, informal controls function less effectively. The result is more crime. They tested their theory in Tallahassee, Florida, and found support for the proposition that spatial concentrations of incarceration promote higher-than-expected rates of crime. Using "neighborhood" as the level of analysis, they found that low rates of prison admissions were associated with no drop in crime the following year, moderate rates of admissions were associated with moderate drops in crime, but higher rates of admission—after a "tipping point" was reached of about 1.5% of the neighborhood's total population—had a strong, positive relationship to crime in the following year. This result supports the idea that high rates of admitting people to prison can destabilize informal networks of social control and lead to increases in crime.

Work and economic well-being. Most inmates leave prison with no savings, no immediate entitlement to unemployment benefits, and few employment prospects. National statistics indicate that 7 in 10 prison inmates function at the two lowest levels of both prose and numeric literacy, meaning that they are unable to fill out a Social Security or job application, write a business letter, calculate a price discount, read a bus schedule, or perform many other text- and number-based tasks of daily life (National Institute for Literacy, 2001). Therefore, it is not surprising that, 1 year after release, as many as 60% of former inmates are not employed in the regular labor market (California Department of Corrections, 1994).

Incarceration is also stigmatizing, and there is increased reluctance among employers to hire ex-offenders. Evidence for the stigma of conviction was provided by experiments in which employers were sent fictitious letters of job applications containing information about the conviction status of job applicants (Buikhuisen & Dijksterhuis, 1971). Employers were less likely to respond positively to ex-convicts than those who provided no information about past convictions. A survey in five major U.S cities suggests that

employers would be more likely to hire welfare recipients or applicants with little work experience than ex-convicts (Holzer, 1996). Holzer also reports that 65% of all employers said they would not knowingly hire an ex-offender (regardless of the offense), and between 30% and 40% had checked the criminal records of their most recent employees.

The "get-tough" movement of the 1980s also increased employment restrictions on parolees. Commonly, a felony record can temporarily disqualify employment in licensed or professional occupations. These prohibitions typically extend beyond the professions to include jobs in health care and skilled trades. In addition, felony status in several states can bar public-sector employment. The severity of civil disabilities varies across states. In California, for example, parolees are barred from law, real estate, medicine, nursing, physical therapy, and education. In Colorado, the jobs of dentist, engineer, nurse, pharmacist, physician, and real estate agent are closed to convicted felons. Their criminal record may also preclude them from retaining parental rights, be grounds for divorce, and bar them from jury service. Although the legal status of ex-felons is well documented (Office of the Pardon Attorney, 1996), little is known about the effects on employment of civil disabilities.

Simon (1993) notes that these disabilities are inherently contradictory. The United States spends millions of dollars to "rehabilitate" offenders, convincing them that they need to obtain legitimate employment, and then frustrates whatever was accomplished by barring them from many kinds of employment and its rewards. Moreover, the loss of a solid industrial base, which has traditionally supplied jobs within poorer inner-city communities, has left urban parolees with few opportunities.

The underemployment of ex-felons has broader economic implications. One reason America's unemployment statistics look so good compared with those of other industrial democracies is that 1.6 million mainly low-skilled workers—precisely the group unlikely to find work in a high-tech economy—have been incarcerated and are thus not considered part of the labor force (Western & Becket, 1999). If they were included, U.S. unemployment rates would be 2% higher. Recycling ex-offenders back into the job market with reduced job prospects will have the effect of increasing unemployment rates in the long run.

Family stabilization and childhood development. Women are about 7% of the U.S. prison population, but their incarceration rates are increasing faster than are those for men. About 80% of U.S. female inmates are mothers with, on average, two dependent children; two thirds of their children are younger than age 10 (Snell, 1994). More than half of incarcerated men are parents of

children younger than 18 years of age. Altogether, more than 1.5 million children have parents in U.S. prisons, and the number will increase as the proportion of female inmates increases.

We know little about the effects of a parent's incarceration on childhood development, but it is likely to be significant. When mothers are incarcerated, their children are usually cared for by grandparents or other relatives or placed in foster care. One study found that roughly half of these children do not see their mothers the entire time they are in prison (because there are fewer prisons for women, women are often incarcerated further away from their children than are men, making family visits more difficult). The vast majority of imprisoned mothers, however, expect to resume their parenting role and reside with their children after their release, although it is uncertain how many actually do (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993).

Mothers released from prison have difficulty finding services such as housing, employment, and child care, and this causes stress for them and their children. Children of incarcerated and released parents often suffer confusion, sadness, and social stigma, and these feelings often result in school-related difficulties, low self-esteem, aggressive behavior, and general emotional dysfunction. If the parents are negative role models, children fail to develop positive attitudes about work and responsibility. Children of incarcerated parents are five times more likely to serve time in prison than are children whose parents are not incarcerated (Beck, Gilliard, & Greenfeld, 1993).

We have no data on involvement of parolees in family violence, but it may be significant. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect include poverty, unemployment, alcohol/drug abuse, low self-esteem, and poor health of parents—common attributes of parolees. Concentrated poverty and social disorganization increase child abuse and neglect and other adjustment problems, which in turn constitute risk factors for later crime and violence.

Mental and physical health. Prisoners have significantly more medical and mental health problems than the general population, due to lifestyles that often include crowded or itinerant living conditions, intravenous drug use, poverty, and high rates of substance abuse. In prisons, 50-year-olds are commonly considered old, in part because the health of the average 50-year-old prisoner approximates that of average persons 10 years older in the free community. While in prison, inmates have access to state-provided health care, but on release, most are unable easily to obtain health care and have the potential for spreading disease (particularly tuberculosis, hepatitis, and HIV) and presenting serious public health risks (McDonald, 1999).

In New York City, a major multi-drug-resistant form of tuberculosis emerged in 1989, with 80% of cases being traced to jails and prisons. By

1991, the Rikers Island Jail had one of the highest TB rates in the nation. In Los Angeles, an outbreak of meningitis in the county jail moved into the surrounding neighborhoods.

At year-end 1996, 2.3% of all state and federal prison inmates were known to be infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), a rate six times higher than in the general U.S. population. Public health experts predict that these rates will continue to escalate and eventually make their way to the streets, particularly as more drug offenders, many of whom engage in intravenous drug use, share needles, or trade sex for drugs, are incarcerated (May, 2000).

Inmates with mental illness also are increasingly being imprisoned—and being released. In 1998, 16% of jail or prison inmates reported either a mental condition or an overnight stay in a mental hospital (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999). Even when public mental health services are available, many mentally ill individuals fail to use them because they fear institutionalization, deny they are mentally ill, or distrust the mental health system.

Democratic participation and political alienation. An estimated 3.9 million Americans—1 in 50 adults—were in 1998 permanently unable to vote as a result of a felony conviction. Of these, 1.4 million were African American males, representing 13% of all Black men. The numbers will certainly increase. In 1996, a young Black man age 16 had a 28.5% chance of spending time in prison during his life. The comparable figure for White men was 4.4% (Bonczar & Beck, 1997).

Denying large segments of the minority population the right to vote will likely alienate former offenders further. Disillusionment with the political process also erodes citizens' feelings of engagement and makes them less willing to participate in local activities and exert informal social control over residents. This is important because our most effective crime-fighting tools require community collaboration and active engagement.

Housing and homelessness. The latest census counts about 230,000 homeless in America. In the late 1980s, an estimated quarter of them had served prison sentences. The figure is surely higher now, with many U.S. cities reporting a critical shortage of low-cost housing. California officials report that 10% of the state's parolees remain homeless, but in urban areas such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, the rate has reached 30% to 50% (Legislative Analysts Office, 1999).

Transients, panhandling, and vagrants increase citizens' fears, and that ultimately contributes to increased crime and violence. This is because neighborhood crime often worsens when law-abiding citizens are afraid to

go onto streets filled with graffiti, transients, and loitering youth. Fearful citizens eventually yield control of the streets to people who are not frightened by these signs of decay and who often are the people who created the problem in the first place. A vicious cycle begins. Wilson and Kelling (1982) illustrate this by describing how a broken window can influence crime rates. If the first broken window in a building is not repaired, people who like breaking windows may assume no one cares and break some more. Soon, the building will have no windows. As "broken windows" spread—homelessness, prostitution, graffiti, panhandling—businesses and law-abiding citizens move away, and disorder escalates, leading to more serious crime.

RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM

Government officials voice growing concern about the problem of prisoner reentry. Former Attorney General Janet Reno recently called prisoner reentry "one of the most pressing problems we face as a nation" (Reno, 2000). Federal programs are being developed to encourage responsible fatherhood among offenders, job training for parolees, and establishment of reentry courts. Reentry courts are modeled on "drug courts," which use judges instead of corrections officers to monitor released offenders (Travis, 2000). California Governor Gray Davis, in a "State of the State" address, called for hiring 100 new parole officers to increase surveillance of high-risk offenders and find the nearly 20% of California parolees who have absconded.

Initiatives such as these may or may not prove useful, but often they are not based on thoughtful analysis and debate. It is safe to say that parole has received less research attention in recent years than any other part of the correctional system. A congressionally mandated evaluation of prevention programs included just *one* parole evaluation among hundreds of recent studies that were examined (Sherman et al., 1997). I have spent many years working on *probation* effectiveness but know of no similar body of knowledge on *parole* effectiveness. Without better information, the public is unlikely to give corrections officials the political permission to invest in rehabilitation and job training programs for parolees. With better information, we might be able to persuade voters and elected officials to shift away from solely punitive crime policies and toward policies that balance incapacitation, rehabilitation, and just punishment.

Parole *release* also needs to be reconsidered. In 1977, 72% of all U.S. prisoners were released after appearing before a parole board, but that figure had declined to 26% by 1998, the lowest since the federal government began compiling statistics on the subject.

Parole was abolished because it came to symbolize the alleged leniency of a system in which hardened criminals were "let out" early. If parole were abolished, politicians argued, then parole boards could not release offenders early, and inmates would serve longer terms. However, this has not happened. Stivers (2000) shows that, after controlling for offender and offense characteristics, inmates released in 1995 in nonparole states served 7 months less, on average, than did inmates with the same characteristics released in states using discretionary parole. Similar experiences in Florida, Connecticut, and Colorado caused those states to reinstate discretionary parole after discovering that abolition resulted in shorter terms being served by most offenders.

Parole experts have been saying all along that the public is misinformed when it labels parole as lenient. To the contrary, through their exercise of discretion, parole boards can target more violent and dangerous offenders for longer periods of incarceration. When states abolish parole or reduce parole authorities' discretion, they replace a rational, controlled system of "earned" release for *selected* inmates with "automatic" release for nearly *all* inmates (Burke, 1995). Nonparole systems may sound tough, but they remove an important gate-keeping role that can protect communities and victims.

Parole boards are in a position to demand participation in drug treatment, and research shows that coerced drug treatment is as successful in achieving abstinence as is voluntary participation. Parole boards can also require an adequate plan for a job and residence in the community—and that has the added benefit of refocusing prison staff and corrections budgets on transition planning.

Parole boards can meet personally with the victim. Involving victims in parole hearings has been one of the major changes in parole in recent years. Ninety percent of parole boards now provide information to victims on the parole process, and 70% allow victims to be present during the parole hearing.

Perhaps most important, parole boards can reconsider the tentative release date when more information about the offense and offender has been collected and the offender's behavior in prison has been observed. More than 90% of U.S. offenders receive criminal sentences as a result of pleading guilty to offenses and not as a result of a trial. Usually they plead guilty to a reduced charge. Because there is no trial, there is little opportunity to fully air the circumstances surrounding the crime or the risks presented by the criminal. The parole board can revisit the case to discover how much injury the victim really suffered or whether a gun was involved—even though the offense to which the offender pled, by definition, indicates no weapon was involved. Burke (1995) observes, "In a system which incorporates discre-

tionary parole, the system gets a second chance to make sure it is doing the right thing" (p. 7).

Ironically, "no-parole" systems also significantly undercut postrelease supervision. When parole boards have no ability to select who will be released, they are forced to supervise a more serious parolee population and not one of their own choosing. Parole officers say it is impossible to ensure cooperation of offenders when offenders know they will be released, regardless of their willingness to comply with certain conditions (e.g., get a job). And due to prison crowding, some states are no longer allowing parolees to be returned to prison for technical violations. Parole officers say that parole has lost its power to encourage inmates toward rehabilitation and sanction parole failures. Field supervision tends to be undervalued and, eventually, underfunded and understaffed.

No one would argue for a return to the unfettered discretion that parole boards exercised in the 1960s. That led to unwarranted disparities. Parole release decisions must be principled and incorporate explicit standards and due process protections. Parole guidelines, which are used in many states, can establish uniformity in parole decisions and objectively weigh factors known to be associated with recidivism. Rather than *entitle* inmates to be released at the end of a fixed time period, parole guidelines specify when the offender becomes *eligible* for release.

We also need to rethink who should be responsible for making parole release decisions. In most states, the chair and all members of the parole board are appointed by the governor; in two thirds of the states, there are no professional qualifications for parole board membership. Although this may increase the political accountability of the parole board, it also makes it highly vulnerable to improper political pressures. In Ohio, by contrast, parole board members are appointed by the director of corrections, serve in civil service positions, and must have an extensive background in criminal justice.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Parole supervision and release raise complicated issues and deserve more attention than they now get. Nearly 700,000 parolees are doing time on U.S. streets. Most have been released to parole systems that provide few services and impose conditions that almost guarantee parolees' failure. Monitoring systems are getting better, and public tolerance for failure is decreasing. A rising tide of parolees is back in prison, putting pressure on states to build more prisons and, in turn, taking money away from rehabilitation programs

that might help offenders stay out of prison. Parolees will continue to receive fewer services to help them deal with their underlying problems, ensuring that recidivism rates and returns to prison remain high—and public support for parole remains low.

This situation represents formidable challenges to policy makers. The public will not support community-based punishments until they have been shown to "work," and they will not have an opportunity to "work" without sufficient funding and research. Spending on parole services in California, for example, was cut 44% in 1997, causing parole caseloads nearly to double (now at a ratio of 82 to 1). When caseloads increase, services decline, and even parolees who are motivated to change have little opportunity to do so.

In 2001, the United States is likely to have 2 million people in jails and prisons and more people on parole than ever before. If parole revocation trends continue, more than half of those entering prison in the year 2001 will be parole failures. Given the increasing human and financial costs associated with prison—and all of the collateral consequences parolees pose to families, children, and communities—investing in effective reentry programs may be one of the best investments we make.

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