

Tools for Building Effective Community Corrections

# Balancing Correctional Costs To Improve Public Safety





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The Center for  
Community  
Corrections

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# Balancing Correctional Costs To Improve Public Safety

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A public-private partnership promoting an  
effective system of community corrections  
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## THIS PROJECT IS DEDICATED TO THE FOLLOWING PROPOSITIONS:

- That successful community corrections depends on inter-governmental collaboration which recognizes the needs and promises of each level of government;
- That successful community corrections demands a genuine partnership with the community;
- That the optimum use of community corrections requires public officials and a public who understand its purpose and are willing to support its programs;
- That small, relatively inexpensive changes in the right places can do much to increase the likelihood of successful community corrections.

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# Introduction



This piece explores whether we are getting the most from our correctional dollars and what can be done to improve the overall effectiveness of correctional services. It encourages elected officials and citizens to consider:

- ❑ What has happened to offender supervision and services for the majority of nonviolent offenders in the community when jurisdictions have increased their correctional costs.
- ❑ Why the Center for Community Corrections views monitoring correctional budgets and costs as an important issue.
- ❑ What steps leaders can take to help improve correctional cost allocations and rehabilitative correctional programs that include community corrections.

In the Center for Community Corrections' ("Center") survey of local and state legislators, the most frequently mentioned response to an open-ended question about obstacles to improved community corrections programs was lack of adequate funding or resources for programs. (See the Center's publication entitled *Leaders' Perceptions of Intergovernmental Issues*.) Community corrections is a part of state and local correctional systems that is premised on the view that there are nonviolent and special populations routinely incarcerated who are better served and less likely to re-offend when placed in community-based programs. Furthermore, such programs may cost no more than incarceration and may be more effective in curbing crime in the long run.

Many persons believe that in times of economic prosperity and rapidly expanding correctional budgets, adequate resources are readily available to support effective correctional programs for those incarcerated and for the majority of all offenders who are under community supervision. The reality is that most correctional programs in the community are

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chronically under-funded, and many prison rehabilitation programs have long waiting lists or have been discontinued.

This piece explores why inadequate funding for community corrections programs is a problem in most places and what can be done to improve the quality and availability of community corrections options.

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PART 1

# Consider the Impact of Trends



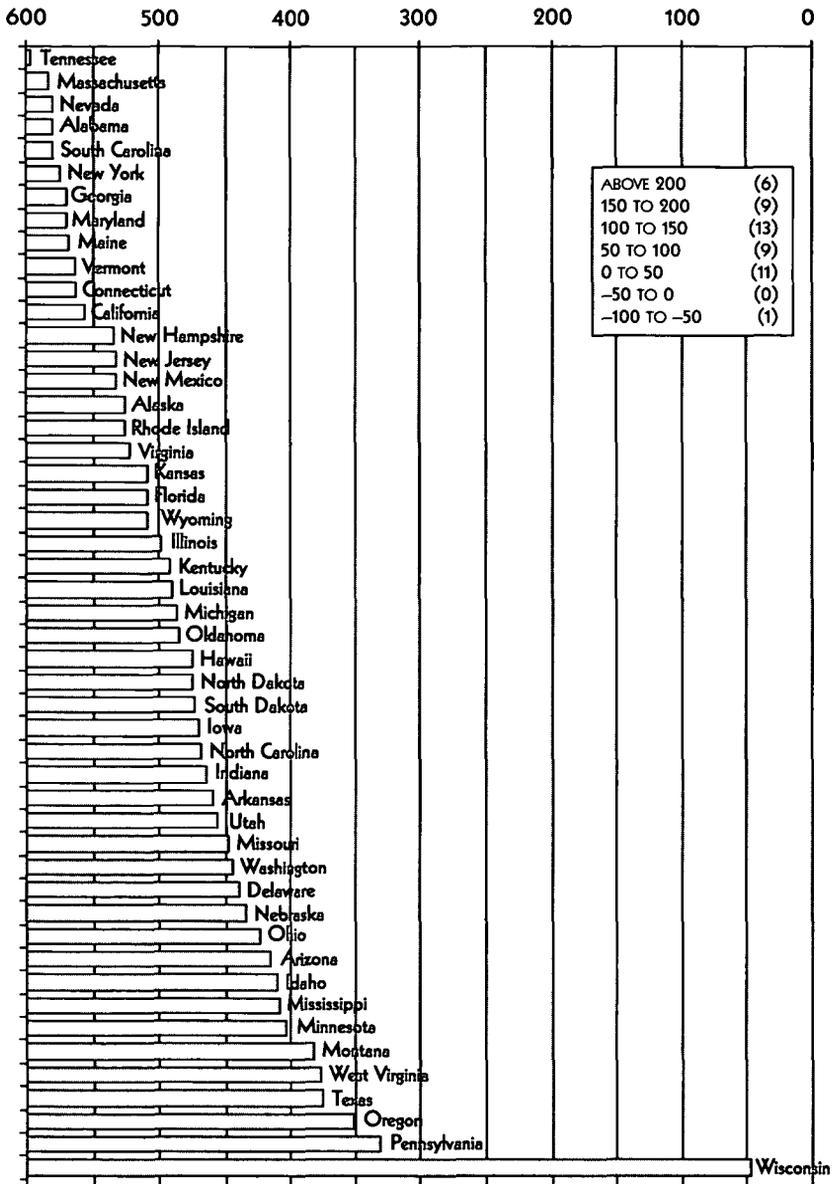
## WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO OFFENDER SUPERVISION AND SERVICES OVER THE PAST DECADE WHEN JURISDICTIONS HAVE INCREASED THEIR CORRECTIONAL BUDGETS?

Virtually all jurisdictions pay more each year for correctional expenditures with the intent to improve public safety. The primary force driving increased budgets is the desire to keep pace with growing prison and jail populations. Higher rates of arrest, detention in jail, and prison sentences have contributed to increased costs throughout the entire justice system as indicated in Figure 1. This shows that in the past decade, over half of the states have increased their correctional expenditures by more than 100%. Costs for jails, prosecutors and court services have all steadily increased. Additionally, use of longer prison terms, sentencing enhancements, and more frequent probation and parole revocations have kept prisons and jails full. This has translated into growing expenditures.

### Funding trends show a lag in services.

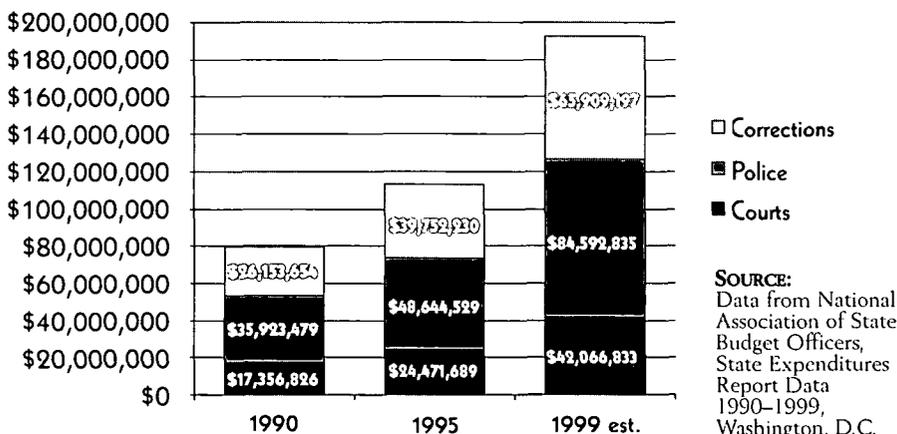
Nationally, we incarcerate at more than 668 persons per 100,000 persons. This is a rate six times higher than our historic national average. One in 23 white males and one in four black males born in the decade of the 1990s will be incarcerated during their lifetimes. In anticipation of growing numbers of persons behind bars, some states like Virginia and Texas have built prisons so fast that they have surplus prison space. Although all criminal justice expenditures have grown rapidly during the 1990s, the corrections share has increased dramatically due to prison and jail construction. Figure 2 provides an overview of projected growth in corrections costs. Despite this trend toward prison and jail construction and staffing, correctional programs in prisons and in the community have barely kept pace with increasing caseloads.

**FIGURE 1. Percent Changes in Correctional Expenditures  
1990-1999**



SOURCE: Data from National Association of State Budget Officers, State Expenditures Report Data 1990-1999, Washington, D.C.

**FIGURE 2. Projected Growth in Criminal Justice Spending and Correctional Portion: 1999**



A lack of attention to accelerated and disproportionate funding for prisons, police and courts has enormous short-term and long-term impacts. The two correctional areas most impacted are: (1) prison and jail programs that rehabilitate or educate; and (2) community corrections programs. An imbalance in funding in jail and prison rehabilitation and education programs means that we are losing an opportunity to provide life skills that are most likely to curb recidivism when prisoners are released to the streets. The absence of available community-based program funding is a problem because community corrections options are needed to stabilize offenders who are released into the community.

In some states correctional costs are growing faster than education and other infrastructure items. Yet most states do not have correctional impact and expenditure review processes to assess costs and benefits. They also have few processes for balancing resource allocations between parts of the correctional system and communities. Therefore cities and counties are paying for increased services for offenders who are under community supervision.

**Expenditure growth is traced to incarceration costs.**

Where have such correctional expenditures been spent? Most of the increases have been spent on prisons and jails. According to the

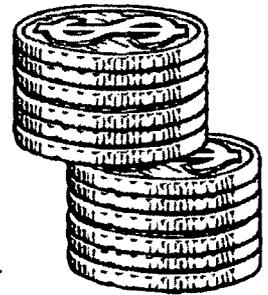
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*Corrections Yearbook*, since 1991, correctional agency expenditures in the United States have gone from just over \$18 billion to nearly \$33 billion in 1999. At a state level, correctional budgets were approaching an average of 5% of total state appropriations. In every state, most of the budget was spent on operating costs for prisons such as staff, food, clothing, medical services, maintenance, utilities and programs.

One important reason for higher budgets is that the number of persons incarcerated has grown steadily and the average cost per day for incarceration has also increased. From 1990–1998, prison costs increased from \$48 to \$56 per inmate per day on the average. At the low end, the average probation cost ranges from \$4 per inmate to \$40, depending on level of services and supervision. Higher correctional costs are not completely explained by the growth in population. A number of complex factors such as medical care costs, transportation, labor and insurance costs are among the contributors.

PART 2

# Reviewing Correctional Cost Issues



## WHY IS BALANCING CORRECTIONAL COSTS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE?

### Tradeoffs and related questions.

Correctional cost increases raise questions about tradeoffs and whether the public is getting the most for its tax dollars. With the high demand for prison beds, what can be done to re-evaluate spending priorities? Are some correctional options going to yield better long-term results than others? Are there programs that reduce re-offending?

Questions related to correctional expenditures are complicated by the fact that three levels of government and multiple agencies are involved in corrections. Furthermore, the private sector provides contractual services at every level. Correctional budgets are often overlapping with other agency budgets such as health, substance abuse, education and other human services.

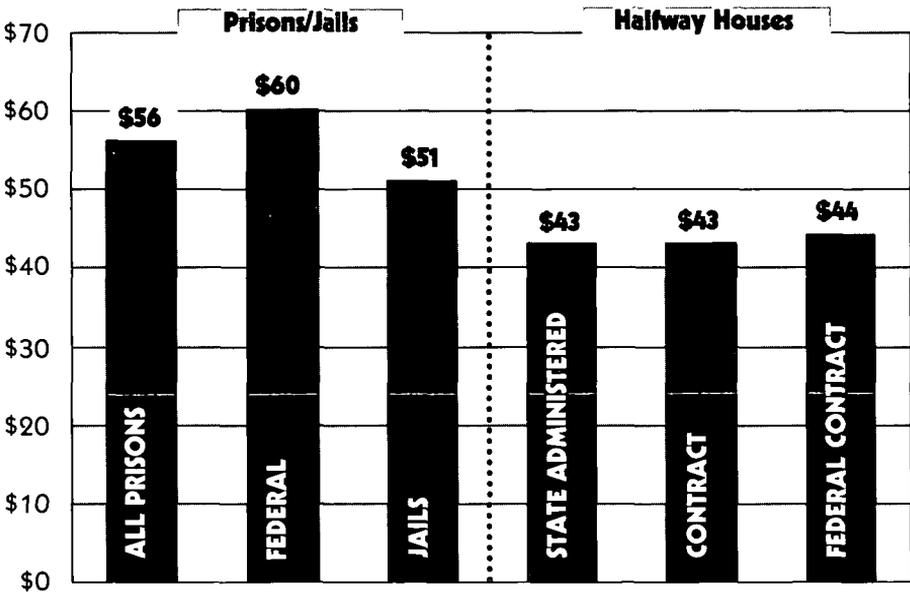
### Federal expenditures.

The Federal Government is the largest single appropriator of funds for correctional expenditures. The largest single prison system in the country is the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Its budget for FY 1999 was nearly \$3.3 billion. The Bureau of Prisons has a growing rate of aliens and drug-involved offenders in its prisons. The growing proportion of elderly and seriously ill prisoners has also increased federal prison costs. Figure 3 shows that Federal costs per prisoner averaged \$60 in 1998. The Federal Bureau of Prisons averaged \$44 per day for its halfway house placements.

## State expenditures.

Similarly, state prisons cost \$56 per day and state halfway houses cost \$43 in 1998. According to estimates for 1996, from the Bureau of Census, state and local governments expended \$37.5 billion on corrections. About two-thirds of the expenditures, or \$25 billion, were at the state level. Localities contributed about \$12 billion in correctional expenditures. These figures are somewhat more difficult to interpret because in some states like California, localities fund more correctional expenditures than in states like Alaska where the state funds almost all expenditures. Increases in expenditures vary each year by state. According to the National Association of State Budget Officers, Michigan experienced the highest percentage increase in correctional costs in FY 1999 (19%), while Massachusetts reported the lowest at 2.4%.

FIGURE 3. Daily Costs Per Offender



SOURCE: Data from Camille and George Camp, The Corrections Yearbook 1999, Adult, Jails and Private, the Criminal Justice Institute, Middletown, Connecticut.

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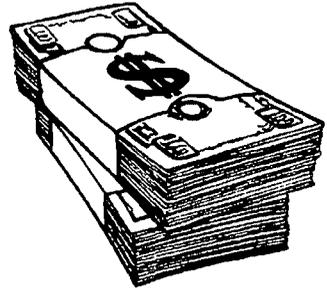
## Local expenditures.

Generally, states pay for prisons and localities pay for their jails. However, some states provide jail subsidies to localities to fund jails as well as other community-based correctional options. The states' budgets for prisons totaled nearly \$29 billion during 1999. States averaged about \$630 million per state according to the *Corrections Yearbook*. Jails cost approximately \$51 per detainee per day in 1998.

Data surveying jails across the country in 1998 revealed that the average cost per prisoner in jail systems per day nationwide was \$54.39. Caution should be used in interpreting this figure as jails use various ways to calculate their daily costs. Such things as employee fringe benefits, costs of transportation or even contractual health services may not be included in some instances. Jails reported a total of \$34 million spent on jail budgets. Of jails surveyed, those responding had an average daily population of 1,541 persons. With expenditure data that cuts across levels of government and multiple agencies, it is difficult to know how much we actually spend on services for correctional populations and to sort out the many difficult decisions about which priorities should be funded. However, elected officials in many places are initiating reforms that involve their communities and the private sector in an effort to become more effective in managing and balancing costs.



# Steps To Improve Balance in the Correctional System



## WHAT ARE THE STEPS THAT LEADERS CAN TAKE TO HELP IMPROVE CORRECTIONAL COST ALLOCATIONS AND REHABILITATIVE CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS?

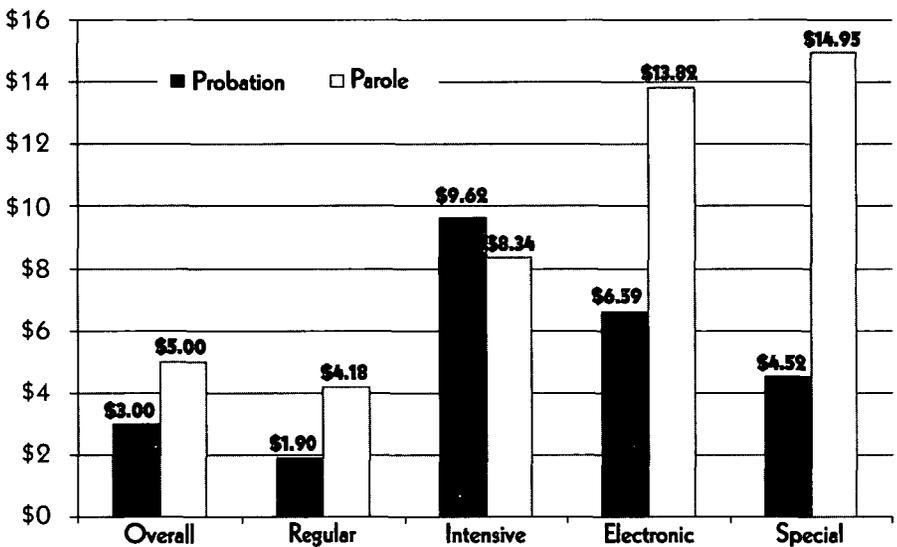
When elected officials begin to look at elements of correctional costs, they often explore a series of issues about what parts of government should pay for various services. State/local expenditure boundary questions are important to understand and resolve. For example, in California, most community corrections and probation programs are funded by localities. In contrast, in Delaware and Alaska, the state governments tend to pay for virtually all correctional costs. States with comprehensive funding of corrections such as statewide community corrections subsidies, provide a process for analysis of budget decisions that often leads to a more balanced approach. Many of these same states have been among the leaders in addressing the needs of victims and resolving community conflict relating to persistent types of crimes in certain localities.

### 1. REASSESS THE COMPONENTS OF CORRECTIONAL EXPENDITURES.

Correctional expenditures include capital costs for construction, debt service costs, and outlays. Operational corrections expenditures include staff salaries, expenses, benefits, staff training, management costs, contracts and consultants, food, maintenance, programs, medical care, and supplies for prisons and jails. Community corrections budgets may include the same items for residential facilities such as halfway houses or work release. The nonresidential community corrections budget items such as parole and probation will have substantially lower capital costs and expenses for food. They generally include substantial program costs for staffing to treatment, transitional and other programs. When elected officials learn more about component costs, they can make better decisions to add or streamline services.

Community corrections costs are about 10 percent of total correctional expenditures. Parole, probation and other community corrections budgets are allocated for supervision of about seven out of 10 offenders. In 1999, the total expenditures for probation and parole in the United States were more than \$4.6 billion. The average probation agency budget was \$68.6 million. Figure 4 provides a summary of daily average costs per probationer for various levels of supervision. They range from \$1.90 for regular unsupervised probation to \$14.95 for special parole.

**FIGURE 4. Daily Costs Per Offender: Probation & Parole**



SOURCE: Data from Camille and George Camp, *The Corrections Yearbook 1999, Adult*, the Criminal Justice Institute, Middletown, Connecticut.

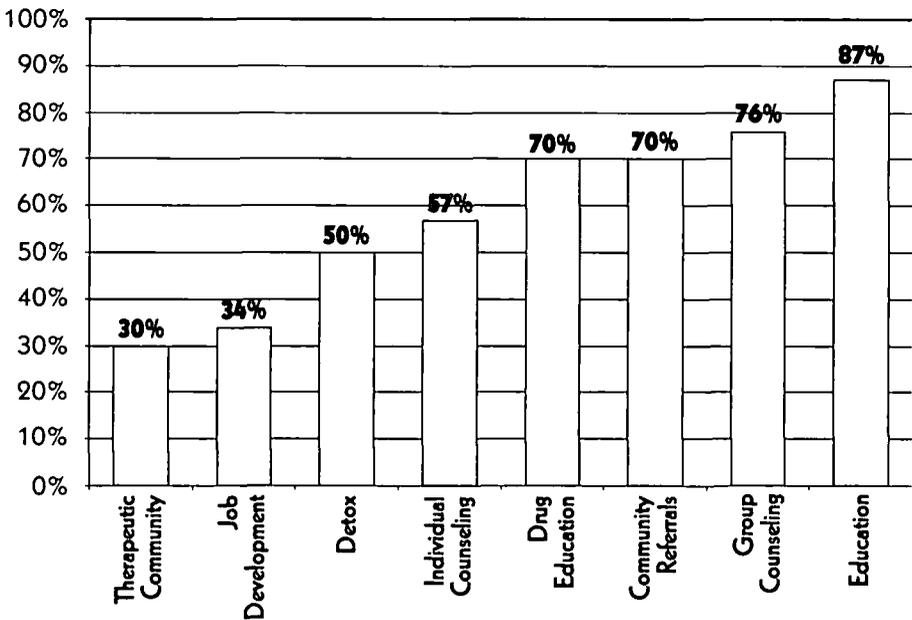
## 2. REASSESS THE GOALS OF CORRECTIONAL EXPENDITURES.

Correctional expenditures are intended to punish, rehabilitate, incapacitate, and deter offenders from committing new crimes. Sentencing options are based on the expectation that public safety and quality of life are to be improved. There is a general consensus that prison and jail are necessary to detain violent and dangerous criminals. In most places, the part of the corrections system that deals with violent offenders is funded primarily to perform the task of detaining such individuals and incapacitating them.

tating them from committing new offenses. When it comes to correctional budgets, there is uncertainty among appropriators about the efficacy of rehabilitating offenders. Surveys reveal that this uncertainty is due to their frequently held views that the public disapproves of rehabilitation. Such views are often mirrored by media treatment of sensational crimes.

A longstanding goal of corrections has been to rehabilitate, while at the same time punishing for transgressions. Although most citizens think of prison or jail as the punishment of choice, when they know more about community corrections, they tend to prefer the community corrections approach for nonviolent offenders. Polls reveal that the public prefers nonviolent offenders to work, maintain family ties, and compensate victims and communities for their crimes. However, most appropriations for corrections do not take this approach into full consideration and rehabilitative services are well below 10% of all correctional expenditures. Figure 5 reveals the limited access to rehabilitative programs afforded to those in jail.

**FIGURE 5. Rehabilitation Program Access in Jails**



SOURCE: Data from Camille and George Camp, *The Corrections Yearbook 1999, Jails and Private, the Criminal Justice Institute*, Middletown, Connecticut.

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### 3. FUND PROGRAMS THAT WORK AND REQUIRE THEM TO MEET PERFORMANCE STANDARDS.

Inadequacy of funding for pretrial diversion, probation, parole and community corrections can have a ripple effect throughout the criminal justice system. Unless funding is directed to programs that are proven to be effective, correctional dollars are wasted and public safety declines. Opportunities to improve areas such as education and medical care are lost when dollars are spent on prisons.

Although not every approach works for each offender, there are some basic interventions that reduce the likelihood of committing new crimes. Educational programs that teach offenders how to control impulses and thinking habits, known as cognitive behavioral programs, are often helpful. These programs can be taught to offenders in a community-based correctional setting. They help offenders understand how to deal with behaviors linked to crime and substitute pro-social habits and behaviors. Additionally, there are educational, psychological and bio-social interventions that help motivate offenders to change their ways. Such approaches are used in relapse prevention, to prevent non-conformity with conditions of supervised release and to build a track record of pro-social conduct. Additionally, traditional education, restoration of family and community ties, faith-based interventions, housing and employment are important factors that work. Highly punitive, psychoanalytical and short-term interventions are not very helpful.

### 4. DEVELOP SYSTEMS TO MANAGE UNNECESSARY GROWTH IN EXPENDITURES.

Examples of ways to balance correctional growth include: correctional impact statements, Community Corrections Acts and subsidies for parole, probation, community justice, criminal justice advisory commissions, and other state-local partnerships to establish comprehensive services for correctional populations. Listed below are some problem solving approaches related to community corrections tools and techniques for offender management.

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## Legislative

- Community corrections legislation
- Restorative justice statutes
- Special populations approaches
- Sentencing reforms
- Correctional impact statements

## Administrative/Executive

- Comprehensive planning and programs
- Public/private partnerships
- Performance-based funding
- Administrative release

## Judicial

- Pretrial services
- Diversion
- Specialized courts
- Re-entry, supervised release programs

### 5. CONSIDER THE PUBLIC'S CONCERNS BY INVOLVING THE PUBLIC IN DECISIONS.

How to involve the public has always been an important issue. Elected officials find that they can more effectively address persistent problems when they work with citizens, victims and justice professionals. In states with Community Corrections Acts, statewide advisory groups and local advisory boards involve all of these stakeholders. Community and restorative justice initiatives have also involved citizens in their work. Correctional impact statements, which are useful in providing information to legislators about the costs of various sentencing options, have been helpful.

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By involving the public in questions about budget and expenditures, benefits to the public can be considered. Consideration may also include the absence of benefits and what the true costs have been. Often true costs include intangible elements such as perception of public safety, quality of life in a community and humane and fair treatment for all persons under criminal justice supervision. Elected officials are more likely to consider political costs and benefits of a balanced funding approach when the public has been involved in program development.

## **6. ATTEND TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS THAT CAN BE SAFELY DIVERTED.**

In a recent survey by the Center, a number of criminal justice practitioners and leaders were asked to identify obstacles to the expanded use of community corrections. One obstacle that was frequently mentioned included the lack of community corrections funding for a range of appropriate programs for offenders who can safely be supervised in the community. Several of the respondents mentioned public perception and political costs as potential inhibitors of adequate program funding.

## **7. INTEGRATE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS STRATEGIES TO BALANCE EXPENDITURES.**

Criminal justice leaders and elected officials use many tools and strategies that help balance their cost decisions. In every state and many jurisdictions correctional systems have service audits and budget oversight reports. Although internal service audits are helpful, outside third-party audits and oversight are important to make sure that goals are attained and the performances of probation, parole, community corrections, jails and correctional agencies are adequate.

Like audits, needs assessments provide detailed summaries of whether services match offender characteristics and needs. Needs assessments are helpful in addressing a particular problem such as whether there is adequate capacity in a jail, or whether there are sufficient options for mental health treatment for offenders. Needs assessments also provide the possibility that citizens can participate in advisory or voluntary work related to a given corrections issue.

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Meeting external standards and becoming accredited can help manage correctional budgets. Agencies that are accredited through the American Correctional Association and other similar processes, report that they have been able to provide more comprehensive services of a higher quality. Although additional outlays may initially be required to correct deficiencies revealed through audits and accreditation, the savings in litigation and other subsequent costs may offset the initial outlays in the long run.

Comprehensive funding systems can allocate set dollars for addressing a problem, region or targeted group of offenders. Comprehensive funding systems such as Community Corrections Acts, probation subsidies and intergovernmental allocations can help distribute resources where they are most needed by requiring localities to work together and with the state on funding their top priorities for community corrections programs. Interagency working groups, protocols, and resource allocations based on priority can result from comprehensive funding strategies. Such approaches can foster cross-agency public and private partnerships. Such partnerships can leverage existing resources and private sector support for community correctional budgets.

## Conclusion

There are numerous ways that criminal justice leaders and elected officials work together to assure that all correctional programs are more cost effective.

Correctional costs, their tradeoffs and issues related to community corrections are key elements for improved public safety. Those looking for answers specific to their jurisdictions find that recent increases in correctional costs suggest new strategies for action to enhance future public safety improvements. A balanced approach to correctional programs and treatment will have the longest term benefits. Cost analysis studies show that drug and alcohol treatment of offenders may save at least \$6 for every \$1 spent on treatment. Criminal justice leaders and elected officials can work together to assure that all correctional programs are more cost effective. Cost analysis tools, budget oversight, comprehensive approaches that educate and involve citizens and budget impact tools are among the methods that can be employed to restrain unnecessary spending and channel resources to the places where they will improve public safety.



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### About the Center for Community Corrections

The Center for Community Corrections is a broad coalition of former public officials, researchers and correctional professionals representing local, state, and federal concerns. The Center was created in 1987 to promote the overall concept of community-based sanctions as well as specific program options.

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