



HOPE: A Swift and Certain Process for Probationers

by Kevin McEvoy

NIJ and the Bureau of Justice Assistance are collaborating to find out if a successful probation violation deterrence program from Hawaii can be implemented in other jurisdictions.

For those involved with Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) program, HOPE is not just an acronym — it is a reflection of the program's sentiment. By addressing probation violations in a swift, certain and proportionate manner, HOPE has reduced both violations and revocations of probation, allowing probationers to break the cycle of recidivism.

NIJ's evaluation of HOPE found that the program produced dramatic, positive results. But can Hawaii's success be duplicated? NIJ and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) are collaborating to find out through a demonstration field experiment.

In 2004, then-First Circuit Court Judge Steven Alm brought criminal justice stakeholders together to

design and implement HOPE. He believes that having swift and certain consequences allows probationers to "tie together the behavior that's bad, whether it's testing positive for drugs [or] not going to see their probation officer, with a consequence and learn from it."¹ By addressing each violation immediately, HOPE sends a consistent message to probationers about personal responsibility and accountability. The program reflects the deterrence philosophy that a certain punishment for a probation violation will influence future offending behavior.

An NIJ-funded evaluation of HOPE found that, compared with probationers in a control group, after one year the HOPE probationers were:

- 55 percent less likely to be arrested for a new crime.



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- 72 percent less likely to use drugs.
- 61 percent less likely to skip appointments with their supervisory officer.
- 53 percent less likely to have their probation revoked.

As a result, HOPE probationers served 48 percent fewer days in prison, on average, than the control group.

Procedural Steps

HOPE begins with a direct, formal warning delivered by a judge in court to offenders enrolled in the program. The warning explicitly states that any future probation violations will result in an immediate, brief jail stay.

Probationers with drug issues are assigned a color code at the warning hearing and are required to call the HOPE hotline each weekday morning to find out which color has been chosen for that day. Probationers whose color is selected must appear at the probation office before 2 p.m. the same day for a drug test. Non-drug-involved offenders must comply with their conditions of probation and may be required to attend treatment. When probationers violate the conditions of probation, they are arrested or an arrest warrant is issued. As soon as a probation officer detects a violation, he or she completes a "Motion to Modify Probation" form and sends it to the judge, who promptly holds a violation hearing.

A probationer found to have violated the terms of probation is sentenced to a short jail stay. Upon release, the probationer reports to his or her probation officer and resumes participation in HOPE. Each successive violation is met with an escalated response (i.e., longer jail stays).

Replication

BJA has selected four sites to implement a strict replication of HOPE: Clackamas County, Ore.; Essex County, Mass.; Saline County, Ark.; and Tarrant County, Texas. NIJ selected RTI International to conduct process, outcome and cost assessments using randomized controlled trials. In addition, BJA awarded training and technical assistance funds to Pepperdine University and a team lead by Angela Hawken, who was the lead evaluator of the Hawaii program, to assist the sites in setting up and managing their programs.

The sites have agreed to follow strict procedural implementation in accordance with the original

HOPE program. For example, sites must use the color code system, bring probation violators in front of a judge within 72 hours and use a uniform warning script during all initial hearings. The counties have made adjustments to their usual procedures to ensure that the HOPE replication will be as accurate as possible.

Despite these adjustments, the sites have some inherent differences from the original site and from each other. Hawaiian culture and climate differ from those of the mainland sites participating in the study. Moreover, the population sizes, the percentage and types of crimes committed, and the judges' personalities are all different. These differences, however, will be useful in evaluating whether the HOPE model is transferrable to other jurisdictions.

The original HOPE program was shown to reduce probation violations. The current experiment will help evaluators compare and analyze how the program works in different jurisdictions and determine whether other locales can achieve the same success by replicating Hawaii's HOPE program.

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Learn more about HOPE on NIJ.gov. Keyword: HOPE program.

Read a summary of the two evaluations of Hawaii's HOPE program at <http://www.nij.gov/journals/266/hope.htm>.



Watch an interview with Judge Alm at <http://nij.ncjrs.gov/multimedia/video-nijconf2009-alm.htm>.

Note

1. Alm, Steven S., "'Swift and Certain' Consequences in Probation and Parole," video interview at the 2009 NIJ Conference, Washington, D.C., June 15-17, 2009, available at <http://nij.ncjrs.gov/multimedia/video-nijconf2009-alm.htm> (accessed October 16, 2011).