

NIJ UPDATE

# A hopeful approach

## Understanding the implications for the HOPE program

By **Eric Martin**

*Author's Note: Findings and conclusions reported in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.*

Hawaii's Honest Opportunity Probation With Enforcement (HOPE) program was developed in 2004 as a way to create a more transparent and accountable probation system. An initial examination of the new probation model was promising enough to prompt multiple evaluations of the HOPE program,

including three studies funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). The latest study — the HOPE demonstration field experiment (DFE) — which was a strict replication of the HOPE program in four jurisdictions in the mainland U.S., was not able to replicate the earlier promising findings from evaluations of HOPE in Hawaii. Although the HOPE DFE showed reductions in property and drug offenses, the DFE sites did not experience similar reductions in probation violations and

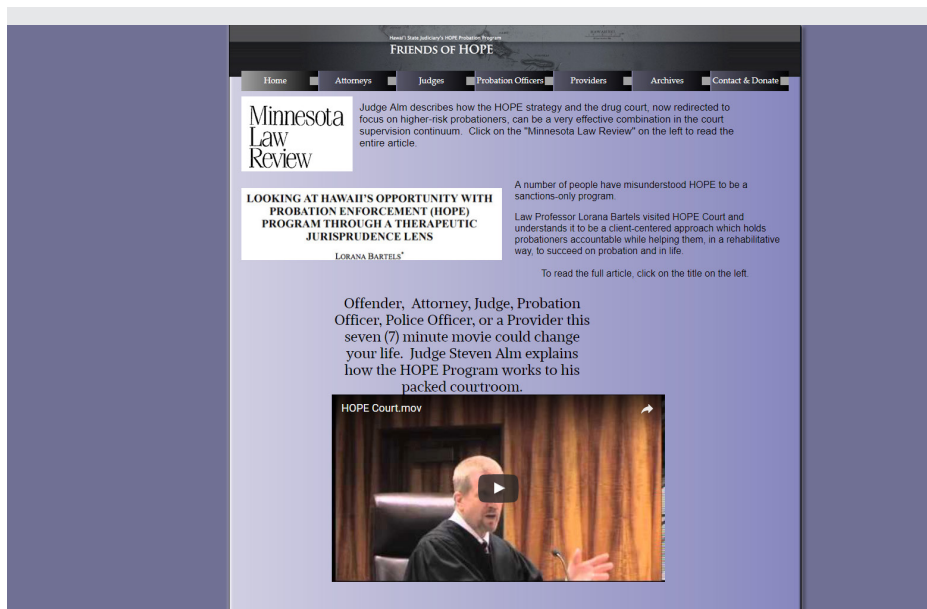
revocations across the board as was seen in an initial evaluation in Hawaii.<sup>1</sup>

This article describes findings from three NIJ studies of the HOPE program: the original 2007 Hawaii HOPE experiments, the 76-month follow-up of the original Hawaii HOPE cohort and the HOPE DFE. It explores possible reasons for the differences in findings of the Hawaii HOPE and the HOPE DFE, and it concludes with a discussion of the HOPE DFE deliverables and their likely implications for policy and practice.

### NIJ HOPE findings

#### Hawaii HOPE program.

Hawaii HOPE's probation supervision model gives a swift and commensurate sanction for each probation violation. Probation, as has traditionally been implemented, usually allows probation violations to accumulate since there are few sanction alternatives available to probation officers and judges apart from a probation revocation. Once the probationer accumulates enough violations to forfeit probation, the probationer



usually is sent to serve the original prescribed prison sentence. HOPE, on the other hand, involves delivering an immediate, measured and proportionate sanction for each violation as it occurs. Each probationer entering HOPE is made aware of the program expectations, including that there will be an immediate consequence for every violation.<sup>2</sup>

**Original Hawaii HOPE evaluations.** In 2007, NIJ funded a study that consisted of two separate evaluations of Hawaii HOPE: a quasi-experimental design (QED) study and a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in two different Hawaiian probation units.<sup>3</sup> The findings from the QED showed HOPE contributed to a decrease in drug offenses by 28 percent in the first three months of the program and increased compliance with probation conditions.<sup>4</sup> The findings from the RCT also showed significant differences in compliance and recidivism for HOPE probationers, with large differences in positive drug tests (13 percent HOPE versus 46 percent among those in the control group) and new arrests (21 percent HOPE versus 47 percent among those in the control group)<sup>5</sup>

Despite these findings, questions remained about HOPE: Because the follow-up period for the RCT was only 12 months, what is the long-term effect of HOPE? Could HOPE be success-

fully transferred to jurisdictions in the mainland U.S.? How did HOPE contribute to increased personal responsibility among probationers?<sup>6</sup> To answer these questions, NIJ continued to evaluate the HOPE program by funding two additional research projects.

**The Hawaii HOPE long-term follow-up study.** In 2011, NIJ funded a study to examine a possible long-term effect of Hawaii HOPE on probationers. An analysis of 76 months of administrative data from the 2007 RCT cohort showed HOPE probationers had slightly less new charges on average (0.91 for HOPE versus 1.12 for those in the control group).<sup>7</sup> HOPE probationers also had fewer violations on average (6.3 versus 7.1).<sup>8</sup> Finally, HOPE probationers experienced fewer returns to prison on average: 13 percent for those who only served HOPE probation; 15 percent for those who were transferred into HOPE from conventional probation; and 32 percent for those who served conventional probation only.<sup>9</sup>

**The HOPE DFE preliminary findings.** Given the promising results from the original and long-term Hawaii HOPE studies, in 2012, NIJ and its partner, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), initiated a DFE in four jurisdictions in the mainland U.S.: Clackamas County, Oregon; Tarrant County, Texas; Saline County, Arkansas; and Essex County,

Massachusetts. The DFE consists of a process evaluation of HOPE's implementation in the four sites, an outcome evaluation examining probationer violations and recidivism for individuals in HOPE versus those on traditional probation, and a cost-benefit analysis of HOPE versus traditional probation.

Preliminary findings from the outcome evaluation show mixed results. Overall, the results show no statistical difference between HOPE and conventional probation in the average number of arrests when the probationers were pooled across the four sites (738 for HOPE versus 758 for controls). However, HOPE did contribute to a reduction in property arrests (15 percent for HOPE versus 20 percent for controls) and drug arrests (12 percent for HOPE versus 15 percent for controls).<sup>10</sup> HOPE probationers also were found to have more probation revocations (26 percent for HOPE versus 22 percent for controls). Revocations were significantly higher in Saline and Clackamas Counties, whereas Essex and Tarrant Counties had reductions in revocations that were not statistically significant.<sup>11</sup>

### Implications for the HOPE program

How do we reconcile the findings from the Hawaii HOPE studies and the HOPE DFE in Oregon, Texas, Arkansas and Massachu-

setts? What are the implications for determining the effectiveness of the HOPE program? HOPE in Hawaii led to positive results for probationers in the short-term,<sup>12</sup> and these results continued, albeit to a lesser extent, in the long-term.<sup>13</sup> Although the preliminary HOPE DFE findings suggest no overall differences in the average number of arrests for HOPE and control probationers, certain jurisdictions

governing the amount of time a probationer serves for a revocation varied across the sites. Jurisdictions that limited the amount of time that could be served for a probation revocation may have lessened its impact as a threat as compared to its use in Hawaii. Finally, there was no precise guidance for HOPE judges regarding when to revoke probation. Although the HOPE demonstration sites sought to

the interviews may reveal evidence regarding the impact of HOPE on probationers' attitudes of their own responsibility for compliance and the transparency and perceived fairness of HOPE.<sup>17</sup>

The preliminary results from the HOPE DFE outcome evaluation may not capture the full impact of the HOPE program. If anything, the HOPE model standardizes, to the extent possible, how probation should be administered. At the present time, there is little uniformity on how probation is implemented across jurisdictions.

### **The results of the HOPE DFE confirm the HOPE program requires intensive collaboration among the courts, law enforcement, jail and probation staff**

saw reductions in recidivism and probation revocations.<sup>14</sup> The differences in results between Hawaii HOPE and the four demonstration sites may have to do with the environment in which HOPE was implemented. The results of the HOPE DFE confirm the HOPE program requires intensive collaboration among the courts, law enforcement, jail and probation staff. In addition, the climate of the probation office has an attitude toward change, and the larger structure of probation relative to the other criminal justice system components impacts the success of these partnerships.<sup>15</sup>

Also, the four jurisdictions had different legislative and regulatory contexts that may have affected outcomes. For example, regulations

create uniformity in judges' decision-making for sanctions, judges retain discretion, and the HOPE probation model does not replace that. To date, the various triggers that prompt a probation revocation are unknown.<sup>16</sup>

The preliminary HOPE DFE evaluation findings do not address how the program may instill a greater sense of accountability and responsibility among HOPE probationers. One component of the HOPE DFE evaluation includes interviews of probationers at intake and six-month and 12-month follow-up periods. Four additional waves of longitudinal mini-interviews were also conducted for a sample of probationers as they participated in random drug testing. Collectively, the results of

### **Next Steps**

The HOPE demonstration field experiment will produce comprehensive process, cost and outcome findings and should reveal the conditions necessary to reproduce the results originally found in Hawaii. NIJ will integrate the final results from the HOPE DFE into its larger portfolio of research on HOPE and other similar types of programs. The results will provide community corrections practitioners' insight into promising practices that would reduce probation violations and recidivism. It will also suggest to policymakers how they can best adapt promising programs from other jurisdictions.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lattimore, P., MacKenzie, D., Zajac, G., Dawes, D., Arsenault, E., & Tueller, S. (2016). Outcome findings from the HOPE demonstration field experiment: Is swift, certain, and fair an effective supervision strategy? *Criminology & Public Policy*, 15(4), 1103–1141.

<sup>2</sup> Hawken, A., & Kleiman, M. (2009). *Managing drug-involved probationers with swift and certain sanctions: Evaluating Hawaii's HOPE* (Report No. 229023). Washington, DC: Office of Justice Programs.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Hawken, A., Kulick, J., Smith, K., & Vial, T. (2016). *Hope II: A follow-up evaluation of Hawaii's HOPE probation* (Report No. 249912). Washington, DC: Office of Justice Programs.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Lattimore, P., et al. (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hawken, A., & Kleiman, M. (2009).

<sup>13</sup> Hawken, A., et al. (2016).

<sup>14</sup> Lattimore, P., et al. (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Zajac, G., Lattimore, P., Dawes, D., & Winger, L. (2015). All implementation is local: Initial findings from the process evaluation of the Honest Opportunity Probation With Enforcement (HOPE) demonstration field experiment. *Federal Probation*, 79(1), 31–36.

<sup>16</sup> Lattimore, P., et al. (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

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