

Report Highlights

Funding of County Probation Services

House Resolution 619 called on the LB&FC to conduct a study of the costs and services of Pennsylvania’s county probation and parole (hereafter shortened to probation) system.

The study found:

- **Most (86%) of PA’s probation cases are under county jurisdiction.** County probation offices supervised 233,345 offenders, compared to 39,036 offenders at the state level.
- **Turnover rates for county probation officers averaged 6.0% in 2011.** This is down from 7.8% in the late 1990s.
- **Many new responsibilities have been placed on county probation offices in the last 10 years, with little or no additional funding.** Actuarial risk assessments—a time-consuming requirement—is likely to soon become another unfunded mandate for county offices.
- **The percentage of county funds used to support county probation offices has been increasing.** In FY 13-14, county funds comprised 58% of total funding for county probation offices, compared to 45% in FY 98-99.
- **Average caseloads have fallen from 117 active cases per probation officer in 2002 to 113 in 2013.**
- **The number of felons in the county probation and parole system has increased from 55,650 in 2002 to 74,971 in 2013.**
- **Evidence-based practices hold the promise of lowering recidivism rates.** Almost all counties have implemented at least some EBPs, but are limited by resource constraints.
- **State Grant-in-Aid funding has declined markedly in the last 10 years, both in real dollars and as a percentage of eligible salaries.** State law targets GIA funding at 80% of eligible county salaries. GIA funding was close to this goal in the late 1980s, but by FY 14-15, had fallen to only 17.6% (see graph).
- **The statutory requirement that half the monies counties collect in supervision fees be sent to the Commonwealth is unnecessary.** These funds are returned back to counties on a dollar-per-dollar basis later in the year. This transfer creates paperwork burdens

and can also present a misleading picture of how much state support counties receive.

- **The percentage of supervision fees actually collected varies widely from county to county.** Some counties reported collecting about 25% of the supervision fees they assess, while others reported collecting 90% or more.

Recommendations

1. **The Grant-In-Aid program be re-defined and re-purposed to better encourage evidence-based practices.** This would require a statutory change.
2. **Counties be allowed to retain 100% of the supervision fees they collect.** This would require a statutory change, but might encourage improved efforts to collect the fees.
3. **The Executive Budget document better identify the amount of Grant-in-Aid funds that go to counties.**
4. **The General Assembly may wish to revisit the Justice Reinvestment Initiative legislation.** The JRI as was enacted in 2012 is projected to yield much less in reinvestable savings for county probation offices than would have been possible under the original proposal.

