

A STUDY OF COSTS AND SERVICES IN PENNSYLVANIA'S COUNTY ADULT PROBATION SYSTEM

Report Highlights

Nearly 70 percent of Pennsylvania's entire offender population is on probation. As of January 1, 2000, county adult probation officers were supervising a total of 182,018 adult offenders statewide. Collectively, the counties currently spend in excess of \$80 million annually for adult probation. House Resolution 251 of 1999 directed the LB&FC to conduct a study of costs and services in Pennsylvania's statewide county adult probation system. The LB&FC's study was to focus on the state's grant-in-aid program for the improvement of adult probation services and on related issues of program funding, caseload size, and service delivery.

- **The State Grant-in-Aid (GIA) Program.** Since 1967, the counties have received more than \$245 million through the GIA program in order to expand and improve county adult probation services. Under this program, the PA Board of Probation and Parole awards state grants to the counties based on the salary costs the counties incur for "eligible" adult probation staff positions added to their complements since 1966. Under state law, the grants are to cover 80 percent of the salary costs for these positions except that a prorated reduction occurs if sufficient funds are not available.
- **Key Study Findings:**
 - ❖ State GIA funding has not been adequate to meet the 80 percent funding percentage in any year since the Legislature added this provision in 1987. For FY 1999-00, the GIA appropriation covered only about 42 percent of the counties' actual eligible salary costs.
 - ❖ In 1991, the Governor's Budget Office imposed an "administrative cap" on positions eligible for state assistance at 1,016. Although eligible, another 378 positions added by the counties since that time are not being funded due to the cap.
 - ❖ State funding of the GIA program has not kept pace with the increases in caseload and workload demands occurring in the county programs or with funding increases provided for other components of the state's law enforcement and corrections system.
 - ❖ The pattern of state appropriations for the GIA Program since 1991 suggests that one-half of the offender supervision fee revenues collected by the counties are being used to reduce the amount of state funding provided to county adult probation offices.
 - ❖ County officials and staff believe that the shortfall in state funding is stagnating the growth of county adult probation departments. Others state that inadequate funding has resulted in inadequate staffing and unmanageable caseloads.
- ❖ Many chief adult probation officers cite low salaries and high staff turnover as two of the most significant challenges currently facing their departments. Many also expressed concerns that there is no statewide minimum starting salary and that county adult probation officer salaries are not commensurate with the level of education required.
- ❖ As a whole, the number of offenders in the county adult probation system appears to exceed the system's capacity. Statewide, the average total caseload per supervisory probation officer is 166.
- ❖ More than 18,000 persons, about 10 percent of the counties' adult probation caseloads, are "absconders," i.e., they are not under supervision because they cannot be located.
- **Recommendations:**
 - ❖ The House and Senate Appropriations Committees should: (a) conduct a special review of the GIA funding provisions and the Budget Office's administrative cap; and (b) consider granting the Board of Probation and Parole a separate budget hearing to provide a forum for full discussion of the funding needs of county adult probation.
 - ❖ In the longer term, the General Assembly should consider amending the law to base grant allocation on a "needs-based" budgetary system rather than basing state grant amounts on county salary costs.
 - ❖ The report includes other recommendations related to the need to establish reasonable caseload/workload standards or models for use by the county adult probation departments; revise the Board's policy and procedures relating to minimum salaries for county adult probation personnel; allow counties to retain all offender supervision fees; and statutorily add a representative of the County Chief Probation Officers Association to the Advisory Committee on Probation.