

Recidivism and Barriers to Successful Reentry

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**Executive Summary**

The state of Maryland has a prisoner recidivism rate of 40%, suggesting reentrants face serious barriers to reentry which pull them back into a cycle of re-incarceration. The Justice Reinvestment Act of 2016 was passed to address this issue; however, reentry initiatives are still lacking in a few key areas, namely in employment opportunities, parole limitations, collecting essential documentation upon release, and education. Current efforts by Maryland comprise training and employment of inmates, correctional and vocational education, obtainment of a certificate of high school equivalency, postsecondary education, parole and probation, opportunities for criminal record expungement, and support services for substance-abuse.

Accordingly, this paper's recommended policies to address these issues include: (1) Pre-Release Portfolio Preparation, (2) Relaxation of Parole and Probation Requirements, and (3) Expansion and Improvement of Correctional Education Opportunities through Technology. These three policy recommendations are analyzed under the lenses of efficiency, administrative feasibility, and effectiveness, revealing estimated success and benefits from their implementation.

Finally, this report recognizes that each policy recommendation faces certain implementation issues, including but not limited to facilitating cooperation between agencies and limited resources (i.e. time, funds, personnel, etc.). Overall, this report recommends the implementation of the first policy, the Pre-Release Portfolio Preparation, as a solution to address the underlying issues that contribute to recidivism.

## **Introduction**

The recidivism rate in Maryland is currently 40 percent (Basu, 2015). This means within the first three years upon release, 40 percent of reentrants end up back in prison. The term reentrant refers to a person re-entering society directly from prison. The state spends approximately \$38,000 a year to incarcerate someone, making the funding of recidivated inmates an extremely costly endeavor (Basu, 2015).

In May 2016, Maryland passed the Justice Reinvestment Act. This provision aims to reinvest resources into the corrections system in order to reduce recidivism as well as help ex-offenders transition back into society. These steps include implementing mandatory minimum sentences and administrative release for nonviolent offences (Pilgrim, 2016). The Justice Reinvestment Act aims to reduce the Maryland prison population by 1,100 over the next 10 years, saving the state an estimated \$80 million (Dresser, 2016).

Despite Maryland's move forward with the Justice Reinvestment Act, deeper issues of inmate preparedness for release are not being adequately addressed. Finding employment acts as one of the largest barriers to successful reentry, yet multiple factors work together to undermine the employment potential of ex-offenders, namely identification upon reentry, parole requirements, and education.

This report provides a qualitative analysis of Maryland's high rate of recidivism, identifies barriers to successful reentry of ex-offenders, and recommends policies to address recidivism. The recommendation results from an analysis of three viable options: (1) Pre-Release Portfolio Preparation, (2) Relaxation of Parole and Probation Requirements, and (3) Expansion and Improvement of Correctional Education Opportunities through Technology. Of these, this paper argues the pre-release portfolio will be the most effective because it consolidates all the necessary

materials and professional assistance for inmates into one location and ensures reentrants are fully prepared to reenter society before leaving prison.

### **Problem Definition**

According to the National Institute of Justice, recidivism refers to the relapse of criminal behavior, usually after the person has gone through sanctions or interventions for a past crime (“Recidivism,” 2014). The term “recidivism” applies to criminal actions causing an offender to be rearrested, reconvicted or returned to prison within three years of their prior release. In 2005, the national recidivism rate was 67.8% (“Recidivism,” 2014). The most current data for Maryland suggests the recidivism rate in Maryland is around 40% (Basu, 2015). However, state-specific data may be missing some information in calculating its percentage because it ignores factors such as the possibility of arrest and conviction in another state (Maltz, 2001). Recidivism is influenced by a number of factors, including unemployment, parole violations, difficulty in obtaining legal identification, and a lack of education, each of which is examined in more detail in the following section.

### **Origins of the Problem**

#### *Employment*

Obtaining employment is an important component of offender reintegration into the community. Scholars find that reentrants who maintain steady work and strong social ties are less likely to recidivate than those who do not (Berg & Huebner, 2011). However, there are many barriers to reentrants finding employment. Visher, DeBus and Yahnir conducted a study which found that although 65 percent of released felons found some employment in the first eight months after their release, only 45 percent were currently employed at the time the study was conducted, suggesting that finding and maintaining employment over time may be difficult for many reentrants (2008).

Factors that pose difficulties for reentrants attempting to gain meaningful employment include insufficient qualifications, resumes, and job and interview skills. Berg and Huebner found most prisoners that are released do not have a current resume and are under-skilled compared to the rest of the population (2011). Resource and funding cutbacks in work and skills training programs for prisoners prior to release increases the discrepancy of skill levels between the general population and those incarcerated, as prisoners lose job skills while serving their sentences (Visher et al., 2008).

#### *Identification upon Reentry*

The Justice Reinvestment Act fails to highlight the challenge reentrants face obtaining identification documents upon release. Vital identification documents are commonly misplaced during incarceration (La Vigne et al., 2008). State issued identification cards, social security cards, and birth certificates are essential to secure housing, prove employment eligibility, open a bank account, and access helpful resources, such as Medicaid. A study done by H.I.R.E Network found that without identification and documentation, a reentrant is not only unable to access helpful services for reintegration, but he or she may be prompted to partake in criminal activity to fulfill basic needs (La Vigne et al., 2008). State issued identification card, social security cards, and birth certificates are essential to secure resources available upon release including housing, employment, banking, and healthcare.

The case for accessible identification upon release is supported by reputable sources. H.I.R.E Network, the National Helping Individuals with Crime through Employment Network, aims to increase the number and quality of jobs available to those with past criminal history. In order to obtain a job upon release, it is essential that state issued identification cards are obtained upon reentry (La Vigne et al., 2008). In April 2016, Attorney General Loretta Lynch addressed the

necessity of government-issued identification documents for successful reentry by writing a letter to the 50 state governors (Zapotosky, 2016). Without vital identification documents, reentrants have a weak foundation to start a new life and are more likely to recidivate. By providing identification, reentrants will have easier access to post-release programs.

### *Parole Requirements*

Most reentrants released from prison in Maryland are required to retain supervision under parole for a designated period of time (Diller, Greene, Jacobs, 2009). Parole is mandated supervision placed on reentrants which includes mandatory visits with a parole officer and participation in supervised programs (Diller et al., 2009). Another option is probation, which can be mandated instead of prison or mandated directly after prison to shorten the offender's prison term ("What is the difference", 2016). Parole and probation are also very cost efficient, relative to incarceration, saving the state approximately \$31,888 per year for each parolee ("What is the difference", 2016).

Both parole and probation include requirements such as meeting with one's officer, performing community service, and paying fees ("What is the difference", 2016). According to The Brennan Center for Justice, parole and probation fees, on average, cost \$743.00 per reentrant (Diller, Greene & Jacobs, 2009). Current parole and probation requirements fail to recognize or respond to the environment most reentrants return home to. Many parolees are returning to the poverty-stricken areas where they grew up. Because of this, a parolee may wish to move closer to an area with high employment. However, the current probation rules in the state of Maryland require most probationers and parolees to request permission before they are allowed to change their home address or place of employment ("Probation/Supervision Order," 2015).



A probationer or parolee may be in need of new employment if their current job is part-time, has poor work conditions, is temporary or unstable, does not provide sufficient benefits, or requires inconvenient hours. However, earning permission to change one's employment creates new barriers, for getting approval can be a lengthy process, undermining reentrants' abilities to meet the scheduling needs of employers. Probation also requires frequent meetings with probation officers, who are stationed in the capital of the county the parolee currently lives in (Durnescu, 2011). This is difficult for people who are living in poverty and cannot afford the transportation, nor can they afford to take the time off of work.

### *Education*

One of the key factors that feeds into Maryland's high recidivism rate is that reentrants often do not possess the knowledge, education, or training in technical and essential skills to support employment. Nationally, offenders tend to be less educated than their counterparts. In 2004, the national proportion of individuals in prison that had attained less than a high school diploma was 37%, compared with the national proportion of 19% for individuals of at least age 16. This suggests a clear need for correctional education (Davis et al., 2014).

Davis et al. conducted a meta-analysis of all relevant primary empirical studies that met certain standards of evaluating an eligible intervention, outcome measure, and research design on correctional education. In their most rigorous screening process for research design, the meta-analysis revealed that the probability of recidivating was 43% lower for inmates who participated in a behind-the-fence education program than for those who did not. Likewise, reentrants with correctional education were 48% more likely to find employment than reentrants without (2014).

Correctional education can take the form of adult basic or secondary education, English second learner education, attainment of a certificate of high school equivalency, postsecondary

education, vocational training, or career and technical education (CTE). Vocational training and CTE can begin in prison and continue upon release, combined with support services, in order to increase a reentrant's likelihood of gaining employment and successfully returning to society.

### **Current Efforts**

#### *Justice Reinvestment Act of 2016*

Maryland passed the *Justice Reinvestment Act* ("Justice Reinvestment," n.d.) during the legislative session of 2016, although its measures have a delayed effective date of October 1, 2017. The purpose of the JRA is to reduce Maryland's prison population and use the savings to expand the resources and treatment available to offenders before, during and after incarceration with the ultimate goal of reducing the likelihood of recidivism. The JRA will implement fiscally conservative and socially progressive approaches to reach its goal ("Justice Reinvestment," n.d.).

Among the legislation's main measures are sentence decreases for nonviolent crimes, treatment diversion for drug offenses, reduction of parole and probation for ex-offenders who have a good record of compliance, individualized risk and needs assessment for ex-offenders, early release and reduced supervision for good behavior, "certificates of rehabilitation," and the possibility of expungement. The savings from these measures will be invested in victim assistance, pretrial improvements, reentry and specialty courts, and substance abuse and mental health treatment ("Justice Reinvestment," n.d.).

#### *Reentry Identification Policy*

Maryland currently has a complex identification release process. According to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Corrections and the Maryland Vehicle Administration, an inmate must request an ID card that can be used along with a birth certificate and a social security number confirmation to obtain a state issued ID at the MVA ("Nationwide

Survey,” 2008). Currently, inmates or former inmates are exempt from the residency requirements and therefore the Motor Vehicle Administration may accept an order of parole, an order of mandatory release or an address certification issued by the Maryland MVA, signed by a Department of Public Safety official and dated within 60 days of release (“Identification Cards,” 2016). Former inmates must still present a birth certificate and Social Security number verification. This raises a problem because many inmates have lost these documents during incarceration. This process should be simplified and streamlined to provide vital documents upon release.

An examination of current Maryland infrastructure and other state policies can be used to formulate a pre-release identification distribution. A common method to distribute identification is through the coordination of the Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), or Maryland’s equivalent, the Motor Vehicle Administration. Maryland already has state approved ID equipment that is linked to the MVA’s computer system to create state IDs (Martin, 2016). Minnesota installed similar equipment that allows DMV employees to go to the DOC facility and process identification cards along with license renewals (La Vigne et al. 2008). Louisiana also coordinated the DMV and the DOC, but in this case the DMV visits the DOC facility quarterly. The DOC obtains correct information, and the DMV works to ensure that that necessary documentation is available by requesting social security cards and birth certificate from the appropriate agencies. While these two models require significant cooperation with the DMV and the DOC, they both have the potential to save money by avoiding duplication costs associated with issuing parole IDs and State IDs (La Vigne et al., 2008). Use of current Maryland infrastructure and adaptation of other state models can guide Maryland towards a policy rooted in reform for identification distribution upon release.

In FY2010, the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services noted that 2,800 MVA IDs were issued to offenders either prior to or within 120 days of release, 3,134 offenders left prison with a social security card, and 3,380 had a birth certificate (Maynard, 2010). While the DPSCS has taken measures to provide returning offenders with vital records, the Bureau of Justice Statistics recorded that 9,387 prisoners were released from Maryland in 2010 (Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011). According to this data, only 29.8% of reentrants left a Maryland prison with a state issued ID. Therefore the distribution of vital records for reentrants must be reformed to cover a wider range of ex-offenders.

#### *Parole, Probation and Expungement*

According to the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, parole and probation are meant to keep reentrants focused on overcoming the “revolving door” of the criminal justice system (“Division of Parole and Probation,” 2016). The Maryland Parole Commission determines whether or not an offender who is sentenced to six months or more in prison is suitable for release prior to the completion of his or her full sentence. This is an opportunity for rehabilitated offenders to be rewarded for their good behavior in prison. Parolees are monitored closely by their parole officer to ensure that they are maintaining good behavior after their release (“Division of Parole and Probation,” 2016).

In Maryland, it is also possible to have one’s criminal record expunged. Expungement removes court and police records from public inspection. Those who received probation before judgment and those who received a gubernatorial pardon are among some of the candidates for expungement (“Expungements,” 2016). Expungement eliminates the possibility of discrimination by employers based on a previous offense.

*Correctional Education*

Maryland currently offers correctional education in prison; however, not all prisons have classes pertaining to each type of behind-the-fence education and training. For instance, not all prisons contain classes in vocational training that result in portable, stackable credentials. Additionally, due to limited resources, class sizes are limited and have long waiting lists.

Maryland addresses technology literacy through an offline instructional course, entitled “Discovering the Internet @ Your Library” (“Special Committee,” 2016) to spread awareness of the potential to use the Internet for finding job postings, educational resources, and other community and social resources. However, technological education needs to adapt to address issues of confidence that are associated with the use of actual technology.

The New Jersey Department of Corrections has a pilot program Prison to Community (P2C). This program enables cost-effective courses to take place over streaming technology. Thus, the number of courses available can be greatly increased; as well as, inmates do not have to worry about stopping and starting their education if transferred to different correctional facilities. Upon transfer, they simply pick up their education where they left off over similar streaming technology (“Special Committee,” 2016).

The Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE) is Maryland’s prison industry program. This program trains and employs offenders in business units located within prisons. Participation in this program requires offenders to fulfill educational requirements and teaches the offenders marketable technical and social skills. The goal of this program is to ease the process of gaining employment after release because of prior experience, which ultimately would lower recidivism rates (“Operations - Corrections, n.d.”).

The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services created a new initiative, Public Safety Works. Participating in this program is meant to have a rehabilitative effect on offenders, while also teaching them marketable employment skills and important personality traits like compassion and community loyalty (“Operations - Corrections,” n.d.).

### **Policy Alternatives**

#### *Policy Alternative 1: Pre-Release Portfolio*

This program will ease the process of reentry by addressing many of the barriers to finding employment. In order for reentrants to be better equipped to apply and obtain employment, prisons and jails can implement a pre-release preparation program and portfolio, where inmates are prepared to find a job after release, which is an integral component of reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Berg & Huebner, 2011). At the end of the program, reentrants will have access to their own personal portfolio of important documents, including state issued identification, birth certificates, social security cards, training certifications, a working resume and other documents that may be required or useful for job applications.

This policy proposes that the Maryland DOC should provide a Social Security card, birth certificate and state issued identification card as three basic vital documents in the pre-release portfolio. The process should begin 180 days before release to ensure that all necessary documentation is processed. First the DOC will assist the inmate in requesting for the birth certificate and Social Security card. Once these documents are obtained, the DOC will partner with the MVA. Maryland already has the infrastructure to create state IDs using equipment linked to the Maryland Vehicle Administration. However, issuing state IDs to all state prisoners is not currently mandatory. In order to increase the number of reentrants receiving a state ID while in prison, significant cooperation between the DOC and the MVA is required. This plan has the

potential to save money by avoiding duplication costs associated with issuing parole IDs and State IDs (La Vigne et al., 2008). The Maryland DOC would use the birth certificate, Social Security card and state issued identification card as foundations for a pre-release portfolio. The collection of vital documents should be considered a mandatory model for portfolios granted upon release (“Possible Models,” 2009).

In addition to the identification documents presented in the pre-release portfolio, this policy would include a program that prepares reentrants for employment. As part of this pre-release program, the prison will provide career counselors to work with the releasees to create a resume to use when applying for jobs. The loss of skills and employment history while in prison create a major barrier to ex-offenders when applying for jobs. However, many prisoners participate in training programs, short-term work release programs, or volunteer experience during their time in prison. The career counselors in this program would integrate the experiences of the ex-offenders while in prison into their resumes, reducing the appearance of loss of skills and lack of employment history in job applications. Oftentimes, these experiences will come with documentation of either a work-release program or completion of training. This resume, as well as training documents and proof of work experience, will be some of the documents contained in the pre-release portfolio.

The career counselors will also work with the releasees on how to search for job openings. They will be able to counsel the ex-offenders on which jobs they are qualified for and which they are not. They will also be able to line up references and recommendations that will verify good behavior and rehabilitation for ex-offenders who apply to jobs prior to release. Any references or recommendations would then be a part of the portfolio prepared for ex-offenders upon their release.

Finally, time spent in prison can have a negative effect on the interpersonal skills of the offenders. Communication styles in prison may differ from the communication styles used in a business or professional world. Another important task of the career counselor could be to prepare ex-offenders for interviews and jobs by teaching them the skills necessary to perform well in an interview and on a job-site. This can be accomplished through seminars and through practice interviews with the ex-offenders.

A pre-release program that culminates with the completion of a portfolio with all of the documents needed for job applications would be an important step towards helping ex-offenders earn gainful employment. As studies have shown, employment is crucial in keeping ex-offenders from reoffending and future arrests. Reentrants will then reenter their communities with improved interpersonal skills along with a portfolio that includes hard copies of a birth certificate, Social Security card, state issued ID card, resume and references.

*Policy Alternative 2: Relaxation of Parole and Probation Requirements*

This policy recommends a relaxation of parole and probation restrictions to supplement the new requirements in the Justice Reinvestment Act. The Justice Reinvestment Act brings attention to the need for positive reinforcements in the parole and probation system (“Final Report”, 2015). It recommends that parolees and probationers who demonstrate good behavior, such as paying all their fines and attending all their meetings, should be rewarded for their behavior.

The recommended policy is flexible in order to allow the probationer to search for better employment outside of their county. First, probationers and parolees should not be required to ask permission for a change of address or workplace, unless the change is taking place outside the state. Instead, the probationer should inform their probation officer of their new address and place of employment prior to accepting. Other states use this policy instead of requiring permission as



well. One such state is Illinois, which only requires probationers and parolees to notify their agent prior to any change in residence or employment (“Corrections, Criminal Justice”, n.d.).

If the probationer or parolee has secured employment in another county and can show proof that his or her new residence is in the county where their job is, then the probation meetings should be transferred to the other county’s probation department in a fast and efficient manner. Currently, this process can take weeks, which conflicts with most jobs that require an early start date. Employment and address changes must be made a priority in the probation and parole offices. Probation or parole should be transferred to the new county within a week’s acceptance of the job offer if the probationer or parolee is able to provide proper proof.

The second piece of the policy identifies situations when mandated parole/probation meetings should be cancelled with little notice and with no penalty to the parolee or probationer. Some probationers and parolees live far from the office they are required to report to and rely on public transportation to get there. Sometimes, this requires blocking off two to three days of work just to make it to the appointment on time (Durnescu, 2011). If a parolee/probationer is unable to take those days off of work in order to make the meeting, they should be relieved of the obligation if they are able to provide their officer with a description of the public transportation modes that they take as well as the hours spent traveling and waiting, so that the officer can verify that it will take them two to three days to make the meeting. The parolee/probationer should also provide proof of work hours. If the meeting is urgent, the officer may conduct a phone meeting instead or visit the parolee/probationer at their home.

Meetings may also be cancelled if they conflict with job interviews or employment start dates. If the meeting that was missed was not urgent, then the meeting should be cancelled to reward the initiative to seek better employment that the probationer/parolee is taking. According

to the Justice Reinvestment Act, good behavior should be rewarded with incentives such as fewer probation/parole meetings (“Final Report”, 2015). Because job interview and employment start date notifications can occur less than a couple days from notification, parolees and probationers may notify their officer of the event with as little notice as 24 hours, as long as they provide proof of the interview or employment start date, i.e. email exchanges and employment contracts.

*Policy Alternative 3: Expansion and Improvement of Correctional Education Opportunities through Technology*

Education and career training play key roles in the employability of reentrants. Career-centered education, degrees, and stackable credentials increase a reentrant’s chances of gaining full time employment, higher wages, and higher standards of living. There is an inverse relationship between correctional education and recidivism (Davis et al., 2014); likewise, as education and employment are connected, an increase in education leads to greater employment opportunities, simultaneous to the decrease in risk of recidivating. In light of this progression, behind-the-fence educational opportunities and support should be greatly expanded and developed to efficiently meet the varying educational needs of its serving population.

First, it is imperative that technology literacy classes be incorporated into correctional education. Computer literacy acts as a prerequisite for most middle and high school jobs. Furthermore, a technology literacy initiative would expand of basic and secondary education opportunities. Distance learning, or computer-assisted instruction, has measured similar results to in-classroom instruction, i.e. no statistical difference was found in terms of test scores for behind-the-fence students (Davis et al., 2014). A Maryland technology-based education program could be modeled after the New Jersey Department of Corrections pilot program Prison to Community (P2C). While initial installation costs may be high, the long-term education costs would decrease,

as the technology platform allows for greater numbers of students to easily and cost-effectively interact remotely with fewer instructors.

This technology-based education, partnered with Maryland’s pre-release employment program, would build up inmates’ professional networks, increase contact with possible future employers, and provide them with the much needed skills, both technical and essential, for thriving in the workplace. The aim is not simply for a reentrant to get a job, but he or she should gain upward mobility and increased wages, all countering the risk of recidivism.

**Analysis and Recommendation**

*Recidivism Analysis Matrix*

These three policy alternatives are evaluated on a ranking system 1-to-3, 1 being the best, and 3 being the relative worst. The most effective policy, thus, is the one with the lowest total ranking. An evaluation of these three policies can be analyzed through the public policy criteria of cost, efficiency, effectiveness, political feasibility, administrative feasibility, equity, social acceptability, and technical feasibility.

Factors	Policy 1 - Portfolio	Policy 2 - Parole/Probation	Policy 3 - Education
Cost	2	1	3
Efficiency	1	3	2
Effectiveness	1	2	3
Political Feasibility	1	3	2
Administrative Feasibility	2	3	1
Equity	1	3	2
Social Acceptability	1	3	2
Technical Feasibility	2	1	3
Total	10	21	17

*Analysis of Policy Proposal 1: Pre-Release Portfolio Preparation*

The Pre-release Portfolio Preparation program proposal relies on a variety of resources. In order for the proposed policy to be efficient, multiple moving parts must be streamlined and cost effective. Because this program will be available for all ex-offenders the equity is high. This will also be socially acceptable because it is socially acceptable for each person in the United States to have a State ID, birth certificate and Social Security card. The administrative feasibility is a challenge due to the inter-agency cooperation between the DOC and the MVA, but since the DOC would be able to print State IDs at the prison, this proposal would save money by avoiding duplication costs associated with issuing parole IDs and State IDs (La Vigne et al., 2008).

This proposal would cost the second least at less than \$50 per person for the cost to obtain copies of a birth certificate for \$10 (“Requesting”, 2016), Social Security card at no cost (“New or Replacement,” 2016), State ID from \$20 to \$24 (“Identification Cards,” 2016) and any training certificates. This partnership could initially pose a challenge to technical feasibility. While the program will be a cost to the state initially, it will not only reduce duplication costs in the long run, but will also reduce the overall effort required to obtain vital records. Reentrants will not lose time or money obtaining these documents after prison and can reinvest this time into pursuing employment opportunities. By reducing costs and removing barriers to reentry, this policy is the most politically feasible. This policy could be a supplement to the Justice Reinvestment Act, ensuring that funds are laying the foundation to keep people out of prison.

*Analysis of Policy Proposal 2: Relaxation of Parole and Probation Requirements*

The relaxation of parole and probation requirements is the most cost efficient as it only restructures the current parole and probation requirements and does not require any new purchases by the state. However, it is limited in efficiency and equity because it only benefits reentrants in

the parole and probation programs and ignores reentrants who do not fall into either of these two programs. According to the Justice Policy Institute, 38% of reentrants are released on the expiration of their sentence and do not have access to parole or probation services (“The Release Valve,” 2009). However, it is effective in assisting reentrants on a day-to-day basis as employment conflicts arise. Research shows that when a parolee or probationer is able to keep a job, they spend a longer amount of time out of prison (Tripodi, Kim, & Bender, 2010). This policy may have issues with political and social acceptability as it relaxes restrictions on people that the community may view as dangerous. It will be difficult to implement administratively because it will require more efficient communication between counties. Lastly, this policy will require very little technical assistance, as it does not change the actual structure of the parole and probation programs but only streamlines the process of making employment and location changes.

*Analysis of Policy Proposal 3: Expansion and Improvement of Correctional Education Opportunities through Technology*

The education technology behind-the-fence alternative is complicated in terms of cost analysis. Initial costs may be high; however, in the long-term, technology would increase class sizes without impeding individual learning. Initial implementation costs, for tablets completely loaded with video and textbook materials, come out to \$1,000 per student; however, this cost may decrease according to how much and what type of material an instructor requires. In the long-run, the tablets would enable prisons to save up to double the initial costs due to increased efficiency and streamlining of material allocation (Moraff, 2016). Therefore, this policy would more efficiently allocate education resources within the prison system.

Concerning effectiveness, there is a measurable inverse relationship between recidivism and correctional education. The implementation and expansion of correctional education and

employment-related opportunities would lead to the reduction Maryland's rate of recidivism. Social stigma of ex-offenders and fears for public safety act as the largest barrier of this policy's political feasibility and social acceptability. However, correctional education technology would increase the equity of Maryland's correctional education system, for it would additionally increase the number of and types of classes available to students. The diverse education and training needs of inmates would be efficiently and equitably met. Finally, concerning technical feasibility, correctional education organizations have developed offline streaming tablets that connect to secure kiosks to download lessons. This system of distribution is streamlined to ensure public safety in a readily understandable yet secure manner.

### **Implementation Issues**

Implementation issues for Policy 1: Pre-release Portfolio Preparation includes difficulty facilitating cooperation between the MVA and the DOC. Second, there may be issues with the amount of time and resources that the DOC will have to spend on obtaining Social Security cards and birth certificates for each inmate. Third, inmates may be from out of state which poses a challenge to collect state documents. Fourth, career counselors may be expensive. In order to reduce cost, there may be less career counselors available per each inmate, which may deprive inmates of the career assistance that they need. However, there may not be enough room in the budget to hire a sufficient number of career counselors.

Implementation issues for Policy 2: Relaxation of Parole and Probation Requirements has several implementation issues. First, requiring probation offices to approve employment and residence changes within a week's span will be difficult because many probation offices are already under-resourced. Also, not requiring probationers or parolees to request permission for job moves or residence changes may damage the state's ability to maintain control over probationers

or parolees. However, this would allow parolees and probationers to gain more control over their own lives.

Implementation issues for Policy 3: The Expansion and Improvement of Correctional Education Opportunities through Technology include issues of funding and personnel. While the P2C model addresses some aspects of these issues, there is still an underlying need for in-person instructors. For instance, before an individual can successfully participate in an online course, he or she needs a basic understanding of how to use a computer. Likewise, it may be difficult to gain support for putting technology behind-the-fence. While it is possible to use internet-restricted tablets and/or computers, there appears to be a stigma, correlating correctional education technology and public safety.

Lastly, in relation to the effectiveness of these policies, it is essential that the program does, in fact, reduce recidivism. A survey should be conducted upon release that measures whether or not ex-offenders found the program helpful and how many of those reentrants recidivate. This should be done over a 5 year period.

## **Conclusion**

Recidivism is a problem caused by a series of inequalities that revolve around unemployment, and lack of education, along with many other factors. With a recidivism rate of 40% in Maryland, it is essential that these inequalities be addressed (Basu, 2015). The Justice Reinvestment Act serves as a milestone for fighting recidivism in Maryland, with a focus on reinvesting much needed resources into the corrections systems, such as providing minimum sentences and rewarding positive behavior (Pilgrim, 2016). The core mission of the Justice Reinvestment Act is best integrated into Policy 1: Pre-Release Portfolio Preparation. In order to ensure that reentrants have the resources necessary to reenter society after prison, the Pre-release

Portfolio Preparation will provide them with State IDs, Social Security cards, birth certificates, resumes, and additional career training.

Other policy alternatives include the Relaxation of Parole and Probation Requirements and the Expansion and Improvement of Correctional Education Opportunities through Technology. The Relaxation of Parole and Probation Requirements allows parolees and probationers to move or change jobs without restriction but may weaken correctional services' ability to maintain appropriate supervision over parolees and probationers. The advancement of correctional education prepares inmates to reenter their communities but may be too costly for the state.

The Pre-release Portfolio Preparation is the strongest policy as it will provide reentrants with the ability to devote all their time and energy into finding employment and stable housing after prison. Currently, many reentrants have to devote much of their time and energy into obtaining vital identification documents and creating resumes after leaving prison and are unable to search for jobs or housing right away. The Pre-release Portfolio Preparation would consolidate all of the services available for inmates into one location with professional assistance, so that they are fully prepared to reenter society.



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