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Probation Department gets "Smart on Crime" by using Evidence-Based Practices

March 24, 2011 — Chambersburg, PA - The Franklin County Commissioners

Franklin County is seeing a significant reduction in the re-arrest and recidivism rate of offenders placed on Probation and Parole. The Probation Department has gotten "smart on crime" by using evidence-based practices.

At today's Franklin County Commissioners' meeting, Daniel Hoover, Chief Probation Officer, reported that offenders' recidivism rates have declined significantly.

"Today's presentation was an opportunity to hear in greater detail if the funding we authorize from year to year for Adult Probation is being prudently spent," said David S. Keller, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners. "It is clear to me that Chief Hoover and the courts are making wise investments in programs and personnel. The result is helping people set a new course for their lives and keeping the cost of criminal justice under control," Keller added.

A three year study by Dr. James Jengeleski and Dr. Michael S. Gordon of Shippensburg University showed that in 2010 the re-arrest rate for offenders under supervision by the county's Probation and Parole department was 24%, compared to the 2004 rate of 47.8%. The national average is 67.5%. Chief Hoover attributed the re-arrest rate decline in Franklin County to the difference between the former "old traditional supervision methods" and the present evidenced-based practices.

Hoover noted that "a lot of work went into changing the way we supervise offenders. . . . I have to give a lot of credit to the hard work and dedication of my Probation Officers, Supervisors, and Staff. . . . They have undergone training on these practices, and I know it was difficult for them to make some of the changes." Hoover credited former Adult Probation Supervisor Jim Furry as being instrumental in the initial research and realization of the potential of evidence-based practices.

An evidence-based practice is a data driven, actuarial based system of doing offender supervision. A Risk / Need assessment is completed to determine the individual offender's risk factors and treatment needs. The supervision level of the offender is established based on the results of the actuarial tool. The high risk offenders are supervised more closely than the low risk offenders. Every six months following the initial assessment a re-assessment is done. The offender helps the Parole Officer develop a case plan. Evidence shows offenders are less likely to stray from a program that they had a role in developing.

Hoover noted that a key implementation was the inter-departmental cooperation among County agencies. The Jail staff, Day Reporting Center, Franklin/Fulton Drug & Alcohol, Franklin/Fulton MH/MR and other agencies all have worked together to obtain the most positive outcomes possible. Hoover commended Dr. Kimberly Eaton, and Warden John Wetzel (now nominated as Pennsylvania Secretary of Corrections) for their support during the transition.

Hoover observed that a successful Probation and Parole program is the most cost-effective method of supervising an offender. Supervision of an offender on Probation or Parole averages \$2 per day. The average cost of a jail inmate is \$65 per day.

Public safety is the Probation Department's top priority, said Hoover. "I don't want anyone to get the impression that we are getting soft on crime. We are getting 'Smart on Crime.' Offenders are being held accountable for their actions. If an offender cannot safely be supervised in the community, they are re-arrested and placed in the Jail."

"The hard work that my Officers have put into making the changes necessary is a real testament to their commitment to the safety of the people of Franklin County, said Director Hoover. ""Lower crime rates, increased public safety, increased efficiency, and a cost savings to the community, are all benefits of the new way we are doing business at the Probation Department."

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