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PRESS RELEASE

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Denver, Colorado – 4/27/09- Members of the judiciary committees of both the House of Representatives and Senate will hear testimony today from national experts on innovations in other states that have reduced recidivism and curbed corrections costs.

A new report issued by Justice Strategies entitled “*Reducing Recidivism: A Review of Effective State Initiatives*” indicates that traditional approaches to reducing recidivism such as hiring more probation or parole officers or increasing the number of contacts between the officer and the defendant are unlikely by themselves to improve outcomes. Promising results achieved in Maryland, Connecticut, Kansas, and Arizona indicate that more innovative and comprehensive approaches are needed.

“Our research shows that significant results can be achieved in lowering recidivism through two primary strategies. The first is for parole and probation agencies to focus on organizational change internally, and second, that states make modest but strategic investments in community-based services for people on supervision,” said Néstor Ríos, Senior Policy Analyst at Justice Strategies.

With 2.3 million people behind bars, the United States is the world’s leading incarcerator per capita. A recent report by the Pew Center on the States indicates that 1 in every 31 U.S. adults is under some form of correctional control either by being incarcerated in jail or prison or under supervision on probation or parole. These rates are drastically elevated for men (1 in 18) and blacks (1 in 11). According to the Pew report, Colorado has an even higher ratio, with 1 in every 29 adults under some form of correctional control.

As with many states, one of the main drivers of growth in the prison population in Colorado is the high rate of revocation among people on community supervision, whether on probation or parole, which accounted for approximately 40 percent of prison admissions in 2007.

Meanwhile, the Department of Corrections’ budget is the third fastest growing item in the entire state budget, nearing \$760 million for 2009. The cost of housing an adult in prison is \$28,759, as compared to regular and intensive probation costs of \$1,121 and \$3,275, and regular and intensive parole costs of \$3,401 and \$8,319, respectively.

Lawmakers heard firsthand of the innovations in Maryland from Judith Sachwald, who was the director of Maryland’s Division of Probation and Parole when it launched a redesign of its supervision model when the state faced enormous fiscal strains and the beleaguered agency struggled with high revocation rates.

Rather than spending scarce resources on small programs that would reach just a handful of those under supervision, Sachwald and her team made critical improvements across the board in policies and procedures for professional training and staff supervision. This landmark model is called Proactive Community Supervision (PCS) which applies a research-based approach to supervision

that holds offenders accountable for their actions while assisting them in becoming law-abiding, responsible and productive.

Under PCS, probation and parole officers are retrained in behavioral intervention methods and supervision strategies are restructured to focus on the criminogenic triggers of those under supervision. System-wide organizational improvements were also made in supervisor training and data collection.

A rigorous evaluation conducted by Dr. Faye Taxman verified that the PCS model was able to achieve a stunning 42 percent lower rate of re-arrest for new crimes, compared to those supervised using traditional methods. The technical violation rate was also lower for the PCS group: 35 percent compared to 40 percent of the non-PCS group.

“I believe the PCS strategy has been successful because it is research-based, requires the ongoing examination of data, and the transformation of the agency to a learning organization,” explains Ms. Sachwald.

Ms. Greene, the report co-author, said that a number of states are working to improve outcomes for people under community supervision through a new comprehensive strategy called “Justice Reinvestment” – an approach that shifts spending on corrections to community-based services in “high stakes” neighborhoods from which most people are sent to prison, and to which they return when they are released.

In Connecticut, programs specifically designed to reduce technical violations for people placed under probation supervision have exceeded a 20 percent goal for reduction set by legislators. Millions of dollars that have been saved from corrections have been “reinvested” in housing and re-entry services for parolees in Hartford and New Haven.

In Kansas, the justice reinvestment concept is working well, with the number of parolees being returned to prison dropping from 203 a month in 2003 to 103 a month in 2007, and convictions for new crimes by people on parole plummeting from 424 a year in the late 1990s to 280 a year in the past three years. The Kansas justice reinvestment project is focused on redeveloping housing in the Wichita neighborhood that produces the highest incarceration rate in Kansas.

“Although every state has its own path, there are lessons to be learned from the experiences in other states. Reducing recidivism has been a focus of the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice. I hope the information in this report will be useful to it and other policymakers,” said Christie Donner, Executive Director of the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, which commissioned this report.

You can download the report at www.ccjrc.org (on the home page under “What’s New”).

The presentation is scheduled for today at 1:30 pm before the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. You can connect live to the House Judiciary Committee Hearing Room 107 via the following link: http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/leg_dir/gaweb/107.aspx

Justice Strategies is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization that provides policy research to advocates and policymakers on criminal justice and immigration law enforcement issues.

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