

CHAPTER SEVEN

VIOLATIONS OF PROBATION AND SUPERVISED RELEASE

PART A — INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Authority

Under 28 U.S.C. § 994(a)(3), the Sentencing Commission is required to issue guidelines or policy statements applicable to the revocation of probation and supervised release. The Commission chose to promulgate policy statements only. These policy statements were intended to provide guidance and allow for the identification of any substantive or procedural issues that require further review. The Commission viewed these policy statements as evolutionary and intended to review relevant data and materials concerning revocation determinations under these policy statements. Updated policies would be issued after federal judges, probation officers, practitioners, and others had the opportunity to evaluate and comment on these policy statements.

2. Background

(a) Probation.

Prior to the implementation of the federal sentencing guidelines, a court could stay the imposition or execution of sentence and place a defendant on probation. When a court found that a defendant violated a condition of probation, the court could continue probation, with or without extending the term or modifying the conditions, or revoke probation and either impose the term of imprisonment previously stayed, or, where no term of imprisonment had originally been imposed, impose any term of imprisonment that was available at the initial sentencing.

The statutory authority to “suspend” the imposition or execution of sentence in order to impose a term of probation was abolished upon implementation of the sentencing guidelines. Instead, the Sentencing Reform Act recognized probation as a sentence in itself. 18 U.S.C. § 3561. Under current law, if the court finds that a defendant violated a condition of probation, the court may continue probation, with or without extending the term or modifying the conditions, or revoke probation and impose any other sentence that initially could have been imposed. 18 U.S.C. § 3565. For certain violations, revocation is required by statute.

(b) Supervised Release.

Supervised release, a new form of post-imprisonment supervision created by the Sentencing Reform Act, accompanied implementation of the guidelines. A term of supervised release may be imposed by the court as a part of the sentence of imprisonment at the time of