

The Michigan Council On Crime And Delinquency

A CALL TO ACTION: REJUVENATING PRISONER REENTRY IN MICHIGAN

Community Ownership and Engagement is the Key to Continued Prisoner Reentry Success

SUMMARY

The collaborative framework of the MPRI Model led to its unprecedented success. Michigan achieved the largest drop in recidivism of former prisoners in the United States:

- *An overall 18% reduction in returns to prison between 2005 and 2007 and a 28% reduction in returns to prison between 2000 and 2008;¹*
- *A recidivism improvement of 38% for returning citizens;²*
- *The steepest reduction of a prison population in the shortest period of time of any state in the nation: Michigan's prison population declined over 12% in three years and 17% in five years.³ Michigan's accomplishments with MPRI represent the most massive decarceration effort in our country's history. By 2012 the state led the nation in closing 21 prisons, saving nearly \$350 million annually while keeping the crime rate down.⁴*

Michigan's accomplishments with MPRI represent the most massive decarceration effort in our country's history. By 2012 the state led the nation in closing 21 prisons, saving nearly \$350 million annually, and yet while keeping the crime rate down.

However, a shift in focus away from local control in Michigan and a reduction in resources committed to the effort over the past few years has slowed further progress and may even be threatening to erode the gains achieved. Evidence is pointing to reduced effectiveness of prisoner reentry. An assessment by the Council of State Governments's showed that as of 2011—the beginning of the end of MDOC's utilization of the full community-based MPRI Model—the re-arrest rate of parolees began to increase – from a low in 2010 of 22% (down from 30% when the MPRI was being implemented in 2008) to 24% in 2011. And a more recent examination of parolee returns to prison is documented in a 2016 MDOC Legislative Report on prison population projections. The report indicates an increase in “parole violation technical returns” in 2015 compared to 2014 but without any explicit data to show if it is a trend. It also includes a projected increase in the prison population from about 42,000 to 44,000.

Community ownership and engagement is the key to continued prisoner reentry success, and further advances can double down on the achievements realized so far. We cannot simply be satisfied with the new status quo and merely hope that progress to date is not lost. The Michigan Prisoner Reentry Association is thus calling for a rejuvenation of the MPRI by codifying the MPRI Model into law and by restoring the commitment to and capacity of the state/local partnership to expand upon the post-prison successes of Michigan's returning citizens.

¹ Council of State Governments' Justice Center, *States Report Reductions in Recidivism* (Sept. 2012)

² *The MPRI, A Success Story*; Michigan Department of Corrections (2013)

³ From 2006 to 2009 the prison population dropped from 51,577 to 45,478 – a 12% drop in three years. The decline continues today – through February 2013 the population has dropped by 17% (Michigan Department of Corrections)

⁴ See *Washington Monthly*, November/December 2010, *Prison Break: How Michigan managed to empty its penitentiaries while lowering its crime rate.*

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

Introduction

In 2005, the *Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative* (MPRI) was created through a state/local partnership between the state (the Office of the Governor, the Governor’s Office of the Foundation Liaison, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG), and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), the private sector, represented by Public Policy Associates, Inc. (PPA), and community stakeholders, represented by the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency (MCCD).

The vision of the Initiative was that every person released from prison to the community had the tools and resources needed to succeed. The mission was to reduce crime through a seamless plan of services and supervision developed with each returning citizen—delivered through state and local collaboration—from the time of their entry to prison through their transition, reintegration, and aftercare in the community. The partnership that inspired the MPRI Model assured a focus on community and family engagement, housing, employment from the point of entry into prison to release and aftercare. This unique partnership emphasized local ownership and control by each community for its own returning citizens.

The development of the MPRI Model was informed by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) “Transition from Prison to Community” (TPC) model, adapted for Michigan under the counsel of NIC and the National Governors Association (NGA). The MPRI Model and its implementation benefited tremendously from the guidance provided by these two national organizations, which funded technical assistance and support for the first year of planning. The refinement of the MPRI Model to fully reflect community ownership was documented in an Issue Brief in 2006 that was vetted for nearly a year until it received unanimous support at a meeting of over 150 state and community stakeholders. The brief received positive national attention through NIC and NGA, and was published by NIC in 2007 under the title, “Community Engagement: The Heart of the MPRI” (attached).

The subsequent implementation of the MPRI Model using evidence-based policy and practices became one of the most robust examples of state and local collaboration in Michigan’s history. By 2008, the MPRI Model engaged communities across all 83 Michigan counties, organized under 18 regional reentry councils that collaborated with MDOC, DLEG, MSHDA, MCCD, and PPA through the Governor’s state Reentry Council. The effort also relied on extensive public education and engendered enormous media attention. By 2012, over 35 positive editorials were published across the state. The backing of the Governor’s Office of the Foundation Liaison led to millions of dollars in philanthropic funding by 2009. This was in addition to the \$57 million in state savings generated through prison closures as a result of the Initiative’s unprecedented impact on reducing the Michigan prison population. The success of the MPRI is well documented and has received not only national attention, but has been the driving force behind an expanded model for improved prisoner reentry now implemented in other states.

MCCD and other leaders in promoting effective, evidence-based criminal justice policy are calling for a rejuvenation of the MPRI by codifying the MPRI Model into law, to ensure that community engagement and ownership of this successful enterprise, as well as adequate capacity and commitment to the post-prison success of Michigan’s returning citizens, are restored.

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

Documented Successes of the Community Engagement Model

The collaborative framework of the MPRI Model led to its unprecedented success. Michigan achieved the largest drop in recidivism of former prisoners in the United States:

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- A recidivism improvement of 38% for returning citizens;⁶
- The steepest reduction of a prison population in the shortest period of time of any state in the nation: Michigan's prison population declined over 12% in three years and 17% in five years.⁷ Michigan's accomplishments with MPRI represent the most massive decarceration effort in our country's history. By 2012 the state led the nation in closing 21 prisons, saving nearly \$350 million annually while keeping the crime rate down.⁸

A 2013 report published by the MDOC showed that MPRI has been a major contributor to lowering recidivism rates statewide. The MDOC historically used performance measures to monitor the number of prisoners engaged in services, and their outcomes – research that has apparently now ceased. When still using those performance measures in 2013, the MDOC reported that since the inception of the MPRI, from 2005 through 2012⁹:

- Nearly 37,000 prisoners were engaged in the MPRI and paroled from in-reach facilities (prisons closer to home where transition services are provided prior to parole).
- Outcomes tracking for these prisoners showed a relative rate reduction of 38% fewer returns to prison for violation of parole conditions or new crimes compared to baseline expectations, controlling for level of risk and history of prior parole failure.
- The 38% improvement equates to 5,193 fewer returns to prison compared to what would otherwise have been anticipated under the baseline rates.
- As implementation of the full MPRI model progressed over time, prisoner outcomes continued to improve.

In March of 2014, the Council of State Governments, while working in Michigan to improve sentencing, probation and parole policies under the national Justice Reinvestment Initiative, reported new data indicating that the arrests of parolees dropped from 30% in 2008 to 22% in 2010. Its report indicated that “engaging communities” and “increasing funding for community-based programming for parolees” contributed to the success of the MPRI. Further, the report suggests using the same approach to improve outcomes on the front end of the system.¹⁰

⁵ Council of State Governments' Justice Center, *States Report Reductions in Recidivism* (Sept. 2012)

⁶ The MPRI, A Success Story; Michigan Department of Corrections (2013)

⁷ From 2006 to 2009 the prison population dropped from 51,577 to 45,478 – a 12% drop in three years. The decline continues today – through February 2013 the population has dropped by 17% (Michigan Department of Corrections)

⁸ See Washington Monthly, November/December 2010, *Prison Break: How Michigan managed to empty its penitentiaries while lowering its crime rate*.

⁹ The MPRI, A Success Story; Michigan Department of Corrections (2013)

¹⁰ Report to the Michigan Law Revision Commission, Council of State Governments (March 2014)

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

According to the Pew Center for the States (*State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America's Prisons*; 2011) and other national crime and justice think tanks,¹¹ Michigan's story is one of several in the nation where improvements in policy and practice, anchored in research and proven over time, can pave the way for other states to, "... improve the odds that released offenders will reappear at the prison gate. That outcome benefits everyone, saving public funds and keeping communities safe." Pew also stated:

At the start of the millennium, Michigan did not look like a state on the cusp of inspiring correctional reform... By 2002, the state was sinking \$1.6 billion a year into corrections, almost one-fifth of its general fund. Less than a decade later, Michigan is riding a wave of policy changes that have allowed it to shrink its inmate population by 12 percent, close more than 20 correctional facilities and keep a growing number of parolees from returning to custody. The cornerstone of the effort is the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI). Launched in 2003 and expanded statewide in 2008, the initiative's mission is to equip every released offender with tools to succeed in the community. MPRI begins at intake, when a prisoner's risk, needs and strengths are measured to develop individualized programming. Prior to parole, offenders are transferred to a reentry facility, and a transition plan, which addresses employment, housing, transportation, mentoring, counseling and any necessary treatment for mental illness or addictions, is finalized in close collaboration with community service providers. After release, officers use firm but flexible graduated sanctions—including short stays in a reentry center if needed—to manage rule breaking before it escalates to more serious transgressions.

A 2009 report by the American Civil Liberties Union, *Michigan Breaks the Political Logjam: a New Model for Reducing Prison Populations*, weighed the accomplishments and approaches of the MPRI and stated, in part¹²:

While it may seem obvious that locking up more people would lower the crime rate, the reality is much more complicated. Sentencing and release policies, not crime rates, determine the numbers of persons in prison. Michigan's new initiatives to reduce overcrowding began in 2007, when the Michigan Department of Corrections initiated programs that have been refined over time. As a Michigan Department of Corrections official bluntly stated in testimony to the Michigan legislature, these steps "have broken the political logjam that has consistently stymied many prior justice policy reform proposals," by providing incentives for various stakeholders to support the initiatives and without requiring politically-sensitive reductions in statutory penalties for criminal offenses....

Overall, with the implementation of the MPRI program and the development of focused re-entry preparation within the prison system, the percentage of prisoners paroled on their ERD (Earliest Release Date) has increased to more than 70%. As a result, the percentage of prisoners serving time past their ERD fell from 31% to 25% in just two years....The history of over-incarceration in Michigan illustrates why the fact that over-incarceration results from deliberate policy choices about punishment rather than directly from crime rates is actually good news. As a persuasive body of evidence demonstrates, with an effective criminal justice policy, public safety can be improved, crime rates lowered, and our massive over-incarceration reduced. Michigan's experience is important because it demonstrates that common sense can in fact beat demagoguery and that smart-on-crime policies can actually triumph.

¹¹ See, for example, Downscaling Prisons: Lessons from Four States; The Sentencing Project; 2010.

¹² Michigan Breaks the Political Logjam: a New Model for Reducing Prison Populations; Elizabeth Alexander, National Prison Project of the ACLU (November 2009)

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

In 2012, the Michigan Auditor General performed a program audit of the MPRI that included its independent analysis of MPRI's impact on recidivism. Auditors reviewed the data sets of parolees assigned to the MPRI by the Michigan Parole Board and concluded:¹³

- When comparing the recidivism rates of 10,055 parolees who were paroled in 1998 - before the MPRI was implemented - to the 14,142 parolees who were paroled in 2007 when MPRI was in place, those paroled under the MPRI had recidivism rates that were notably lower.
- Similarly, when comparing groups of parolees who had a history of parole failure pre-MPRI to a group who were paroled under MPRI, the MPRI group had a notably lower recidivism rate.
- When considering levels of service, a group of MPRI parolees who utilized all of the services recommended in their Transition Accountability Plan had lower recidivism rates than a group that utilized only some of the services. This result was consistent across all risk levels. Even those who utilized some of the recommended services had lower recidivism rates than those who did not utilize any services.

Based on these objective reviews, the MPRI has been shown to be an effective model that improved public safety in Michigan and greatly reduced corrections costs - enabling reinvestment of taxpayer dollars for community-based, post-release services as well as other state investments such as education. Why has it been effective? It is "smart on crime."

MPRI partners, MCCD and Public Policy Associates, Inc., highlight four inter-related, evidence-based factors from the original model that are important in understanding the impact of the Initiative:

1. The MPRI enabled higher parole approval rates by improving the releasing authority's confidence. This was achieved by using objective, validated risk and need assessment to drive improved case plans, which resulted in better offender accountability and better parole outcomes.
2. It lowered the parole revocation rate, while maintaining public safety, through successful transition services that were planned prior to release and provided collaboratively between the MDOC and local communities.
3. The Initiative was governed locally. Site-specific steering teams had a primary role in planning and guiding local strategies – and then trouble-shooting problems – so that the plans worked effectively. This local governance structure created the capacity to do the work, including funding local community coordinators and explicit governance agreements with the MDOC.
4. The MPRI had widespread support among our community partners and the general public, because it was a community-based model that recognized that persons in prison are local citizens returning home.

The Migration of the MPRI as an Initiative to a MDOC Program

From its inception, the MPRI Model was intended to eventually migrate into the policies and practices of the MDOC. This migration began in earnest in 2012 with the change in gubernatorial administrations. Faced with

¹³ Performance Audit of the MDOC Michigan Prisoner Reentry Program (MPRI), Office of the Auditor General; pages 12-14 (February 2012)

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

budget challenges in 2011, state government began to downsize and one of the by-products of this down-sizing was a reduced reliance on local reentry stakeholders to plan, budget and implement the MPRI:

- In FY 2011, state budget deficits forced 1,400 early retirements, without replacements, for state employees, including a substantial number of the MDOC's top administrators and managers who were responsible for planning and implementing the MPRI.
- In FY 2012, the new Administration's budget required \$1.5 billion less in spending, forcing deeper cuts again to the MDOC and other health care, education, workforce development and social services critical to prisoner reentry. **As a result, many parolees began leaving prison without the support and supervision needed to maximize opportunities for a successful return to the community.**

Adaptation of the MPRI's community-engagement model into an MDOC program model greatly impacted the local partnerships that had proven so effective in the MPRI design and implementation.¹⁴ The MDOC:

- Stopped participating in strategic planning meetings with local and state MPRI partner organizations, including MCCD;
- Terminated the MPRI website and electronic newsletter - two primary tools for communicating with stakeholders outside of the MDOC;
- Cancelled statewide training and strategic planning meetings designed for MPRI Community Coordinators and members of the regional Steering Teams; and
- Dropped previous commitments to provide matching funds for the Inner City /AmeriCorps Neighborhood Project beyond the current fiscal year.

With pressure growing to reduce costs, tough decisions to cut resources and reduce, end or modify valuable programs were inevitable. MDOC began focusing more attention on internal capacity building to replace some of the external resources lost through these decisions. ***And while overall funding was reduced by 57% from FY2010 to FY2014, the portion of community-based funding was reduced by 69%*** (See Addendum, page 8). Without a legislative requirement to fund prisoner reentry at a required level in a way that respects the Model, further erosion of funding is likely. The Governor's recommended budget for fiscal year 2017 includes a requirement to re-bid all reentry contracts, a plan that could result in additional reductions for community funding.

Increased Recidivism: The Impact of Changing the Community Engagement Model?

In contrast to the MDOC's earlier transparent and collaborative decision-making process brought about through the MPRI, decisions affecting stakeholders across the state are now predominantly internal. They are made largely without effort to seek consensus or input from stakeholders, no different than many other "state run" programs. **Evidence is now pointing to the reduced effectiveness of prisoner reentry.** The Council of State Governments' assessment showed that as of 2011—the beginning of the end of MDOC's utilization of the full community-based MPRI Model—the re-arrest rate of parolees began to increase – from a low in 2010 of 22% (down from 30% when the MPRI was being implemented in 2008) to 24% in 2011.

¹⁴ See, for example, Governor Snyder and MDOC Dismantle Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative, Rev. Joe Summers, Community Co-Chair of Washtenaw County Prisoner ReEntry Program (March 2014)

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

A more recent examination of parolee returns to prison is documented in a 2016 MDOC Legislative Report on prison population projections. The report indicates an increase in “parole violation technical returns” in 2015 compared to 2014 but without any explicit data to show if it is a trend. It also includes a projected increase in the prison population from about 42,000 to 44,000. (Additional research by MCCD is underway).¹⁵ One way to determine the extent of the increase in recidivism and its impact on expanding the prison population, and perhaps examine specific causes for the increase, is for the Auditor General to perform another Program Audit of the MDOC approach, which is no longer called the MPRI, but simply, “reentry services.”

Codifying the Community Engagement Model into Law – A Call to Action

The MPRI Model has been more fully developed by MCCD’s Center for Justice Innovation into the *Strategic Planning for Prisoner Reentry (SPPR) Framework*. The SPPR Framework, with input from over 10 states in the past 7 years and based on the MPRI Model, provides guidance for specific justice policies and practices that should be considered by states and other jurisdictions as their “Targets for Change” in order to improve prisoner reentry.

As a tribute to the success of the MPRI Model and the principle of community engagement, it is noteworthy that technical assistance services using the SPPR Framework have been provided in 14 states and are particularly effective in Alaska, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, and Montana, resulting in statewide application of massive prisoner reentry reforms, greater community engagement and a wider range of evidence based principles and practices. As implementation continues, demonstrated reductions in recidivism – similar to those witnessed in Michigan - are possible if the Framework is fully implemented.

From the perspective of Michigan communities, what is needed is a re-commitment to the full, community-based MPRI Model and the principles upon which it stands. **Without substantial commitment to immediate change, the improvements gained through MPRI could be permanently lost** as the local and external partners who remain continue to witness the erosion of this celebrated, effective, and much-replicated model. Communities across the state are ready to speak out against the erosion of the MPRI Model and the failure of the MDOC to meet its historical commitment to this vital state/local partnership. The following steps are suggested by MCCD as a Call to Action:

1. Hold Town Hall meetings throughout the remainder of 2016 with prisoner reentry stakeholders and advocates to determine their positions on the status of implementation of the MPRI. How is it working? How does it differ from the original spirit, intent and detail of the original model embraced by communities?
2. Request a program audit from the State Auditor General to determine the degree to which the MPRI Model is being implemented by the MDOC. Are prisoners receiving the services envisioned by the MPRI while in custody to prepare for a successful transition to the community? If so, to what degree? What measures of accountability are or should be in place to assess the degree to which implementation maintains fidelity to the evidence-based MPRI Model?

¹⁵ Report to the Legislature, Pursuant to PA 84 of 2015, Article V, Section 401, Prison Population Report, Michigan Department of Corrections (February 2016)

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

3. Work with the Michigan Legislature to create a requirement that prisoner reentry services be evaluated – comparing both the original MPRI Model and the current MDOC approach to determine its impact on crime, recidivism and costs. The MPRI has never been formally evaluated, in spite of its obvious impact.
4. Work with the Michigan Legislature to draft legislation that would codify the MPRI Model into law. This would include, but not limited to, the aspects of the model that center on community engagement and ownership and the evidence-based, three-phased development of individualized Transition Accountability Plans, which include community based services, reaching in to the prisons, as well as upon release. Simultaneously, codify these expectations in appropriations law (boilerplate).
5. Convene a statewide rally in the fall of 2016 to bring together advocates and stakeholders to celebrate the strength of their commitment and the individual successes of returning citizens and to call for support for the Program Audit, the evaluation of the MPRI Model, and funding protections through both appropriations law and statute.

A Call to Action: Rejuvenating Prisoner Reentry in Michigan

ADDENDUM

Shifting MPRI Funding from Communities to the DOC and Reducing Overall Spending

Administrative and service funding for prisoner reentry is multi-faceted. It requires some funding for the MDOC and some funding for community-based services – either through community-based contracts (local control and authority) or by the MDOC through an internal bidding process (state control and authority). While a complete analysis of budgeting and spending could provide great detail on how funding has not only declined but shifted from local to state control, a cursory review from two time periods is eye-opening. Table 1 below shows a comparison between FY2010 when MPRI funding was at its peak, and FY 2014, the most recent year for which figures are available. ¹⁶ *These data illustrate how overall funding has been reduced by 57%; and how community funding decreased by 69% from FY2010 to FY2014.** Without funding protections in appropriations law, community-based funding is very likely to be further reduced.

Table 1

	FY 2009 – 2010	FY 2013 - 2014	Difference
Community-based Contracts and Services	\$27 million - contracts with “administrative agencies [that] serve as fiduciary agents and subcontract with other agencies to provide MPRI services.”	\$13.8 million - contracts with “administrative agencies [that] serve as fiduciary agents and subcontract with other agencies to provide MPRI services.”	(\$13.2 million)
	\$18.1 million - provide capacity building and technical assistance services.	-0-	(\$18.1 million)
Subtotals	\$45.1 million	\$13.8 million	(\$31.3 million)
MDOC Contracts and Services	\$4.5 million - contracts to expand risk reduction services such as substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment, parole supervision and day reporting.	\$12.1 million - special needs contracts; data management; MDOC-operated “community-based programs”	(\$2.8 million)
	\$10.4 million - special needs contracts to serve mentally ill, developmentally disabled, juvenile and medically fragile offenders.		
Subtotals	\$14.9 million	\$12.1 million	(\$2.8 million)
Total Funding	\$60 million	\$25.9 million	(\$34.1 million)
% Community	75% Community Funding	53% Community Funding	

Sources: MDOC, Prisoner Reentry Expenditures and Allocations Report to MI Legislature, FY 2009/10, FY2013/14

***Note: Total funding in FY14 of \$25M = 57% of total funding of \$60M in FY10; Community funding of \$25.9M in FY 14 down from \$45.1M in FY10 is a 69% decrease.**

¹⁶ Prisoner Reentry Expenditures and Allocations Report to MI Legislature, MDOC, (FY 2010 & FY2014)