AN ANALYSIS OF RECIDIVISM RATES
AMONG RESIDENTS RELEASED FROM
MASSACHUSETTS CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS
IN 1976

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an analysis of recidivism rates for individuals released from Massachusetts correctional institutions in the year 1976.

Consistent with past departmental recidivism research, the recidivism rate in 1976 showed a downward trend. For release in 1966, the mean recidivism rate was 30%. For the years 1971 through 1975 the rates were 25%, 22%, 19%, 19% and 20%, respectively. In 1976, the recidivism rate dropped to 16%.

This report attributes the reduction in recidivism rates to three factors: 1) participation in the Home Furlough Program; 2) release from a pre-release center; and 3) the combined effect of the two programs.

More specifically, controlling for selection biases, the results of this study substantiate prior evidence that individuals who had participated in the Furlough Program prior to release had lower rates of recidivism, as did individuals released from a pre-release center. Moreover, those individuals having experienced both the Furlough Program and a Pre-Release Center had the lowest recidivism rate. Therefore, the existence of graduated release programs again emerges as the most significant contributing factor in the reduction of recidivism rates.

INTRODUCTION

In order to assess the operational and reintegrative effectiveness of the programs introduced to the Massachusetts Department of Correction by the Correctional Reform Act of 1972 (i.e., pre-release centers, the home furlough program, and work and education release programs), extensive research evaluations have been undertaken by the Department's Research Unit.

Recidivism rates have been used as one measure of the effectiveness of the state's correctional programs. A series of studies of recidivism rates has been produced by the Research Unit, covering the years 1966 and 1971 through 1975. Moreover, a series of recidivism studies has been produced for individual pre-release centers and halfway houses. 2

The studies have indicated that the overall recidivism rate in Massachusetts has consistently dropped in the last number of years. For releases in the year 1966, the mean recidivism rate was 30%; for 1971, 25%; for 1972, 22%; for 1973, 19%; for 1974, 19%; and for 1975, 20%. The year 1976 showed an even more significant drop in the recidivism rate, the overall rate being 16%.

Controlling for selection factors in furlough program participation, it has been found that participation in the program results in lower rates of recidivism.

Moreover, participation in pre-release programs prior to release resulted in lower rates of recidivism.

The most recent departmental research has further substantiated the positive effects of the above mentioned programs, by concluding that the combined effect of participation in both the furlough program and pre-release centers yielded the lowest rate of recidivism.³

Still another factor that has been associated with the impact on recidivism rates is the security level of the institution from which an individual is released.

The present study is an attempt to study the above trends and to detect any additional trends in recidivism rates. The Research Unit collected data describing the background characteristics and the recidivism variables for all individuals released from Massachusetts correctional institutions in 1976. The statistics are available for

releasees from MCI's Walpole and Concord (then both classified as maximum security institutions); MCI Norfolk (medium security); Forestry Camps and MCI-Framingham (minimum security); and Pre-Release Centers. The raw data for this report has been published as a separate study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Definition of Recidivism:

A recidivist was defined as any subject returned to a federal or state correctional institution or to a county jail or house of correction for 30 days or more as a result of either a parole violation or a new court sentence.

Follow-Up Period:

The follow-up period was one year from the date of the subject's release to the community.

Variables Collected:

The analyses following in this report are based on five categories of variables: commitment variables, personal background variables, criminal history variables, furlough variables, and recidivism variables. Appendix I gives a specific listing of the variables.

Data was derived primarily from the computerized data base developed by the Correction and Parole Management Information System. Additional data was collected from the files of the Department of Correction, the Parole Board, and the Board of Probation. The data was analyzed on the Massachusetts State College Computer Network.

FINDINGS

In 1976 a total of 925 individuals were released from Massa-chusetts' correctional institutions to the street. Of the 925, 774 (84%) were not returned to a correctional institution within one year of their release, while 151 (16%) were reincarcerated within the year follow-up period. The overall recidivism rate, therefore, was 16%.

When examining recidivism rates for individual institutions, considerable variation occurred. The recidivism rates for releasing institutions ranged from 0% for Framingham men, to 25% for MCI-Concord. Table I summarizes the individual recidivism rates.

TABLE I

RECIDIVISM RATES BY RELEASING INSTITUTION, 1976

INSTITUTION	NUMBER OF RELEASES	PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION	RECIDIVISM RATE
Concord	207	(22)	25%
Walpole	100	(11)	24%
Norfolk	78	(8)	22%
Framingham Men	9	(1)	0%
Framingham Women	95 ·	(10)	21%
Forestry Camps	38	(4)	5%
Southeastern Correction Center	33	(4)	12%
Pre-Release Centers	365	(40)	9%
TOTAL	925	(100)	16%

Whereas the recidivism rates for the years 1973-1975 were stable (19%, 19% and 20% respectively, in 1976 the recidivism rate dropped to 16%-a statistically significant decline. Further research will be necessary to determine whether or not a downward trend in recidivism rates will persist.

When the recidivism rates for each institution are taken separately, variations continue to occur each year. The rates for pre-release centers and forestry camps have dropped significantly while the recidivism rate for MCI-Norfolk has risen considerably. Table II presents comparative recidivism rates for 1966-1976.

TABLE II

COMPARATIVE RECIDIVISM RATES FOR YEARS 1966-1976

YEAR	CONCORD	WALPOLE	NORFOLK	FRAMINGHAM	PRE RELEASE	FORESTRY	TOTAL
1966	30%	33%	28%	32%	- '	27%	30%
1971	28%	27%	18%	29%	-	14%	25%
1972	27%	21%	15%	18%	••	14%	2 2%
1973	26%	21%	14%	17%	12%	14%	19%
1974	27%	22%	19%	12%	12%	7%	19%
1975	26%	27%	12%	18%	14%	15%	20%
1976	25%	24%	22%	19%	9%	5%	16%

Research in past years has shown that there is a reintegrative quality in the movement from maximum to medium and minimum security levels of releasing institutions, leading to lower rates of recidivism. In order to determine whether this previously identified trend continued in 1976, the releasing institutions were first divided into four categories of security status:

- Pre-Release: including state operated and subcontracted
 facilities;
- 2) Minimum security: forestry camps and MCI-Framingham;
- 3) Medium security: MCI-Norfolk and SECC;
- 4) Maximum security: MCI-Concord, MCI-Walpole*

Utilizing these categories, the releasee population was then broken down by security level of releasing institution:

TABLE III

INSTITUTIONAL SECURITY LEVEL RELEASE

	Number	. Percentage	Recidivism Rate
Pre-Release	365	(39)	98
Minimum Security	142	(15)	15%
Medium Security	111	(12)	19%
Maximum Security	307	(34)	25%
TOTAL	925.	(100)	16%

From Table II it is clear that the security level of the insittution from which an individual is released plays an important role in effecting (i.e, reducing) recidivism rates. Individuals released from minimum security institutions or pre-release centers had significantly lower rates of recidivism than individuals released from maximum and medium security institutions.

^{*} In 1976, MCI Concord was defined strictly as a maximum security institution. However, Table VI gives a breakdown of MCI Concord as it is currently classified.

The recidivism rates for individual pre-release centers also showed a great deal of variation. As noted in the 1975 recidivism report (Mershon, 1978), some of the variation is a result of the small sample size of individual centers such as South Middlesex Pre-Release, and Roxbury Community Rehabilitation Center. Prior research has also demonstrated that the variation in recidivism rates of individual pre-release centers is a function of the risk potential of the population upon which that particular center draws. The recidivism rates are shown in Table IV:

TABLE IV

RECIDIVISM RATES FOR SPECIFIC PRE-RELEASE CENTERS, 1976

INSTITUTION	NUMBER OF RELEASES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION	RECIDIVISM RATE
Shirley	56	(15)	9%
Boston State	76	(21)	3%
Roxbury C.R.C.	3	(1)	0%
Charlotte House	13	(4)	8%
Coolidge House	18	(5)	6%
Brooke House	31	(8)	10%
METAC	24	(7)	10%
BOSP	13	(4)	15%
Temporary Housing	14	(4)	7%
699 House	43	(12)	21%
577 House	38	(10)	11%
S.Middlesex Pre-Release	1	(1)	90
Lancaster	17	(5)	68
Norfolk Pre-Release	11	(3)	0%
Drug Houses	7	(2)	29%
TOTAL	365	(100)	9%

It is interesting to note that the number of releases from prerelease centers has increased from 224 to 365 - an increase of 63% within a year's time. Moreover, over 39% of the total releasee population was released from pre-release centers, yet the recidivism rate has dropped from 14% in 1975 to 9% in 1976. When comparing recidivism rates for individual pre-release centers over the years (i.e., since their inception), it is clear that significant changes have occurred. The rates have all decreased from the first year of operation, with the exception of Temporary Housing, which however, has dropped from 1975, and Coolidge House, which has dropped from 1975, but is identical to the 1974 rate.

The following table shows the recidivism rates for the individual pre-release centers since 1973:

TABLE V

COMPARATIVE RECIDIVISM RATES FOR PRE-RELEASE CENTERS FOR YEARS 1973-1976

YEAR	varatus	BOSTON STATE	ROXBURY C.R.C.	CHARLOTTE HOUSE	COOLIDGE	BROOKE HOUSE	TEMPORARY HOUSING	699 HOUSE	DRUG HOUSES	BOSP	METAC	577 HOUSE	SOUTH MIDDLESEX	LANCASTER	PRE- RELEASE	total Pre- <u>release</u>	
TEAR	Dittimer	011120			• =====================================	,					·		<u>.</u> .	٠ ـ	•	123	
1973	16%	8%		-	•	-	-		•		7					164	
1974	21%	7%	11%	14%	6%	11%	0 ≴	-	-	-	-	-	**	34	-	12%	
1975	18%	. 7%	oz	0%	14%	23%	100%	33%	100%	-	. •	 '	• •	•	••	14%	
1917	70%	. 11-				· •	Walter Barrier		one	254	10%	11%	0%	6%	0%	04	•
1976	9%	3%	· 0%	8%	6,5	. 10%	7%	21%	29%	15%	70%	***	Ψp.	-2-		,,,	

[&]quot;-" indicates center not in operation as of that year.

A new dimension of the recidivism data for releases in 1976 includes a specific breakdown of differential recidivism rates for MCI-Concord releases according to the institutional security level from which the individual was released. It was found that those individuals released from Gralton Hall had the lowest rate of recidivism. These figures are summarized in Table VI below:

TABLE VI

MCI-CONCORD RELEASES BY SPECIFIC SECURITY LEVEL OF RELEASE, 1976

MAXIMUM SECURITY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL	RECIDIVISM RATE
I. New Line	15	(7)	33%
II. Department 9	16	(8)	31%
MEDIUM SECURITY	·		
III. Rooms	63	(30)	27%
MINIMUM SECURITY			
IV. Overflow	7	(3)	17%
V. Farm Dorm	94	(45)	23%
PRE-RELEASE	1		
VI. Gralton Hall	12	(6)	15%
TOTAL	207	(100)	25%

These figures are consistent with the results of the general releasee population, as well as past departmental research, verifying the strong impact of the security level of the releasing institution upon rates of recidivism.

SPECIFIC CATEGORY OF RECIDIVISM FOR RELEASES IN THE YEAR 1976

Recidivism was broken down into three categories for purposes of analysis: 1) returned for a technical infraction of parole conditions; 2) returned for a new arrest in association with a parole violation; and 3) returned on a new court sentence.

In the 1976 releasee sample, 20 or 13% were reincarcerated for a technical infraction of their parole conditions. Sixty-six individuals, or 44%, were returned for a new arrest (although at the time of their return they may not yet have been tried for the new offense). Similarly, 65 or 43% were returned upon receiving a new sentence from the court. Table VII summarizes the findings:

TABLE VII

RECIDIVISM BREAKDOWN FOR 1976 RELEASES BY CATEGORY OF RETURN

Non-Recidivists	WALPOLE N % 76 (76)	CONCORD N % 155 (75)	NORFOLK N % 61 (78)	FORESTRY N % 36 (95)	FRAMING- HAM WOMEN N % 75 (79)	FRAMING- HAM MEN N % 9 (100)	PRE- RELEASE N % 333 (91)	S.E.C.C. N % 29 (88)	TOTAL N % 774 (84)
Recidivists Parole Violation technical	6 (6)	2 (1)	3 (4)	0 (0)	3 (3)	0 (0)	5 (1)	1 (3)	20 (2)
Parole Violation new arrest	9 (9)	24 (12)	10 (13)	1 (3)	5 (5)	0 (0)	14 (4)	3 (9)	66 (7)
New court commitment	9 (9)	26 (13)	4 (5)	1 (3)	12 (13)	0 (0)	13 (4)	0 (0)	65 (7)
TOTAL	100 (100)	207 (100)	78 (100)	38 (100)	95 (100)	9 (100)	365 (100)	33 (100)	925 (100)

As in previous years, a lower proportion of individuals were returned for a technical infraction of their parole conditions. When compared with 1975, a lower proportion of individuals were returned for a new arrest in association with a violation of their parole conditions, and an equal proportion returned on a new court commitment.

Table VIII breaks down the three categories of return by year:

TABLE VIII

BREAKDOWN OF RECIDIVISM BY CATEGORY OF RETURN FOR YEARS 1966, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975 AND 1976

	1966 N %	1971 N %	1972 N %	1973 N %	1974 N %	1975 N %	1976 N %
Non-Recidivists	648 (70)	835 (75)	1204 (78)	780 (81)	739 (81)	645 (80)	774 (84
Recidivists: Parole Violation, Technical	93 (10)	118 (11)	76 (5)	65 (7)	40 (4)	20 (2)	20 (2
Parole Violation, New Arrest	96 (11)	128 (12)	190 (12)	85 (9)	85 (9)	84 (10)	66 (7
New Commitments	81 (9)	26 (2)	80 (5)	36 (4)	47 (5)	57 (7)	65 (7
TOTAL	918 (100)	1107 (100)	1550 (100)	966 (100)	911 (100)	806 (100)	925 (100

RECIDIVISM RATE BY TYPE OF RELEASE

The 1976 sample was divided into two categories by type of release, in order to discern if any differential recidivism rates occurred. The two categories, parole and discharge, are shown in Table IX along with their corresponding recidivism rates for the major institutions.

In contrast to 1975 where the recidivism rate for parolees was higher than that of dischargees, in the 1976 releasee sample the recidivism rates for each category were identical (16%), although for most of the individual institutions, the recidivism rate for parolees was higher than that of dischargees - consistent with past research.

TABLE IX

TYPE OF RELEASE, 1976

	WALPOLE N Z 1	RR	CONCORD N %	RR	NORFOLK N Z	RR	SECC BRIDGEWAT N %	ER RR	FRAMINGHAM N % RR	FO N	RESTR	RR	PRE RELI	RR RR	TOTAL N #	RR
Parole	76 (76)	26	167 (81)	25	59 (70)	25	23 (70)	17	60 (58) 22	36 (95)	6	333 (91)	9	754 (82)	16
Discharge	24 (24)	17	40 (19)	28	19 (24)	11	10 (30)	0	44 (42) 16	5 (5)	0	32 (9)	9	171 (18)	16
TOTAL	100 (100)	24	207 (100)	25	78 (100)	22	33 (100)	12	104 (100) 19	38 (100)	5 .	365 (100)	. 9	925 (100)	16

FURLOUGH PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Of the 925 individuals released in 1976, 426 (46%) did not receive a furlough prior to release and had a recidivism rate of 25%. The remaining 499 releasees did experience one or more furloughs while incarcerated and had a recidivism rate of 9%.

Since the inception of the Home Furlough Program in 1972, the recidivism rates for individuals receiving a furlough while incarcerated have been significantly lower than for those not having experienced a furlough. This is true even when selection factors are controlled. Prior departmental research has demonstrated the effect of the furlough program on recidivism rates in great detail.

An interesting fact emerges when comparing findings from year to year. In 1976 the proportion of the releasee population furloughed was 54% (a drop from 74% in 1974 and 62% in 1975), indicating a tightening up of the administration of the furlough program.

The recidivism rate broken down by participation in the furlough program is shown below in Table X:

TABLE X

RECIDIVISM RATE BROKEN DOWN BY PARTICIPATION ON FURLOUGH PROGRAM

	NUMBER	PERCENT	RECIDIVISM RATE
Did not receive a furlough	426	(46)	25%
Received a furlough	499	(54)	9%
TOTAL	925	(100)	16%

When the furlough variable is broken down by specific releasing institution, a great deal of fluctuation occurs. For all institutions with the exception of Forestry Camps, those individuals who had received a furlough before being released had a lower recidivism rate than those not furloughed. Table XI shows the results:

RECIDIVISM RATE OF INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING FURLOUGH PRIOR TO RELEASE COMPARED TO THOSE RELEASED WITHOUT RECEIVING A FURLOUGH, 1976

	WA	LPOLE	CON	CORD	NOR	FOLK		C.C. GEWATER	FRAMI	NCH AM	r⊄∩'¤	ESTRY	זכו ישמס	er to Act to	mom	
Recidivism Rate of Individuals Not Receiving a Fur- lough Prior to	<u>N</u> 61	RR 33%	<u>N</u> 150	RR 29%	<u>N</u> 44	RR 34%	20 20	<u>RR</u> 15%	<u>N</u> 73	RR 23%	<u>N</u> 5	RR 0%	PRE RI <u>N</u> 73	RR 11%	TOT <u>N</u> 426	RI 2'
Release Recidivism Rate of Individuals who had	39	10%	57	16%	34	6%	13	8%	31	10%	33	6%	292	8%	499	\$
Received a Furlough Prior to Release							,		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	•						
Recidivism Rate	100	24%	207	25%	78	22%	33	12%	104	19%	38	5%	365	9%	925	16

More support for the furlough program's effect on the reduction in recidivism rates has recently been demonstrated. The latest recidivism study not only shows that participation in the furlough program reduces the incidence of recidivism, but also shows the strong interactive effect of both furloughs and pre-release centers on rates of recidivism. It was found that those individuals who had participated in the furlough program and who had also ended the term of their incarceration in a pre-release center had the lowest rate of recidivism.

VARIABLES FOUND TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN RECIDIVISTS AND NON-RECIDIVISTS

The final section of this report focuses on specific background variables that distinguished between individuals who recidivated and those who did not. Each variable was dichotomized to determine the best split for high and low recidivism risk categories. Those variables which produced a statistically significant difference between high and low recidivism risk groups were chosen for the following discussion.

An interesting distinction appeared to result between 1976 and the previous years. Whereas in past research studies the collective category "Criminal Career Pattern" emerged as a significant distinguishing factor between recidivists and non-recidivists, in the 1976 sample this was not found to be true. The only variable included in this category which proved to be significant concerned prior court appearances for property offenses. Those individuals who had 2 or fewer property charges had a recidivism rate of 9%, as opposed to a recidivism rate of 22% for those having had more than 2 property charges.

Only three other categories of variables were found to be significant in distinguishing between the incidence of recidivism and non-recidivism. The categories are summarized below:

- I. Furlough History
 - (1) Number of Furloughs
 - (2) Number of Successful Furloughs
- II. Security Status of Institution of Release (pre-release, non-pre-release)
- III. Employment History
 - (1) Time at Most Skilled Position
 - (2) Time at Job of Longest Duration

Individuals who had experienced three or fewer furloughs at the time of their release had a recidivism rate of 23%, whereas individuals having experienced more than three furloughs had a recidivism rate of only 6%. Moreover, those who had four or fewer successful furloughs had a significantly higher recidivism rate than those individuals who had more than four successful furloughs - 23% versus 5%, respectively. Earlier in the report it was shown that individuals who had received a furlough prior to release had a recidivism rate of 9%, and those who hadn't received a furlough had a recidivism rate of 25%. Thus it is clear that once again furlough program participation is an important factor in effecting recidivism rates.

The 1976 releasee sample also yielded support in favor of pre-release centers. It was found that those individuals released from a pre-release center had a recidivism rate of 9%. On the contrary, those individuals who were not released from a pre-release center had a recidivism rate of 21%.

Finally, employment history proved to be an indicator of recidivism. Individuals who had spent 3 or fewer months at their most skilled position had a significantly higher recidivism risk potential than individuals who had spent more than three months at such position - 22% and 11% respectively. Along the same line, those who had spent 3 or fewer months at their job of longest duration had a higher recidivism rate (23%) than those having worked more than 3 months (11%). The following table presents the distinguishing variables in a more concise format:

RECIDIVISM RISK POTENTIAL BY DISTINGUISHING VARIABLES

	•	i de la companya de		
VARIABLE	LOW RISK CATEGORY	RECIDIVISM RISK	HIGH RISK R CATEGORY	ECIDIVISM RISK
Number of Furloughs	4 or more	6%	3 or fewer	23%
Number of Successfu Furloughs —	il 5 or more	5%	4 or fewer	23%
Institution release From	d Pre-Release	9%	Non-Pre-Releas	e 21%
Number of Property Charges	2 or fewer	9%	3 or more	22%
Time at most Skille Position (months)		11%	3 or fewer	22%
Time at Job of Long Duration(months)	est 4 or more	11%	3 or fewer	23%

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the 1976 releasee population further substantiated the importance and effectiveness of graduated release to the community. Three components of graduated release covered in this report are the furlough program, pre-release centers and the security status of the institution an individual is released from (i.e., the gradual movement from maximum security institutions to lower security institutions prior to release).

Coinciding with the results of past departmental research, the following trends continued to exist: 1) individuals gradually moved to and released from minimum security institutions or pre-release centers had lower rates of recidivism than those released directly from maximum or medium security institutions; 2) individuals who had participated in the furlough program had lower rates of recidivism than those who did not participate (controlling for selection biases); and 3) individuals released from pre-release centers had lower recidivism rates than individuals not released from pre-release centers.

Finally, a new dimension has been added to the previously identified trends: namely, that those individuals who had participated in both the furlough program and pre-release centers prior to release had the lowest recidivism rates.

Therefore, analysis again supports the process of graduated release to the community as an integral component in an individual's reintegration into society and as an effective means of curbing recidivistic behavior.

FOOTNOTES

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APPENDIX I

VARIABLES

A. COMMITMENT VARIABLES

- 1. Institution of Original Commitment
- 2. Number of Jail Credits
- 3. Age at Commitment
- 4. Present Offense (most serious charge)
- 5. Number of Charges Involved in Present Offense
- 6. Type of Sentence
- 7. Minimum Sentence
- 8. Maximum Sentence

B. PERSONAL BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS VARIABLES

- 1. Race
- 2. Marital Status
- 3. Military Service
- 4. Last Civilian Address
- 5. Emergency Addressee
- 6. Occupational Field
- 7. Length of Employment at Most Skilled Position
- 8. Longest Time Employed at Any One Job
- 9. Type of Education
- 10. Last Grade Completed
- 11. History of Drug Use

C. CRIMINAL HISTORY VARIABLES

- 1. Age at First Arrest
- 2. Age at First Drunk Arrest
- 3. Age at First Drug Arrest
- 4. Total Number of Court Appearances
- 5. Number of Court Appearances for Person Offenses
- 6. Number of Court Appearances for Property Offenses
- 7. Number of Court Appearances for Sex Offenses
- 8. Number of Court Appearances for Narcotic Offenses
- 9. Number of Court Appearances for Drunkenness Offenses
- 10. Number of Court Appearances for Escape Offenses
- 11. Number of Juvenile Commitments
- 12. Number of House of Correction Commitments
- 13. Number of Prior State or Federal Commitments
- 14. Number of Juvenile Paroles
- 15. Number of Adult Paroles
- 16. Number of Juvenile Parole Violations
- 17. Number of Adult Parole Violations
- 18. Age at Release

D. FURLOUGH VARIABLES

- 1. Total Number of Furloughs
- 2. Total Number of Successful Furlough Outcomes
- 3. Total Number of Late-Under Furloughs
- 4. Total Number of Late-Over Furloughs
- 5. Total Number of Escape Furlough Outcomes
- 6. Total Number of Arrest Furlough Outcomes
- 7. Specific Institution Granting Furlough
- 8. Months Served Before Receiving First Furlough
- 9. Months Served Before First Furlough Escape

E. RECIDIVISM VARIABLES

- 1. Category of Return
- 2. New Arrests
- 3. Types of Parole Violations
- 4. Disposition of New Arrests
- 5. Date Returned to Custody
- 6. Date Parole Warrant Issued