

## Probation Committee Report – June 26, 2007

### Priorities and Focus Areas:

- The committee obtained information on salary structure for Hamilton County probation officers and caseload size, compared to surrounding counties. Salaries in Hamilton County are lower and caseloads are higher in comparison. This poses serious problems in recruitment and retention.
- Forty percent of Municipal Court probationers are employed. Sixty percent are unemployed. This points to an urgent need to increase efforts for job training and job placement services.
- Approximately 50% of probationers who return to jail have not committed a new offense. In most cases probation officers try many options before resorting to jail. Many violations are viewed as a signal that the probationer needs help rather than immediately being returned to jail.
- A large menu of options for probationers is available to probation officers. These involve such things as GED preparation and certification, employment training, counseling, support groups, and workshops. The community Action Agency provides case management and apprenticeship services. The Urban League provides computer training as well as services for employment. This is in addition to an array of mental health and substance abuse services.
- Given the importance of job readiness screening, job preparation and job placement, members of the committee met with a representative from the Department of Job and Family Services to discuss linkages with their job screening and job training. The department has agreed to work more closely with probation officers to make these opportunities more available to probationers.
- Our committee is still in the process of obtaining information on revocation and re-arrest rates.

### Next Steps:

- Services should be more closely wrapped with the specific needs of a client, instead of trying to fit clients into ongoing services. Needs assessment and risk assessment tools for use by probation officers need to be updated, along with training to use those tools.
- Efforts should be made to improve up-front screening for motivation and readiness to use specific resources. This is to occur after the needs and risk assessments.
- The committee believes that therapeutic incarceration can only be useful if the stay in jail is wrapped with services to the specific needs of the inmate. There is no research evidence that jail alone is effective in changing behavior.
- Access to services must be improved and is viewed by the committee as one of the highest priorities. A probationer should be able to access needed services within 48 hours of the needs and readiness assessments. These quick access services can be a bridge or a transition to longer term community based services.
- Studies show that probationers place high importance on relationships with their children. It is therefore recommended that expanded, improved programs be established to foster parent/child relationships. There is reason to believe that such fostering can impact on the motivation of some probationers to make use of other resources to improve their chances of succeeding.
- The committee spent considerable time exploring the issue of job readiness, job training, and job placement. It is our recommendation that the county set aside 100 of its 6,000 to 7,000 jobs as six-month traineeships. These trainee positions would offer the potential of preparing the person to enter the work force. Careful screening would have to occur and job placement services would be developed in connection with JFS efforts already in place. A package of services based on each individual's needs assessment would be available during and after the six-month job training.

- It is recommended that greater use of EMUs be ordered as an alternative to jail.
- Recommendation is made to find ways to expand community-based probation services. It should be recognized that community-based probation officers should have a different skill set. It is therefore this committee's recommendation that new job descriptions and skills and credentials for applicants be developed for community-based probation officers and new standards be used in recruitment when vacancies occur.
- The committee believes the STARR program in New York State offers one model for job training. This model includes internships, job placement, and support services. This includes mental health and substance abuse services.
- In summary, improved needs, risk and readiness evaluations, quick access to gender specific service packages, job training and job placement, support services, including MI/SA, improving probation officers assessments tools, and expanding community-based probation will improve the success rate by reducing recidivism, reducing new arrests, improving employment rates, and improving family connections.