

Office of Performance Evaluations

News Release: Increasing Efficiencies in Idaho's Parole Process

February 24, 2010

(BOISE) Today the Legislature's independent, non-partisan evaluation office released its report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on increasing efficiencies in Idaho's parole process. The report concludes that delays in parole release continue to rise. In 2004, nearly 40 percent of offenders were released on time; in 2008, it was just 17 percent.

The report found the strongest predictor of an offender being released after a tentative parole date (the earliest release date set by the parole commission, provided the offender fulfills all requirements) was the timing of his or her rehabilitative programming. Those offenders who began programming after a parole hearing were significantly more likely to have a delay in their release. During a period of less than three years (between January 1, 2007 and September 14, 2009), the state spent nearly \$7 million for incarcerating offenders beyond their tentative parole date.

The successful movement of offenders through the parole process is essential to slowing growth in the prison system, preparing offenders for reentry into the community, and most importantly, maintaining public safety. For the parole process to operate effectively, several critical elements need to be in place and operating well, particularly coordination between the Department of Correction (IDOC) and the Commission of Pardons and Parole, as well as the cooperation of offenders in the timely completion of their mandated rehabilitative programming.

The report highlights the critical role played by the commission in Idaho's criminal justice system. The commission makes difficult decisions about when public safety and justice are served by releasing offenders back into the community and determining the conditions of their release. A conclusion of the report is that public interest is best served to the extent that the commission has sufficient procedures, resources, and coordination with other criminal justice agencies, particularly IDOC, to make fully informed and timely decisions. Undue delays within the parole decision-making process not only have implications for the efficient administration of justice, but also have a direct impact on state taxpayers by housing offenders in expensive prison beds longer than is needed.

This report makes recommendations for streamlining the joint processes of IDOC and the commission by focusing on improvements in training, communication, policies, and data management. This report also recommends that the Office of the Governor work closely with the executive director of the commission to look into its operations and work toward addressing issues raised by its employees. In the course of their interviews with commission staff and management to learn about the parole process, the legislative evaluators found that 40 percent of staff were concerned about the overall working environment of the commission.

The legislative evaluators conducted their analyses within the statutory framework of Idaho's Unified Sentencing Act, which requires a fixed incarceration time that must be served by the offender for every felony sentence, and in recognition of full discretion given to parole commissioners under Idaho law for making decisions on whether to grant parole.

The report contains formal responses from the Governor, the Commission, and the Department of Correction.

Performance audits or evaluations are an essential function of legislative oversight to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently and in accordance with Idaho law. At the end of 2009 legislative session, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee unanimously voted to direct the non-partisan Office of Performance Evaluations (OPE) to conduct this study. The eight-member committee is equally divided between the two political parties and the two chambers of the Legislature. Senator Elliot Werk and Representative Clifford Bayer co-chair the committee.