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Program Evaluation of the Federal Reentry Court in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

*Report on program effectiveness in service receipt, supervision revocation and recidivism for
the first 265 reentry court participants*

November 2018

Prepared for:

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Introduction

This report describes the latest evaluation of the Supervision to Aid Reentry (STAR) program (hereafter referred to as Reentry Court). The success of the Reentry Court is assessed by comparing the first 265 Reentry Court participants to a group of similarly situated individuals under supervised release. Comparisons between the two groups are analyzed in services offered or received, sanctions imposed, employment status, supervision revocation and new arrests in the 18 months following prison release.

Evaluation Research Methods

Sample Construction

The outcome evaluation employed a quasi-experimental research design that compared the first 265 Reentry Court participants to a matched sample of individuals under the regular terms of supervised release. Descriptive information was first collected on each of the Reentry Court participants including gender, age at release, date of release and risk prediction index (RPI) score. This set of four characteristics was used to select a similarly situated comparison group.

Considering that there is a relatively small pool of individuals who return to Philadelphia from federal prison, it was not possible to match participants to comparison group individuals using a more detailed set of characteristics. Additionally, due to a limited number of eligible comparison group individuals, it was necessary to construct ranges for both age and date of release. For age at time of release, the following categories were constructed: under twenty five years old, twenty five to thirty four years, thirty five to forty four years and forty five years and over. A six month range was used for date of release (such as April to September 2015 or October 2015 to March 2016).

Sets of characteristics were then compiled for each participant. For example, one participant had the following set of characteristics: male, aged twenty five to thirty four at time of release, and released between April and September 2015 with an RPI of six. This set of characteristics was assigned matching group number one. Any other participant with that same set of characteristics was then also assigned matching group number one. A list was sent to the Probation Office with the matching group numbers and the corresponding sets of characteristics. The Probation Office generated a list of all individuals currently under federal supervision in Philadelphia who met each of the sets of characteristics.

Not counting the Reentry Court participant(s) on each list, the remaining individuals' names were numbered starting with one. A random number generator in Microsoft Excel was used to generate a random number and select a comparison group individual from that list. For example, on a characteristics list with one Reentry Court participant and six eligible comparison group individuals, the eligible comparison group individuals were first numbered between one and six. The random number generator was used to identify a random number between one and six. If the generated number was a four, the individual assigned number four on the list was selected as a comparison group individual. For characteristics lists with more than two Reentry Court participants, two random numbers were generated in order to select two comparison group individuals. In some circumstances, there was only one eligible comparison group individual on the list so that individual was automatically selected.

Unfortunately, there were also seventeen cases in which no eligible comparison group individuals were on a list (the list only included the Reentry Court participant's name). In these cases, the release date parameters were extended until an eligible comparison group individual could be identified.

Data Collection

Data were collected for this report with the full support of the Federal Probation Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and the Reentry Court workgroup. The Probation Office provided the researcher with access to Reentry Court participants' and comparison group individuals' case files. Relevant sections of the case files included presentence investigation reports, administrative memorandums, and chronological reports compiled by each research subject's probation officer. The researcher developed a data collection instrument to be filled out using the records kept in each subject's case file. Data collection sheets did not include research subjects' names; rather, subjects were assigned a confidential identification number. The data collection instrument collected the following information about each subject:

- date of birth
- gender
- risk prediction index (RPI) score
- the original offense(s)
- probation receive date
- an end of follow-up date (18 months after the probation receive date)
- the date started in the Reentry Court program
- any dates spent in a halfway house post-release
- graduation date (if applicable)
- supervision revocation date (if applicable)
- date for program withdrawal (if applicable)
- employment status at end of eighteen month follow up date
- dates the following services were offered and/or received: job training, job placement, housing, drug or alcohol treatment, education, mental health services, healthcare, mentoring, legal assistance, or other services
- dates the following sanctions were imposed and the dates the related violations were detected: verbal reprimand, warning letter / written reprimand, increased drug testing, curfew, home detention, community service, administrative hearing, restricted travel, increased reporting, confinement
- new arrest charges and the date of arrest (if any)

For each subject, data were collected for a set period of time. The study period included the time between the individual's release and the eighteen months following their release. This study period was consistent regardless of whether an individual graduated from the Reentry Court

program, withdrew from the Reentry Court program or was returned to prison due to a new arrest or supervision revocation. Ensuring that the length of time under investigation was the same for each individual subject was crucial. If one participant had been in the program for ten months and another participant had only been in the program for two months, the ten month participant would have had more opportunities to receive services, receive sanctions and commit new offenses. Using a consistent length of time is also crucial for comparing the Reentry Court and comparison groups.

For the most recent updates of the evaluation on participant numbers 200 to 265, data were not collected on services and sanctions. Limitations of the researcher's time and resources prohibited the collection of these more detailed and time-consuming measures for this recent rounds of data collection. All analyses presented below on services and sanctions pertain only to the first 200 Reentry Court participants instead of the full sample of 265 participants.

Data Analysis

All data from the data collection instruments were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. An initial analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the Reentry Court group matched the comparison group on key characteristics related to the likelihood of recidivism. As shown in Table I below, the comparison group closely matches the Reentry Court group in terms of age and RPI. Although it would have been ideal to select comparison group members that also matched Reentry Court participants in terms of the type of offense for which they were originally sentenced and the length of incarceration sentence they most recently served, the relatively small pool of eligible comparison group members prevented such matching. A higher percentage of Reentry Court participants had a weapons and narcotics original offense and a higher percentage of the comparison group participants had a narcotics offense as their original offense.

Table I. Characteristics of Reentry Court Participants and Comparison Group

| Characteristics | Reentry Court (N=265) | Comparison Group (N=265) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Age (mean, SD) | 35.68 (8.33) | 35.86 (8.57) |
| Risk Prediction Index (mean, SD) | 5.62 (1.28) | 5.60 (1.25) |
| Original Offense Type (percent) | | |
| Weapons | 23.8 | 19.2 |
| Narcotics | 27.5 | 36.6 |
| Weapons and narcotics | 11.7 | 7.2 |
| Financial or fraud | 12.8 | 14.7 |
| Robbery / carjacking | 22.3 | 17.0 |
| Other | 1.9 | 5.3 |

Evaluation Findings

Bivariate Analyses

Bivariate analyses were used to investigate differences in service receipt, sanction imposition, supervision revocation, future employment and recidivism between Reentry Court participants and the comparison group in the eighteen month study period. This section will also report bivariate analyses on the relationship between graduation from the Reentry Court program and recidivism.

As shown in Table II below , both the Reentry Court participants and the comparison group individuals received a variety of social services, including employment assistance, housing assistance, substance abuse treatment, education, mental and physical healthcare, mentoring, legal services, and parenting services. An impressive 96 percent of Reentry Court participants and 68.5 percent of the comparison group received at least one service during the study period.

Table II. Services Received

| Type of Service | Reentry Court (N=200) | Comparison Group (N=200) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Employment Assistance ** | 83% | 62% |
| Housing ** | 11.5% | 0.5% |
| Substance Abuse Treatment * | 22% | 32.5% |
| Education ** | 36% | 10.5% |
| Mental Healthcare | 18.5% | 17.5% |
| Healthcare ** | 12.5% | 3% |
| Mentoring ** | 7% | 1% |
| Legal Services ** | 39.5% | 1% |
| At least one service received ** | 96% | 68.5% |

* p<.05, ** p<.01

Chi-square tests of independence were used to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between reentry court participation and receipt of services. Services marked with an asterisk indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the number of Reentry Court participants and comparison group individuals who received a service. Reentry Court participants were significantly more likely to receive employment assistance, housing services, education, healthcare assistance, mentoring and legal services. Individuals in the comparison group were significantly more likely to receive substance abuse treatment.¹

As shown in Table III below, both the Reentry Court participants and the comparison group individuals received a variety of sanctions. In both groups, a majority of individuals received at least one type of sanction during the study period. It is also important to point out that although it is included in this table for ease of reporting results, the Reentry Court workgroup does not view community service as a sanction or a punishment. Rather, requiring community service is used

¹ Beginning with the 2015 evaluation, data was also collected on whether the individual received cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Twenty-nine out of the 64 reentry court participants (45 percent) received CBT compared to four out of the 64 individuals in the comparison group (six percent).

Table III. Sanctions Imposed

| Type of Sanction | Reentry Court (N=200) | Comparison Group (N=200) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Verbal Reprimand | 62.5% | 59% |
| Warning Letter | 2% | 3.5% |
| Increased Drug Testing | 13% | 10.5% |
| Curfew * | 2.5% | 0% |
| Home Detention | 9.5% | 8.5% |
| Community Service ** | 15.5% | 3% |
| Administrative Hearing | 5% | 9.5% |
| Restricted Travel | 0.5% | 3% |
| Increased Reporting | 1% | 3% |
| Confinement | 22.5% | 15.5% |
| At least one sanction imposed | 71.5% | 63.5% |

* p<.05, ** p<.01

when participants are struggling to find employment. Community service is believed to occupy participants' discretionary time and encourage them to value hard work and generosity.

Chi-square tests of independence were used to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between Reentry Court participation and the imposition of sanctions. Results indicate that Reentry Court participants were significantly more likely to be sanctioned with a curfew restriction and to be asked to participate in community service.

Table IV below highlights differences between Reentry Court participants and the comparison group for several outcomes of interest, including supervision revocation, recidivism (measured by a new arrest) and employment status at the end of the eighteen month follow-up period. While nearly 13 percent of the comparison group had their supervision revoked during the eighteen month study period, only 5.3 percent of Reentry Court program participants had their supervision revoked. A chi-square test of independence indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between program participation and likelihood of probation revocation.

Nearly 28 percent of the comparison group was arrested for a new offense during the study period compared to only 25.3 percent of the Reentry Court participants. Similarly, 10.6 percent of the comparison group was arrested for a new violent offense compared to only 7.5 percent of the Reentry Court participants. While notable differences, these differences in new arrests did not reach statistical significance. Results revealed a statistically significant difference for employment status at the end of the follow up period, with an impressive 70.7 percent of Reentry Court participants employed at the end of the follow up period. This was significantly more than the comparison group, in which only 51.2 percent were employed at the end of the study period. The Reentry Court program thus appears to be significantly related to the likelihood of future employment for participants.

Table IV. Supervision Revocation, Recidivism and Employment

| Outcome | Reentry Court (N=265) | Comparison Group (N=265) |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Supervision revocation during 18 months ** | 5.3% | 12.8% |
| New arrest during 18 months | 25.3% | 27.9% |
| New violent arrest during 18 months | 7.5% | 10.6% |
| Employed at end of 18 months ** | 70.7% | 51.2% |

* p<.05, ** p<.01

Table V displays the relationship between graduation from the Reentry Court program and the likelihood of a new arrest among Reentry Court participants. Among the 265 Reentry Court participants, more than half (147 people) graduated within the eighteen month study period. Only 8.2 percent of graduates had a new arrest during the study period, while 46.6 percent of non-graduates had a new arrest. Similarly, only 2.0 percent of graduates had a new violent arrest at some point during the study period, but 14.4 percent of non-graduates had a new violent arrest. Chi-square tests of independence indicate that these are statistically significant relationships.

Table V. Reentry Court Graduation and Recidivism

| | Graduates (N=147) | Non-Graduates (N=118) |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| New arrest during 18 months ** | 8.2% | 46.6% |
| New violent arrest during 18 months ** | 2.0% | 14.4% |

* p<.05, ** p<.01

The association between Reentry Court program graduation and the reduced likelihood of a new arrest is also confirmed when comparing Reentry Court graduates to individuals in the comparison group. As shown in Table VI, only 8.2 percent of Reentry Court graduates were arrested for a new offense, but nearly 28 percent of the comparison group was arrested for a new offense during the study period. While over 10 percent of the comparison group were arrested for a new violent offense, only two percent of Reentry Court graduates were arrested for a new violent offense. Chi-square test of independence indicated that these are statistically significant associations.

Table VI. Reentry Court Graduates and Comparison Group Recidivism

| | Reentry Court Graduates (N=147) | Comparison Group (N=265) |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| New arrest during 18 months ** | 8.2% | 27.9% |
| New violent arrest during 18 months ** | 2.0% | 10.6% |

* p<.05, ** p<.01

In sum, according to the bivariate analyses, Reentry Court program participants were significantly more likely to receive employment, housing, education, healthcare, mentoring and legal services. Reentry Court participants were also more likely to participate in community service activities. Although no significant differences were found for new arrests, Reentry Court participants were statistically less likely to have their supervision revoked and much more likely to

be employed at the end of the eighteen month study period. Additionally, Reentry Court graduates were found to be particularly successful and were less likely than non-graduates and comparison group individuals to have a new arrest.

Multivariate Analyses

While bivariate analyses are able to assess the statistical relationship between Reentry Court participation and a particular variable of interest, such as service receipt or recidivism, multivariate analyses can measure the relationship between Reentry Court participation and an outcome of interest while holding constant other variables that may also be associated with that outcome. In other words, multivariate analyses can isolate the unique effect of Reentry Court participation on recidivism or supervision revocation.

Logistic regression was used to identify variables that predict the commission of a new arrest as well as the commission of a new arrest for a violent crime. Table VII below summarizes the results of these analyses for the 265 Reentry Court participants and 265 comparison group individuals. After controlling for subjects’ ages and RPI scores, participation in the Reentry Court has no significant effect on the likelihood of a new arrest. Each one year increase in age decreases

Table VII. Logistic Regression Models Predicting New Arrests and New Violent Arrests (N=530)

| Predictor Variables | Effect on the Odds of a New Arrest | Effect on the Odds of a New Violent Arrest |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Reentry Court participation | -- | -- |
| Age ** | ↓ 3% | ↓ 6% |
| RPI score ** | ↑ 27% | -- |
| Nagelkerke R ² | .05 | .05 |
| Model x ² | 18.34** | 11.96** |

Note: Only significant findings are displayed.

* p<.05, ** p<.01

the odds of a new arrest by three percent and each one unit increase in RPI score increases the odds of a new arrest by 27 percent after controlling for all other variables in the model. Age is the only variable to significantly predict the likelihood of a new violent arrest. The odds of a new violent arrest decline by six percent for each one year increase in age.

Logistic regression was also used to predict the odds of supervision revocation, as summarized in Table VIII below. This analysis confirms that the Reentry Court has an independent effect on reducing the likelihood of supervision revocation. Participation in the Reentry Court program decreases the odds of supervision revocation by an impressive 64 percent, after controlling for age and RPI score.

Table VIII. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Supervision Revocation (N=530)

| Predictor Variables | Effect on the Odds of Supervision Revocation |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Reentry Court participation ** | ↓ 64% |
| Age | -- |
| RPI score ** | ↑ 53% |
| Nagelkerke R ² | .10 |
| Model χ^2 | 23.41** |

Note: Only significant findings are displayed.

* p<.05, ** p<.01

Lastly, logistic regression predicted the odds of being employed at the 18 month follow-up point, as shown in Table IX below. Even after controlling for individuals' ages and RPI scores, Reentry Court participation increased the odds of being employed by 133 percent.

Table IX. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Employment Status (N=523)

| Predictor Variables | Effect on the Odds of Employment |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Reentry Court participation ** | ↑ 133% |
| Age | -- |
| RPI score * | ↓ 14% |
| Nagelkerke R ² | .07 |
| Model χ^2 | 25.91** |

Note: Only significant findings are displayed.

* p<.05, ** p<.01

Overall, the multivariate analyses reveal that Reentry Court participation does not have a unique effect on the likelihood of a new arrest or a new violent arrest, but that participation is significantly related to a reduction in the likelihood of supervision revocation and an increase in the likelihood of employment.

Conclusions

This outcome evaluation has documented several positive effects of the Reentry Court program for the first 265 program participants. Reentry Court participants have impressive access to a variety of social services, with 96 percent of participants having received at least one service. There was a statistically significant difference between Reentry Court participants and the comparison group individuals in terms of receiving employment services, housing assistance, education, healthcare assistance, mentoring and legal services.

Reentry Court participation also appears to yield positive employment outcomes. While only half of the comparison group were employed at the end of the eighteen month study period, over 70 percent of Reentry Court participants were employed. The multivariate analyses revealed that Reentry Court participation is associated with a 133 percent increase in the odds of employment, even after controlling for individuals' ages and RPI scores.

Although neither bivariate nor multivariate analyses indicated a reduction in the likelihood of arrest for Reentry Court participants in the current study period, it is important to consider the possibility that the Reentry Court program may influence recidivism, but in a time period not sufficiently captured by this study. Many Reentry Court participants face serious obstacles in their first few years home and may continue to struggle with avoiding criminal activity. The services and social support available via Reentry Court may help them with some of these challenges, but such changes take time. Future research, using a longer study period, may reveal some of these long-term effects of program participation.

Perhaps the most valuable accomplishment of the Reentry Court is the significant reduction in supervision revocation as a result of program participation. The Reentry Court is associated with a 64 percent reduction in supervision revocation, even after controlling for other factors known to influence revocation. The additional supervision provided by the Reentry Court program allows

participants to receive sanctions for their behaviors in the community with minimal risk to public safety as opposed to being sent back to prison. Considering the exorbitant costs associated with incarceration, overcrowded facilities as well as research documenting the criminogenic effects of incarceration and the collateral consequences of mass incarceration on families and communities, the Reentry Court's reduction in supervision revocation should be seen as an extremely valuable contribution to the criminal justice system as well as the wider society.

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