

2001 Conference Summary

CORRECTING OUR PRIORITIES

A conference presented on October 29, 2001

by

**Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPS)
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency (MCCD)
Michigan Collaborative for Juvenile Justice Reform (MCJJR)**

GOALS AND STRATEGIES:

Summary of Proposals from Agenda Building Workshops

Problems

Highly punitive attitudes held by much of the public, politicians' fears of looking soft on crime, a lack of accurate information, and sensationalized media stories have led to the following problems:

1. Massive growth of the prison system, vast spending for the incarceration of adults and juveniles, and gross underfunding of prevention and treatment programs;
2. A widely held assumption that treatment, education and other rehabilitative programs are lenient and ineffectual;
3. Rigid "zero tolerance" policies that result in disproportionate sanctions and harsh long-term consequences, such as mandatory drug sentences, automatic school expulsions, waivers of juvenile offenders into the adult criminal justice system, and probation and parole revocation in lieu of treatment for substance abuse relapse;
4. Failure to assemble and analyze data, and to tie funding to outcomes;
5. Lack of comprehensive planning and insufficient coordination across systems (e.g., mental health, juvenile justice, education, child welfare), among local agencies, and between local and state agencies result in the inadequate assessment of needs and delivery of services in lieu of incarceration;
6. Incarceration has become a primary societal response to a wide range of underlying problems, such as substance abuse, mental illness, poor parenting and inadequate public schools.

Goals

1. Protect public through effective intervention.
2. Collect, analyze and publish comprehensive, accurate data.

3. Adequately fund high quality treatment services, including community-based residential programs.
4. Develop a comprehensive state health care policy that effectively utilizes available resources, such as tobacco settlement dollars and federal grants.
5. Tie funding to outcomes for all forms of prevention and treatment programs, including county jail reimbursement, community corrections and residential treatment centers, in-prison programs, and alternatives to incarceration for probationers and parolees.
6. Use local dollars to leverage state and federal resources whenever possible.
7. Target prevention programs toward at-risk youth in junior high.
8. Enhance community corrections by targeting technical probation and parole violators.
9. Eliminate mandatory sentences that limit judicial discretion to tailor appropriate individualized sanctions.
10. Place all sentencing under legislatively approved guidelines, including drug sentences and those imposed after probation is revoked.
11. Prohibit consecutive sentencing based solely on the fact that one of multiple offenses involves drugs.
12. Prohibit lifetime probation.
13. Establish mechanisms for diverting substance abusers and the mentally ill from the criminal justice system into treatment whenever this will adequately protect the public.
14. Develop legislative parole guidelines that:
 - Complement, not duplicate, sentencing guidelines;
 - Require parole if guidelines criteria are met;
 - Add positive points for community support.
15. Increase the availability of in-prison educational, vocational and treatment programs; coordinate successful completion with parole decisionmaking and re-entry services
16. Ensure adequate and accessible re-entry services for juveniles and adults, including housing, education and skills training, employment, and assistance in obtaining identification, medication, and government benefits.
17. Prohibit imprisonment of “technical” probation and parole violators until progressive sanctions, including substance abuse treatment, have been tried.
18. Free resources by taking short-term steps that will decrease the prison population without threatening public safety, such as:
 - Direct parole board to release people who score high on parole guidelines, absent substantial and compelling reasons not already considered in the guidelines score;
 - Apply parole guidelines to parolable lifers who are within the board’s jurisdiction;
 - Prohibit parole denial for failure to complete programs if MDOC did not make the program reasonably available;
 - Release prisoners approved for parole within 30 days of board decision;
 - Contact sentencing courts for permission to grant disciplinary credits to habitual offenders who would thereby become parole eligible;

- Prohibit re-incarceration of technical parole violators for more than 12 months unless warranted by misconduct history after parole revocation.

Strategies

1. Identify stakeholders (including legislators, county commissioners, judges, law enforcement, medical and legal professionals, educators, service providers, families of clients/prisoners, victims, civic and religious organizations).
2. Build coalitions, both traditional and innovative.
3. Frame the debate.
 - Reframe zero tolerance; advocate nurturing and guidance instead of wholly punitive environments;
 - Frame issues to reach all stakeholders.
4. Support swift and predictable graduated sanctions.
5. Educate the public and policymakers:
 - Disseminate accurate information about substance abuse, mental illness, and the consequences of abuse, neglect, and domestic violence;
 - a. Destigmatize,
 - b. Emphasize importance of early identification and treatment,
 - c. Explain how treatment works;
 - Emphasize relative cost-effectiveness of treatment vs. incarceration;
 - Emphasize the connection between in-prison programs, re-entry services for parolees, and public safety - discharging prisoners on their maximums means release into community without supervision;
 - Utilize sympathetic case examples: put a human face on adult prisoners, juvenile offenders, substance abusers, mentally ill;
 - Maximize success stories.
6. Emphasize the value of local control and how it relates to funding.
7. Develop a network that can respond effectively to legislative proposals, press articles, and other events that present an opportunity to effect change.
8. Involve family members of clients/prisoners in legislative advocacy.
9. Utilize media:
 - Meet with editorial boards;
 - Write op ed columns;
 - Write letters to editor.

10. Utilize existing structures to reach community groups:

- Speak at group meetings, classes, conferences;
- Supply material for group newsletters.