

January 2000

Evaluation Plan for the Offender Accountability Act

INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Washington Legislature adopted Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5421. The bill modifies the way adult criminals under the jurisdiction of the state are supervised in the community. The new legislation is commonly referred to as the Offender Accountability Act (OAA).

The legislation directs the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to carry out an evaluation of the OAA and submit a research design by January 1, 2000. This document describes the overall approach the Institute will take for this evaluation, with the understanding that the specific research models will only be able to be identified as the OAA is actually implemented by the Department of Corrections (DOC). If substantial modifications are needed during the multi-year evaluation, the Institute will revise this document and re-submit it to the appropriate legislative committees.

The key policy and program elements of the OAA can be summarized in the following categories. Under the OAA the state will:

- **Establish community custody ranges.** The legislation directs the Sentencing Guidelines Commission to develop and present to the Legislature ranges of community custody for different offenses. The ranges will apply to those offenders placed on community custody after first serving a prison sentence.
- **Focus resources on higher-risk offenders.** The OAA directs DOC to concentrate its non-prison-based resources on higher-risk offenders. Using formal risk-assessment tools, and taking into consideration the harm done, the relationship with victims and victim input, as well as place safety, DOC will deploy resources—such as community corrections officers, funds for drug treatment, sex offender treatment, and employment counseling programs—to those offenders who pose the greatest risk of re-offending while in the community.
- **Hold offenders accountable.** The bill allows DOC to establish and modify an offender's community custody conditions. The bill also expands DOC's authority to sanction violators without returning to court. These graduated sanctions may include daily reporting, electronic monitoring, work crews, jail time, or other intermediate sanctions. Further, county clerks are authorized to assume the collection of the legal financial obligations of offenders.
- **Establish community partnerships and a community-oriented approach to offender supervision.** The Department intends to implement certain elements of the OAA with a "community-oriented" approach to offender management. Under this approach, at least some DOC community corrections officers will work with local police, community leaders, community groups—both public and private—crime victims, and businesses in geographically concentrated areas where community risk is the highest.

- **Evaluate the act's cost-effectiveness.** The legislation directs the Institute to evaluate the effect of the OAA on recidivism and other specific outcomes. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to provide the Legislature and executive agencies with "bottom line" information on the OAA and its implementation. That is, do the key elements of the OAA achieve the desired outcomes, and do they do so cost-beneficially?