Probation and parole are forms of supervision that allow defendants and convicted offenders to live in the community without compromising public safety. State parole agents and county probation officers monitor these individuals’ progress through required rehabilitative programs and make sure the offenders remain crime free.

The average annual cost of community supervision is less than a tenth of the cost of incarceration, making it a valuable public safety tool for some cases.

The parole board decides who is released from state prisons and how they will be supervised in the community. It also sets guidelines for probation and parole supervision, and audits supervision at the county level – where county probation offices oversee 86 percent of offenders in the community.

- The parole board granted parole for 59 percent of the 20,508 cases it considered for parole or re-parole in 2016/17.
- State parole agents supervise 41,932 offenders with an average active caseload of 54 offenders and an average annual cost per offender of $3,500.
- County probation officers supervise 243,767 offenders with an average active caseload of 113 and an average annual cost per offender of $1,100.¹
- By comparison the average annual cost for a year of incarceration in state prison is $42,293 and the average annual cost of incarceration in a county jail is $29,262.

Parole Board

The Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole is an independent administrative board. Its nine members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate. The board totals about 1,300 employees, including hearing officers, state parole agents, and staffing for the Office of the Victim Advocate and the Sexual Offenders Assessment Board.

The board has the power to parole state prison inmates after they have served their minimum sentences. Before it decides to grant or deny parole, staff prepare a parole file, investigate the circumstances of the offense, and facilitate victim input. If the board grants parole, PBPP works with the Department of Corrections to prepare the inmate to be released into parole supervision in the community. Each parolee must have an approved home plan and pre-parole drug testing. Some offenders are sent to community corrections centers operated by DOC to begin transitioning back to the community until they have an approved home plan.

If an offender is re-committed for violating the conditions of their parole, the board is responsible for deciding if and when they can be re-paroled, and whether the time spent on parole before the violation will count towards completion of their sentence. Guidelines for parole violations are laid out in statute and vary from a short stay in a parole violator center (for minor technical violations) to recommitment to a state prison (for more serious and/or repeated violations). In 2016/17, the average length of stay for a parole violator who returned to DOC custody was 7 months.

¹As of 2014; caseload size and average cost varies by county, statewide average calculated by LBFC for FY2014/15.
Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole Funding

The Board of Probation and Parole is primarily funded by three General Fund appropriations: general government operations, county grant-in-aid, and the sexual offenders assessment board. These appropriations are augmented by monthly supervision fees paid by offenders on probation and parole.

Of the three General Fund appropriations, the largest is for general government operations, or GGO, which provides for state parole supervision, the parole board, administrative functions, and overhead. Supervision fees augment appropriations to pay for state and county supervision respectively, depending on where they were collected.

Eighty-five percent of all PBPP expenditures pay for field supervision at the state level and in grants to support county supervision. The sections that follow look closer at state and county community supervision, the many forms they take, and the different funding approaches.

State Parole

When a state prison inmate is released before their maximum sentence date, they still have to serve the remainder of their sentence up to the maximum date – but they do it in the community on parole.

Releasing offenders on parole doesn’t just save the state money by reducing the use of costly prison beds, it improves public safety by allowing for a smoother transition focused on preventing recidivism. Paroled offenders are required to follow a supervision plan customized to their risks and needs to help them reintegrate into the community. For example, a plan might require the offender to participate in substance abuse treatment and education, or it may require the offender to get a job, pay back restitution, or make other community contributions.

Parole agents don’t just catch offenders if they fail to meet requirements; they help offenders get into the services they need by working with community resources and social service providers with which the board contracts. In contrast,
inmates who serve their entire sentence in prison, known as maxing out, may be released back to the community with fewer resources and no supervision.

A 2013 recidivism analysis by the Department of Corrections found paroled Pennsylvania inmates, compared to those who maxed out, were less likely to be rearrested within 3 years (47.1% compared to 62.0%) or re-incarcerated in a state prison (excluding technical parole violations, 19.4% compared to 20.4%). For this reason, judges, sometimes, add a sentence of probation to follow incarceration to ensure an offender who has served their maximum sentence will be supervised and supported for a transition period in the community.

State parole agents supervise many different types of cases. Most offenders supervised by parole agents in the community are state-sentenced offenders who have been released on parole (76 percent of the 42,000 offender population), but parole agents also supervise certain county cases, as well as individuals from other states who live in Pennsylvania through the Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision.

County cases make up 17 percent of the state parole caseload. These cases include probation supervision for counties that do not have probation offices (Mercer and Venango counties), and cases specially assigned by the courts.

Shown in figure 2, state parole supervision is funded by the General Fund appropriation to the PA Board of Probation and Parole for general government operations, and is augmented by state and interstate supervision fees. Supervision fees are monthly charges paid by parolees to support the cost of their supervision, although the fee may be reduced or waived if an offender is unable to pay.

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2The total re-incarceration rate including technical parole violations is 50.5%; 61.5% of those were for technical parole violations, meaning the rules of parole were broken (such as entering a liquor establishment) but no crime was committed.
Cost Drivers

The primary cost driver for probation and parole is personnel. For state parole field supervision, personnel covers 88 percent of all spending. This is not surprising given its largely mobile workforce in the community. In 2016/17, the board worked to implement new work models and technology designed to make parole agents less reliant on physical office space and paper files. These changes corresponded with a decrease in operational and fixed asset expenditures for PBPP in 2016/17. At the same time, the board worked to keep the complement up to maintain a low caseload in line with national guidelines for effective supervision, by hiring 113 new parole agents. In total the filled complement has increased by a third over the past decade, with 9 out of 10 additional positions being parole agents. This increase has allowed the average active caseload size to decrease. The current active caseload is 54 offenders per agent, which is in line with recommended standards of 50:1 for medium and high risk offenders.

Despite hiring more agents and annual personnel expense increases, the cost of parole supervision is still cheaper than other sentencing alternatives. Compared to the cost of one year in an SCI, the average annual cost per offender is about 12 times cheaper: $3,500 versus $42,000.

County Probation

County probation departments supervise individuals who are out of jail on bail while they await trial, participants in diversion programs, sentenced to probation or county intermediate punishment, or have been released from county jails on parole. Some officers are assigned special caseloads in coordination with a treatment court; others supervise offenders on electronic monitoring or house arrest.

Across the commonwealth, 65 county probation departments supervise more than 240,000 offenders in the community. Mercer and Venango counties do not have adult probation departments and are under the jurisdiction of state parole agents.

County probation offices are not under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, but PBPP provides oversight, technical assistance, and grants. PBPP annually audits the probation departments to ensure compliance with the American Correctional Association standards for adult probation and parole. A county must maintain 90 percent compliance with the standards to be eligible to receive state grant-in-aid funding.

County Probation Funding

Counties rely on state funds for 30 percent of their annual budgets, but there are wide variations in how much they rely on different funding sources (LBFC analysis, 2015). State funding includes the grant-in-aid program and grants administered by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. The other 70 percent of funding comes from county funds, supervision fees paid by offenders (a portion of which passes through the state treasury), and other sources that include various fees and grants.

Grant-In-Aid: The grant-in-aid program, established in 1965, provides state funding for county probation departments. The funding pays for the costs of additional probation personnel necessary to carry out pre-sentence investigations (which, otherwise, courts may order PBPP to complete), and to improve the quality of probation services. The terms for distribution of grant-in-aid funds used today are set in Act 134 of 1986. The grant program is funded by a General Fund appropriation for the improvement of adult probation services, and is distributed to counties based on the number of eligible personnel employed by each department in excess of the number employed in the base year (1966) up to a cap amount (1,014 positions statewide).

Supervision Fees: County-supervised offenders are required to pay monthly fees to offset the cost of their supervision.
Interestingly, state law requires the county to retain half of the amount collected to pay for probation services, and remit the balance to a state-treasury-maintained restricted receipt account for county probation supervision fees. Money in the restricted account is then returned to counties as an augmentation to the appropriation for grant-in-aid funding. Historically, the commonwealth has returned these fees to the originating counties on a dollar-for-dollar basis. In 2013, the average supervision fee for county offenders was $41 per month.

PBPP support for county probation departments (figure 3) includes grant-in-aid, the portion of supervision fees that pass through the state treasury, and training provided by the board.

![Figure 3. County Probation State Expenditures by Fund Source](image)

However, counties also receive grants administered by PCCD. One category of PCCD grants that affects probation departments is an annual General Fund appropriation for county intermediate punishment programs, or CIP ($18.2 million per year). Offenders sentenced to CIP comprise 7 percent of county probation caseloads. Grants awarded to counties often pay a portion of probation officer salaries.

The 2016 Justice Reinvestment Initiative work group recommended increasing funding for county probation and modernizing the funding mechanism based on the number of offenders and offender needs, rather than historical staffing levels.

**Other Functions within the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole**

The Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole works hand in hand with the Department of Corrections. In the interest of increased efficiency, the agencies share resources for certain functions, like information technology, research and statistics, records, business administration, internal affairs and investigation, audit and accreditation, and training academies.

PBPP also houses the Office of the Victim Advocate and the Sexual Offenders Assessment Board, which operate independently.

- The **Sexual Offenders Assessment Board** conducts assessments of certain convicted sex offenders, including juveniles convicted of sexually violent acts. Funded by an appropriation from the general fund and a portion of the appropriation to PBPP for general government operations, this board conducted 1,368 court-ordered assessments in 2014.
• The **Office of the Victim Advocate** collaborates with PBPP, the Department of Corrections, and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to provide services for victims of crime. OVA processed 54,950 victim registrations and notifications in 2016/17. The Office of the Victim Advocate is funded by a portion of the appropriation to PBPP for general government operations and by federal grants.

### Terms and Definitions

**Augmentation** – Fees or institutional billings collected by the commonwealth and used to supplement a specific appropriation. Augmentations can usually be spent for the purposes authorized for the appropriation they augment without an additional appropriation in the General Appropriation Act.

**County Intermediate Punishment** – A sentence that is less restrictive than incarceration but more restrictive than probation and incorporates specific programming requirements to address the cause of criminal behavior and reduce the risk of recidivism. Treatment courts are one form of intermediate punishment.

**Probation** – A sentence of community supervision ordered by the court. An individual may be sentenced to probation in lieu of incarceration, or for a period following incarceration.

**Parole** – Release from a correctional institution before the expiration of the maximum sentence, and the period of supervision in the community following a parole release.