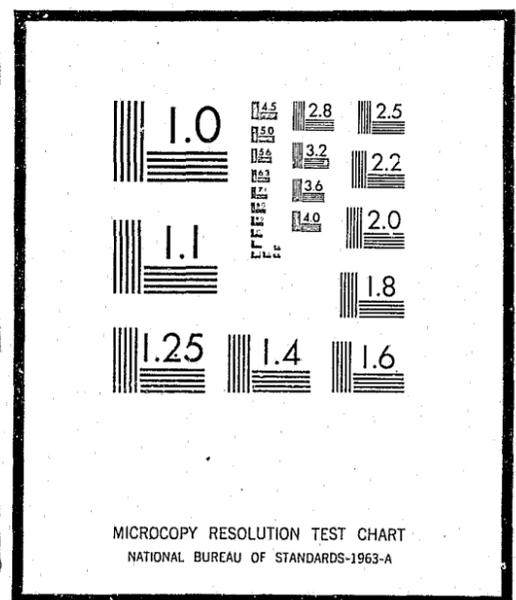


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Department of Corrections

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ABSCONDERS FROM THE
MISDEMEANANT WORK-RELEASE
PROGRAM: PRELIMINARY STUDY

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by
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ABSCONDERS FROM THE MISDEMEANANT WORK RELEASE PROGRAM:
A PRELIMINARY SURVEY, JANUARY 1968

Planning and Research Service
D. C. Department of Corrections

The District of Columbia work release program for misdemeanant offenders was established in April, 1967 under the provisions of Public Law 89-803. Judges of the U. S. District Court or the Court of General Sessions may either order or recommend a misdemeanant for participation in the program. Also, a misdemeanant serving a sentence in either the Jail or the Workhouse may apply for participation. However, because of limitations in the size of the staff of the program, internal applications for participation in the program have not been processed since August, 1967.

As of November 28, 1967, there were 294 misdemeanants who had participated in the program, as described in Table 1. The majority of these cases had been directly ordered into the program by the judges at the Court of General Sessions. As of the above date, there were 58, 19.7 percent, who were active and 236, or 80.3 percent, who were inactive. Of the 58 who were active, there were 39 who were employed, 14 who were available for employment, and five who had been temporarily suspended for infractions of the rules. Of the 236 who were inactive there were 124 who had participated in the program, who had completed their sentences,

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and who had been released from custody. There were 112 of the inactive group who had been revoked, including 36 who had absconded. Of the 36 absconders 20 had returned, or had been returned, and 16 were at liberty on the above date.

As noted above there were 236 participants who were in an inactive status and of these 124, 52.5 percent, had completed the program and 112, 47.5 percent, had been revoked.¹ Considered in this context this program may be said to have a "success" rate of roughly 50 percent. The 112 who had been revoked included the 26 who had absconded.

The focus of this report is upon the 36 who had absconded from the program. Of this group, 32 were Negro and four were White. The median age of the group was 29.4 years. Of the 36, 12 were married, seven were separated, 12 had never married, two were divorced, one was a widower, and information on the marital status of two was not available.

The offenses for which the 36 work release absconders had been sentenced are indicated at Table 2. A tabulation of the

1. As of December 31, 1967, the revocation rate was 30.1 percent. This figure does not include those persons who were removed from the program because they either refused to enter, or were prevented from doing so due to detainers or other holds.

offenses of all convicted misdemeanants in custody was made on April 30, 1967. Of the 760 there were 232, or 30.6 percent, who had been convicted of violations of the drug laws. As noted in the Table there was only one of the absconders from work release who had been convicted of this offense. Apart from this rather sizable discrepancy, the distribution of the offenses of the absconders was roughly comparable to that of the other misdemeanants.

Table 3 indicates the maximum sentence category of the 36 work release absconders. As will be noted from the Table, none of the absconders was serving a sentence of less than 30 days. At the time of the census of misdemeanants noted in the previous paragraph there were 107, or 14.1 percent of the total, who were in this sentence category. There are at least two possible explanations for this difference between the absconders and the total population. The first is that if an inmate has only a short sentence to serve he may not be involved in the misdemeanor work release program because of the period required to "process" the inmate which may include the period required to find employment. The second explanation is that the short-term misdemeanant may not be tempted to abscond since his release date is comparatively close at hand. Evidence in support of this latter explanation is offered in the fact that almost 70 percent of

the absconders are serving sentences of 180 days or more.

The foregoing may be related to the data of Table 4, that is, the period on work release before absconding. As indicated more than half of the actions occurred during the first 14 days that the inmate was on the program. Among those who absconded during the first five days there were four who absconded on the first day and before they were employed. Table 5 indicates the projected period until legal release of the absconders. When Tables 3, 4, and 5 are related to one another, it is obvious that most of those who abscond are serving comparatively long misdemeanor sentences, abscond shortly after entering on the program, and while their release date is some time away. This is a general pattern to which there are, of course, some exceptions.

The work release occupations of the 36 absconders are indicated as Table 6. The skilled group which includes painters, carpenters, chefs, and other artisans is considerably larger, 28.8 percent, than is usual among inmate populations. For example, a recent study of 400 releasees from the D. C. Reformatory for Men in 1965, found only 63, or 13.1 percent, who could be classified as skilled. This suggests the possibility that a high earning potential, that is usual among skilled workers, may be a factor in selection for work release. Also the problem of placement in employment for skilled workers is not so great as for the unskilled.

The weekly income on work release for the 36 absconders is indicated as Table 7. As noted above there were ten of the absconders who were employed in skilled occupations. All of these had weekly incomes of more than 90 dollars and ranging upward to 150 dollars. All money earned on work release is deposited with the staff. The staff makes disbursements to the inmate for such personal items as bus fares, lunches, and similar necessary expenses. The staff also makes disbursements for the support of dependents. Further, those employed on work release pay a maintenance fee to the Department of Corrections.

Table 8 describes the number of dependents of the 36 absconders. The source from which the data of this report was taken is a little hazy on this point. For example, some of the married absconders were reported as having no dependents while some of those who were unmarried reported one or more dependents. The 41.7 percent who were reported as having no dependents seems rather large in view of the fact that a major part of the rationale supporting the work release program is that it will provide the convicted misdemeanant with an opportunity to continue in the support of dependents. If almost half of those involved in the program have no dependents, then this would not appear to be a valid argument for the program. However, it could very well be that the

percentage of participants with one or more dependents is much larger than is indicated in Table 8, and that this data simply offers evidence to the point that those with no dependents are the ones who are most apt to abscond. This is a matter which merits further investigation.

As is indicated in Table 1, on November 28, 1967, of the 36 absconders, there were 20 who had returned and there were 16 at large. As is indicated in Table 9 the median length of the period of absence of those 20 who returned was four days. Eight of these returned of their own volition and 12 were returned by the police. of that 12, there were six who had been arrested as drunk or in connection with some other charge. As was indicated above, all of these had been removed from the work release program. Four were given additional sentences and another was sent to St. Elizabeth's Hospital for 60 days observation.

The length of the period absent of the 16 still at large on November 28, 1967, is noted in Table 10. The median length of the period of absence on that date was 78 days.

TABLE 1
D. C. Department of Corrections
Work Release Program for Misdemeanants, 28 November 1967

	Number	Percent
<u>Total Participation</u>	294	100.0
Inactive	236	80.3
Active	58	19.7
<u>Active</u>	58	100.0
Working	39	67.3
No Job	14	24.1
Suspended	5	8.6
<u>Inactive</u>	236	100.0
Released	124	52.5
Revoked, including absconders	112	47.5
<u>Absconded</u>	36	100.0
Returned	20	55.6
At Large	16	44.4

TABLE 2
 Offense, 36 Misdemeanant Work Release Absconders

Offense	Number	Percent
TOTAL ¹	48	100.0
Petty Larceny	16	33.3
Attempted Housebreaking	7	14.5
Simple Assault	5	10.4
Traffic Offenses	4	8.3
Destruction of Property	4	8.3
Carrying Deadly Weapon	3	6.2
All Other ²	9	18.7

1. The number of offenses is greater than the number of absconders because some had been sentenced for two offenses.

2. The "all other" category includes a variety of offenses such as contempt, false pretenses and violation of the Bail Reform Act. There was one who had been convicted of illegal possession of narcotic drugs.

TABLE 3
 Maximum Sentence, 36 Misdemeanant Work Release Absconders

Maximum Sentence, In Days	Number	Percent
TOTAL	36	100.0
30 - 59	4	11.1
60 - 89	2	5.5
90 - 119	1	2.7
120 - 149	4	11.1
150 - 179	----	----
180 - 269	15	41.7
270 - 359	2	5.5
1 year and over	8	22.2
Median	229 days	

TABLE 4
 Length of Period on Work Release Before Absconding
 36 Misdemeanant Work Release Absconders

Length of Period on Work Release, in Days	Number	Percent
TOTAL	36	100.0
Less than 5	12	33.3
5 - 9	4	11.1
10 - 14	3	8.3
15 - 19	2	5.5
20 - 24	4	11.1
25 - 29	2	5.5
30 - 59	5	13.9
60 - 89	3	8.3
More than 90	1	2.7
Median	13.3 Days	

TABLE 5
 Projected Period Until Release
 36 Misdemeanants Work Release Absconders

Projected Period Until Release, In Days	Number	Percent
TOTAL	36	100.0
Less than 30	4	11.1
30 - 59	2	5.5
60 - 89	3	8.3
90 - 119	2	5.5
120 - 149	6	16.6
150 - 179	7	19.4
180 and over	12	33.3
Median	154.2 Days	

TABLE 6
 Occupation on Work Release
 36 Misdemeanant Work Release Absconders

Work Release Occupation	Number	Percent
TOTAL	36	100.0
Unskilled, including construction laborers	12	33.3
Skilled, including building trade	10	28.8
Unskilled food services	4	11.2
Other services	6	16.6
None ¹	4	11.2

1. As noted in another section of this report, four misdemeanants absconded from work release before they were employed.

TABLE 7
 Weekly Income on Work Release
 36 Misdemeanant Work Release Absconders

Amount of Weekly Income in Dollars ¹	Number	Percent
TOTAL	36	100.0
Less than 50	1	2.8
50 - 64	10	28.0
65 - 89	8	22.4
90 and over	12	33.6
None Reported ²	4	11.2
Unknown	1	2.8
Median ³	\$79.00	

1. The amount tabulated is the gross weekly income before deductions.

2. As noted in another section of the report, four misdemeanants absconded from work release before they were employed.

3. The "unknown" and "not reported" cases were not included in the determination of the median.

TABLE 8
 Number of Dependents
 36 Misdemeanant Work Release Absconders

Number of Dependents	Number	Percent
TOTAL	36	100.0
None	15	41.7
1 and 2	9	25.0
3 and 4	6	16.6
More than 4	4	11.2
Unknown	2	5.5

TABLE 9
 Length of Period at Large
 Misdemeanant Work Release Returned Absconders

Length of Period at Large in Days	Number	Percent
TOTAL	20	100.0
1 or less	4	20.0
2 or 3	6	30.0
4 or 5	2	10.0
6 or 7	2	10.0
8 - 29	4	20.0
30 and over	2	10.0
Median	40 Days	

TABLE 10
 Length of Period at Large
 Misdemeanant Work Release Absconders at Large on 28, November, 1967

Length of Period at Large in Days	Number	Percent
TOTAL	16	100.0
Less than 30	3	18.7
30 - 59	2	12.5
60 - 89	5	31.3
More than 90	6	37.5
Median	78.0 Days	

END

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