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EVALUATION
OF THE FLORIDA COMMUNITY
CONTROL PROGRAM

Executive Summary

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THE FLORIDA COMMUNITY CONTROL PROGRAM

The Florida Community Control Program (FCCP) is an intensive supervision/house arrest program implemented by the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) in late 1983. It is designed to function as an alternative sanction for offenders who would otherwise receive state prison sentences. The major goals of the program are the reduction of prison crowding; and the provision of a safe, punishment-oriented community alternative to imprisonment.

The Florida Community Control Program has received national attention for a number of reasons. Most significantly, it represents the single largest intensive supervision prison diversion program in the nation. Over 60,000 offenders have been placed in Community Control since its inception in 1983. In addition, the degree of control exerted over participants is exceptionally high. Caseloads are very small, ranging between 20 and 25 offenders per supervising officer, and offenders sentenced to Community Control are often placed on house arrest and allowed to leave home only for necessities (employment, grocery shopping, etc.). The minimum expectation is that supervising officers will make 28 offender contacts each month. In addition to routine surveillance, officers perform drug and alcohol screening and encourage offenders to perform community service work, make restitution to victims, and pay the cost of supervision fees. Since late 1987, some offenders have been electronically monitored.

The Florida Department of Corrections contracted with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency in 1987 to conduct an evaluation of the FCCP. The research addresses three questions:

- **Does Florida's Community Control Program divert offenders from prison?**
- **What is the impact of Community Control on offender criminal behavior and correctional program costs?**
- **How has the implementation of Community Control affected Florida's regular probation program?**

IMPACT OF FCCP ON PRISON DIVERSION

Alternative sentencing programs designed to divert offenders from prison have demonstrated a marked tendency to impose additional sanctions on offenders who were not, in fact, prison bound. This phenomenon is typically referred to as "net-widening". Past experience has shown that the procedure for selecting offenders is critical to the success of any diversion effort that attempts to impact prison admissions. In Florida, criteria for sentencing offenders to community control were fully integrated into state sentencing guidelines implemented in 1983.

When estimating the impact of the FCCP on prison diversion, the research takes into account the influence of both the 1983 sentencing guidelines and the changing nature of Florida's offender population on sentencing practices. In 1987, approximately 54% of the offenders sentenced to FCCP would have received a prison term had the community control sentencing alternative not been available. The remaining 46% would most likely have been sentenced to jail or regular probation rather than prison. While the findings suggest that there is considerable net-widening in FCCP, it is net-widening which tends to divert offenders from jail rather than probation. Research estimates suggest that in a typical group of 100 FCCP offenders, 54 were diverted from prison, 32 from jail sentences and 14 from probation. The FCCP has been much more successful in diverting offenders from prison or jail than other programs, and this may be attributable to sentencing guidelines.

Although Florida prison admissions have increased dramatically over the last five years despite the implementation of community control sentencing, these increases can be attributed to: Florida's crime rate, guidelines which recommended prison sentences more frequently than past practice, a more serious offender profile, and a tendency to impose sentences which exceed guideline recommendations.

Despite these mitigating factors, it is clear that the majority of offenders placed in Community Control were diverted from prison and a significant additional percentage were diverted from jail. Had the community control program not been implemented, Florida's prison and jail crowding problems would have been significantly worse. In this sense, the FCCP has been an unqualified success.

IMPACT OF FCCP ON OFFENDER BEHAVIOR AND CORRECTIONAL COSTS

The research effort conducted to estimate the impact of Florida's Community Control Program (FCCP) on criminal behavior and correctional cost considered these questions.

- **How well does the FCCP control offender behavior relative to prison incarceration?**
- **What are the costs associated with the program's operation when net-widening is considered?**
- **What kind of offender responds best to the FCCP sanction?**

Post-sentence outcomes and service costs for offenders similar to FCCP participants, but sentenced to jail, probation or prison were examined to address these questions.

FCCP as a Prison Alternative

The research comparisons suggest that Florida's Community Control Program is effective with the population it was intended to serve - offenders who might otherwise be sentenced to prison. Similar offenders who spent nearly nine months in prison (on average) have a higher new offense rate (24.3%) during an 18 month follow-up than their counterparts in the community control program (19.7%). They also received longer prison sentences for new offenses. In terms of controlling criminal behavior, FCCP appears to be an effective alternative to prison for many offenders.

The Cost of Community Control

When the cost of both initial sentences and those received for new offenses or technical violations during an 18 month follow-up period are considered, diverting one offender from prison to FCCP saves \$5,509. On the other hand, the net-widening diversion of an offender from probation to FCCP costs \$2,881. The diversion of offenders from jail to FCCP is also net-widening, but it appears to yield a small per case cost savings (\$552). These cost estimates are conservative in that they do not include the collection of restitution payments or supervision fees from offenders on community supervision.

The estimated cost impact of net-widening and prison diversion for a hypothetical group of 100 community control participants is presented in the table below.

**ESTIMATED COST IMPACT OF THE FCCP ADJUSTED
FOR NET-WIDENING**

Diverted From:	100 Cases	Average Cost	Total Cost
Regular Probation	14	+\$2,881	+\$ 40,334
Jail/Probation	32	-\$ 552	-\$ 17,664
Prison	54	-\$5,506	-\$297,324
TOTAL	100		-\$274,654

Under the assumption that in every cohort of 100 community control cases there are 54 real prison diversions, 14 diversions from probation, and 32 from jail, the projected net cost savings are \$274,654, or around \$2,746 per case. Given annual program admissions of more than 10,000 offenders in recent years, Florida's community control initiative has substantially reduced state correctional expenditures.

Due to the relatively high rate at which offenders are diverted from jail to community control, a significant amount of the cost savings attributable to community control may accrue to county jail operations rather than to the state-operated correctional system.

Overall, the impact of the community control program on prison crowding, offender behavior, and state correctional costs must be seen as positive. With an estimated prison diversion rate of 54%, community control is cost effective despite the combined effect of both net-widening and the sanctions imposed on its participants for technical violations. Furthermore, the new offense rate for community control offenders is lower than for similar offenders sentenced to prison.

Which Offenders are the Best Candidates for the FCCP Sanction?

As an a sentencing alternative to prison, the FCCP appears to exert the most favorable impact on drug offenders. Approximately 27% of the offenders sentenced to prison for drug offenses committed a new offense during the 18 month follow-up, but only 11% of the FCCP offenders. The finding is important because Florida sentences an unusually large number of drug offenders to prison.

IMPACT OF FCCP ON REGULAR PROBATION

The question addressed here is whether the increase in probation caseloads attributable to the 1983 implementation of Florida's community control initiative has led to an increase in probation revocations. Given available evidence, definite conclusions are difficult to draw.

An assessment of offenders entering probation suggests that, from a criminal risk standpoint, the profile of the offender population is unchanged. Therefore, the increase in probation caseloads between 1983 and 1987 represents a real net loss in the amount of control officers can exert over their clients. It is not clear, however, that caseload increases have contributed significantly to the increase in probation revocations witnessed during this same period. There are a number of competing explanations for the sharp growth in revocations including an increase in the arrest rate for drug offenses during a period when the percentage of drug offenders in the probation caseload has grown dramatically. The revocation phenomenon is likely to have multiple causes, and the contribution of caseload size cannot be isolated.

The consequences of increased probation revocations are less in doubt. At least half of the revoked probationers were admitted to prison, and this has contributed to Florida's prison crowding problem. It appears, however, that the use of community control as a revocation sanction, which was begun in 1987, shows some potential for reducing these prison admissions. A decline in per capita collection of probation fees may be another consequence of increased revocation.