

News for Immediate Release

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Corrections Releases Annual SIP Performance Report

Statistics Show Sentencing Alternative Reduces Crime, But Underutilized

Harrisburg – Corrections Secretary John Wetzel today released the agency's 2013 performance report on the State Intermediate Punishment (SIP) Program.

"The use of State Intermediate Punishment goes hand-in-hand with the prison reforms begun in 2008 and continued in 2012," Wetzel said. "Studies have shown that individuals' criminal behavior is driven by their addictions to various substances and that treatment, not a lengthy incarceration, is the key to reducing future criminal acts by these individuals once released from prison."

"We now have the metrics that definitively shows that this program reduces the future criminality of participants. As we continue to look at ways to improve our corrections system, this type of evidence-based approach needs to be used more, not less. Bottom line, offenders who successfully complete this program are significantly less likely to commit another crime."

Despite having a lower recidivism rate and saving state taxpayers approximately \$61.8 million since the program's inception, Wetzel said the program appears to be underutilized, especially in many of Pennsylvania's larger counties.

"Of the estimated 4,347 offenders admitted to the Department of Corrections (DOC) who appeared SIP eligible from October 2010 through September 2012, approximately 1,178 (27 percent) were court referred for an SIP evaluation," Wetzel said. "We are seeing a slight decline in SIP sentences."

The SIP program, which went into effect in 2005, was created in response to concerns about the link between substance abuse and crime and the finding that many persons commit crimes while under the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs.

SIP was designed as a sentencing alternative, with the goal of enhancing public safety through a period of incarceration while at the same time reducing recidivism through intensive substance abuse treatment.

The SIP program, which lasts 24 months, consists of four phases:

1) Confinement in a state correctional institution for a period of no less than seven months. During this first phase, at least four months are spent in a

- therapeutic community (TC) treatment program, which is an intensive inpatient alcohol and other drug treatment program.
- 2) A minimum of two months in a community-based TC treatment program.
- 3) A minimum of six months of outpatient addiction treatment. During this period, the participant may be housed in a community corrections center or placed in an approved transitional residence.
- 4) Reintegration into the community, under DOC supervision, for the balance of the 24 months of the program.

In 2012, the law was amended to include several changes to the eligibility criteria. First, SIP eligibility was expanded to include offenders subject to certain mandatory minimum sentences. Second, the prosecutor is now able to waive the eligibility requirements for SIP, contingent upon victim notification/input. Third, the law removes the defendant's ability to refuse participation in SIP. Fourth, a 10-year look-back for consideration of prior SIP-ineligible offenses is enacted. And finally, the list of ineligible SIP offenses are slightly refined, including to explicitly exclude all Megan's Law registration offenses.

Highlights of the report include:

- Of those 1,178 offenders who have been court referred for an SIP evaluation from October 2010 through September 2012, 78 percent were found eligible by the DOC.
- From program inception in May 2005 through September 2012, 3,156 offenders were sentenced to the SIP program. SIP sentences have been slightly declining in recent months.
- As of Sept. 30, 2012, 729 offenders were in the SIP program: 239 in Phase 1 (prison), 88 in Phase 2 (community-based treatment), 264 in Phase 3 (outpatient treatment), and 138 in Phase 4 (community supervision). The number of SIP participants has dropped by about 120 since last year.
- As of Sept. 30, 2012, there were 1,743 graduates from the SIP program since its inception.
- Between program inception and September 2012, 579 SIP participants were removed from the program, representing a program failure rate of 18 percent. This is in comparison to a program failure rate of 30 percent for non-SIP therapeutic community programs operated by the DOC.
- Overall recidivism rates are lower for SIP participants than for a comparable group of non-SIP offenders at six months (11.1 percent versus 24.6 percent), one year (22.7 percent versus 39.7 percent), and three years (46.2 percent versus 72.7 percent).

- The three-year rearrest rate for the SIP participants is significantly lower than for the comparison group, at 42.1 percent versus 49.1percent respectively. SIP participants are not under parole supervision.
- The state saves approximately \$35,456 per SIP participant. The 1,743 current SIP graduates have thus saved the state approximately \$61.8 million. This is a conservative estimate, as other costs are likely saved including the cost of parole supervision.

Admission criteria for the SIP program are:

- Step 1 Court Determines Eligibility by Statute and Sentencing Guidelines
 - Convicted of an offense motivated by the use of or addiction to alcohol and/or other drugs.
 - Not convicted of: 1) an offense involving a deadly weapon enhancement under the sentencing guidelines, 2) a personal injury crime (as defined under the Crime Victims Act) or an attempt, conspiracy, or threat to commit such crime, and 3) crimes involving incest, open lewdness, abuse of children, unlawful contact with minors, sexual exploitation of children or internet child pornography.
 - No history of present or past violent behavior.
 - Sentencing guideline a minimum sentence of at least 30 months in a state facility.

Step 2 - PA DOC Assessment

- Before sentencing, the court, upon motion of the district attorney and agreement of the defendant, commits the offender to the DOC for comprehensive assessment.
- DOC reviews criminal records for program eligibility, evaluates offender's treatment needs and determines amenability to treatment.

Step 3 - Sentence to SIP

- Within 60 days of commitment, the DOC provides a recommendation to the court, the defendant, the district attorney and the Commission on Sentencing.
- If the offender is recommended and all parties agree, the court sentences the offender for a period of 24 months to SIP.

To view the entire report, visit the DOC's website at www.cor.state.pa.us.

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