



OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT & BUDGET

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July 10, 2023

Mr. Wayne T. Salisbury Jr., Acting Director
Rhode Island Department of Corrections
40 Howard Avenue
Cranston, RI 02920

Dear Director Salisbury:

The Office of Internal Audit (OIA) has completed its audit of Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) Probation and Parole Unit. The purpose of the engagement was to evaluate business process efficiency and effectiveness and assess the collection and use of data by management to calculate performance metrics and execute evidence-based performance management. The audit was conducted in conformance with the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing and by the authority given to the unit as stated in accordance with Rhode Island General Laws (RIGL) § 35-7.1-1(a) – Establishment of office of internal audit. The recommendations included herein have been discussed with members of management, and we considered their comments in the preparation of this report.

RIGL § 35-7.1-10(d), entitled Annual and interim reports, states that, “Within twenty (20) calendar days following the date of the issuance of the management-response copy of the draft audit report, the head of the department, agency, public body, or private entity audited shall respond, in writing, to each recommendation made in the audit report.” Accordingly, management submitted its response to the audit findings and recommendations on July 5, 2023, and such response is included in this report. Pursuant to this statute, the OIA may follow up regarding recommendations included in this report within one year following the date of issuance.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the RIDOC staff for the cooperation and courtesy extended to the members of our team during this audit.

Respectfully yours,

Michael Sprague, CIA
Chief

cc— Internal Audit Advisory Group
Representative Marvin Abney, Chairman, House Committee on Finance
Senator Louis DiPalma, Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance
Steven Whitney, Senate Fiscal Advisor
Sharon Reynolds Ferland, House Fiscal Advisor

Audit Executive Summary

Why the Office of Internal Audit Did This Review

The Office of Internal Audit (OIA) conducted a performance audit of Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) Probation and Parole Unit (P&P). The purpose of this engagement is to evaluate business process efficiency and effectiveness, assess the collection and use of data by management to calculate performance metrics and execute evidenced-based performance management.

Background Information

In 1972, RIDOC was established by Rhode Island General Laws §42-56. The Department's role is both custodial and rehabilitative in nature. RIDOC's rehabilitative services include the reintegration of offenders into the community. Probation and Parole (P&P) utilizes core correctional practices, focusing on proactive and behavioral management, when supervising adult community residents who have been placed on probation or parole. Effectively monitoring and tracking outcomes specifically related to Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) positively impacts recidivism and the community.

To strengthen controls, the Office of Internal Audit recommends:

- Produce management and statistical report functions in its Case Management System (CMS).
- Develop policy surrounding the data collection for evidence-based practices to engage in reducing recidivism.
- Evaluate design of controls of electronic case management system.

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Introduction

The Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) Probation and Parole Unit (P&P) is the oversight unit which monitors individuals on probation and parole. The unit is responsible for both the enforcement of the terms and conditions of sentencing as well as the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. P&P's mission is to increase public safety by promoting positive change in offender behavior, successfully reintegrating offenders into society, and assisting victims of crime. P&P strives to reduce crime, victimization, and recidivism.

A research study published by Federal Probation Journal in December 2016 emphasized the importance of evidence-based practices (EBP) in community supervision to successfully reduce the rate of recidivism. EBP includes developing a set of measures and best available data to guide policy and practice decisions that improve outcomes for individuals under parole and probation supervision.¹

In November 2021, RIDOC implemented a new electronic case management system (CMS) which tracks data elements such as risk assessments, treatment plans, progress, and violations of the offenders. To assist probation agencies implementing effective automated case management systems, the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) developed functional standards and recommends these as national functional standards.²

Objective and Scope

The Office of Internal Audit (OIA) conducted a performance audit of RIDOC. The purpose of this engagement is to analyze data metrics used for evidence-based performance measures aimed at reducing recidivism. The OIA examined processes in place to collect information about the effectiveness of programs and evaluated challenges in gathering information of data elements necessary to calculate metrics. The scope of the audit includes the examination of data elements within CMS implemented in November 2021 through November 2022.

Methodology

As part of our audit, the OIA gained an understanding of RIDOC's operations and processes for data tracking and managing probation and parole cases. To address our audit objective, we performed the following:

- Interviewed management and staff.
- Reviewed other states' audit reports regarding probation and parole and RIDOC's advisory analysis report.
- Examined internal policies and procedures.

¹ Federal Probation Volume 80 Number 3 "Performance Measures in Community Corrections: Measuring Effective Supervision Practices with Existing Agency Data"

² Article titled "Functional Standards Development for Automated Case Management Systems for Probation"

- Reviewed the project management and implementation of the case management system.
- Developed flowcharts of processes for data management.
- Compared the data elements necessary for effective EBP management to the data elements collected in CMS.
- Coordinated with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) leadership to discuss performance metrics which would enhance reporting.

Recommendations and Management's Responses

Utilize CMS to Produce Management and Statistical Reporting Functions

The Functional Standards Development for Automated Case Management Systems for Probation recommends the following national functional standards for Management and Statistical Reporting:

A CMS must produce management information and statistical reports specific to cases and staff workload monitored by the probation organization, including but not limited to offender activities and behavior, compliance with court orders, resource management, staff activities, outcome measures, and financial activities. At minimum, these are the types of statistical functions performed by a CMS and the types of information required to manage and support organizational activities.

RIDOC's Planning and Research Unit is currently able to view reports and searches from CMS that were existing reports in the legacy software. These types of reports satisfy federal, state, and local statute requirements. However, additional reports and searches, such as tracking of EBP, were not built into the system and need to be requested from the vendor.

Backend data was requested from CMS to review and analyze the data elements collected and to ensure proper controls surrounding the quality of the data collected. However, upon receiving the request from the vendor, RIDOC did not have the ability to open and analyze the data because the agency does not have the type of server needed to access the database. As a result, RIDOC has not had the ability to analyze certain performance metrics since the implementation of the CMS in November 2021.

Performance management and statistical reporting assist agencies when measuring the progress made toward strategic goals. Adequate and continuous monitoring and reporting allow agencies to develop policies and procedures essential for achieving positive outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. Obtain appropriate license to review data.
2. Collaborate with CMS vendor to allow for data exports directly from the system.
3. Involve the State's information technology division when implementing a new software to

assist with information technology planning and strategic planning and monitoring.

Management's Response:

We would like to thank the Office of Internal Audit for their review of our Probation & Parole Unit (P&P) and its Case Management System (CMS). As a unified system, the Planning & Research Unit (P&R) at RIDOC is largely responsible for all data collection, presentation, and dissemination, including that of P&P. It should be noted that the data used in the day-to-day management of the P&P Unit and its staff is maintained by P&P Administration and any shortcomings of the database, CMS, or the broader data system do not impact the daily tasks of P&P officers including, but not limited to, supervision and case management. Notably, the system does include narrative information on offender activities and behavior, compliance, staff activities, and financial activities.

P&R is indeed able to view reports and searches from CMS that existed in the legacy software and help us respond to federal surveys of probation and parole. P&R is also able to see those who were granted early termination from probation in accordance with Rule 35(c) of the R.I. Superior Court Rules of Criminal Procedure. However, one shortcoming of note is the inability of P&R to run a report on current probationers/parolees, historically known as a "stock file." P&R and P&P should have a baseline, individual-level file that provides information on those under probation and/or parole supervision on any given day. For example, the following variables would be helpful as a baseline for the majority of the requests that RIDOC receives: ID#, Last Name, First Name, DOB, Sex, Race, Caseload, Supervision Type, Probation and/or Parole Start and End Dates, Number of Special Conditions per Offense, Supervising P&P Officer, Name, Charge Code, Charge Description, Nativity, Occupation, Education, Religion, Military History, and Address Info (City, State, & Zip).

Although RIDOC can request additional reports from the vendor, P&R would prefer to be provided with a regular database backup in order to create the reports themselves. When a report is created by any vendor, RIDOC is not necessarily privy to the methodology used by the vendor. A database backup would allow P&R access to the raw data to create SQL reports without the vendor's assistance. An added benefit would be a reduced cost to the state in terms of not being required to pay the vendor for the creation of additional reports.

Since the audit, DoIT has had a SQL server built to access all of the eSupervision data and representatives from DoIT that work with RIDOC have been granted access to monthly database backups via an Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud. DoIT must pull the data from this cloud and place it in the server manually, which can be difficult and time-consuming. There are over 1,900 data tables and DoIT and P&R are currently working together to determine what data tables are of interest, use, and/or importance. Therefore, our response as it pertains to OIA's recommendations, in order, is:

1. Obtain appropriate license to review data.
 - DoIT has had a SQL server built and both DoIT and P&R have access to be able to review all eSupervision data.
2. Collaborate with CMS vendor to allow for data export directly from the system.

- Although data will be imported into the new SQL server on a monthly basis, having a “stock” data export available in the eSupervision database, as outlined above, would be incredibly beneficial.
 - It should be noted that P&R requested various data exports from the vendor, dating back to before the “go live” date in November 2021, and continuing on at least a monthly basis until early 2022, when the vendor stopped replying entirely. P&R has copies of emails to DoIT and the vendor requesting at least 1 stock file (although multiple options were outlined) that date back to at least February 2021.
 - P&R is awaiting guidance from the vendor on which tables are of interest, use, and/or importance.
3. Involve the states information technology division when implementing a new software to assist with information technology planning and strategic planning and monitoring.
- It should be noted that DoIT was involved in this project from its inception but there were miscommunications with respect to the coding language(s) used by the parties and the ability to export information from eSupervision. P&R was given “root entity training” but configuring reports in Java was beyond the abilities of P&R and DoIT.

Responsible Party:

Planning & Research Unit, DoIT, and Probation & Parole Administrators with review by, and approval from, the Assistant Director of Administration, the Assistant Director of Rehabilitative Services, and/or the Director of RIDOC.

Anticipated Completion Date:

December 31, 2023

Adopt Evidence Based Practices Aimed to Reduce Recidivism

The P&P unit trains all Parole and Probation Officers to utilize Core Correctional Practices focusing on a proactive and behavioral management approach to interacting with offenders. EBPs are a core set of community supervision practices defined as effective at reducing recidivism. The Federal Probation Journal Volume 80 Number 3 “Performance Measures in Community Corrections: Measuring Effective Supervision Practices with Existing Agency Data” states:

Administrative databases are a source of data that can be used to determine progress towards successful implementation of evidence-based supervision. These data can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of an agency’s programs and policies. However, the functional utility of administrative data is very much contingent on the quality and

completeness of data collected by the agencies, and whether or not the agencies are using the data to construct meaningful measures that are both valid and reliable.

OIA obtained limited access to the CMS module and notes the software has the capability to track large amounts of data for each offender including risk assessments, treatment plans, caseload information, supervision status history, special requirements and conditions, demographics, etc. The OIA was unable to verify the data elements tracked and the related data quality due to software limitations.³ However, discussion with RIDOC revealed CMS is not being utilized to track EBP data metrics.

RIDOC has not developed an official policy to track EBP data elements. Research has shown that embedding EBP within routine community supervision practices has presented success in reducing recidivism and having positive outcomes. A concise list of meaningful EBP metrics should be developed which would allow the agency to effectively oversee operations. EBP should be monitored and assessed on a continuous basis to accurately track progresses and to achieve agency-specific strategic goals.

Recommendations:

4. Develop and execute policy surrounding the tracking of EBP data elements.
5. Evaluate the quality and completeness of the EBP data elements collected by CMS and work with vendor to create EBP reports.
6. Determine estimated cost and feasibility of implementing EBP-specific tracking software.

Management's Response:

The CMS tracks many of the metrics outlined by OIA, including demographic information, education level, risk level, current offense, revocations, number and type of special conditions given, and risk/needs assessment information. Other metrics, such as days on supervision, prior supervision (Y/N or number of previous supervisions), total contacts during supervision period could be calculated from the raw data.

Some of the metrics referenced in the Federal Probation Journal that RIDOC does not track are supervision level and information on reassessments (since RIDOC does not have the capacity to reassess after beginning supervision). Although RIDOC's caseloads are classified by offense rather than risk level, P&P incorporates the principles of risk reduction into their supervision practice through the use of assessment, core correctional practices, and the utilization of low-risk caseloads. Further discussion between P&R and P&P on what would constitute a "successful completion of supervision" is necessary. Minor tweaks in the system could allow measurement of things like negative drug tests or employment during supervision as binary variables which would be easier to

³ See *Utilize CMS to Produce Management and Statistical Reporting Functions Finding*

use for analysis. RIDOC does have many Policies and SOPs pertaining to P&P, however, none are specific to the tracking of EBP elements. Therefore, our response as it pertains to OIA's recommendations, in order, is:

1. Develop and execute policy surrounding the tracking of EBP data elements.
 - A Standardized Operating Procedure (SOP) or RIDOC Policy can be created to standardize the tracking and collection of EPB data elements as outlined by OIA as well as P&P's Strategic Plan and the recommendations from the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI).
2. Evaluate the quality and completeness of the EBP data elements collected by CMS and work with vendor to create EBP reports.
 - New reporting can be built in to the second phase of the contract with the vendor, but many of the metrics referenced by OIA are already being recorded in the new system.
3. Determine estimated cost and feasibility of implementing EBP-specific tracking software.
 - Reports from the new eSupervision system or tracking metrics via the SQL database, rather than a new software, will likely be sufficient to track many EBP data elements. There are some additional variables that will need to be added to eSupervision.

Responsible Party:

Probation & Parole Administrators with review by, and approval from, the Policy & Auding Unit at RIDOC, the Assistant Director of Administration, the Assistant Director of Rehabilitative Services, and/or the Director of RIDOC. Planning & Research can provide support establishing metrics and tracking procedures. Probation & Parole Administrators in conjunction with DoIT can work to execute additional contracts with the vendor with input from Planning & Research.

Anticipated Completion Date:

June 30, 2024