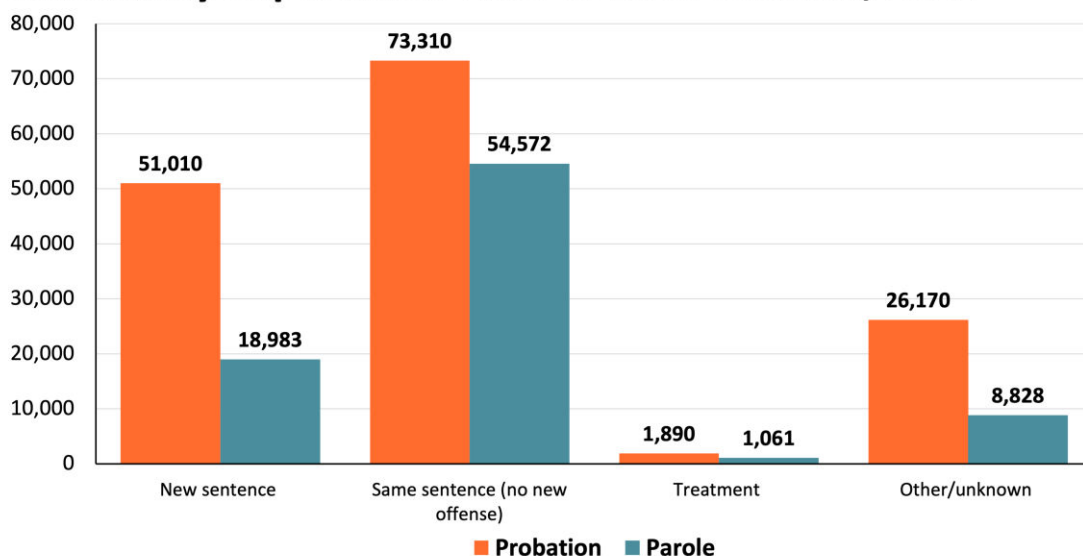# Strategies for Improving Community Supervision Programs

Community supervision refers to several programs that allow criminal offenders to remain in their communities rather than being incarcerated, albeit under varying degrees of oversight by an officer assigned to their case. The two main forms of community supervision are probation and parole. Nearly 3.7 million adults are on community supervision programs like probation and parole—that's nearly twice the number of people incarcerated in jail or prison.

Disproportionate responses to technical violations of parole and probation are contributing to mass incarceration.

- Individuals under community supervision are typically subject to conditions including regular check-ins, drug testing, curfews, electronic monitoring, and the payment of fines and fees. In some cases, failure to comply with these conditions can result in a revocation of community supervision and a return to jail or prison.
- Examples of technical violations include missing appointments with the supervising officer, breaking curfews, falling behind on legal financial obligations, and breaching other conditions of supervision.
- According to data from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 230,000 people on community supervision spent time in jail or prison in 2021, mostly due to technical violations rather than new criminal offenses.

Community Supervision Exits to Incarceration, 2021

	Probation	Parole
New sentence	51,010	18,983
Same sentence (no new offense)	73,310	54,572
Treatment	1,890	1,061
Other/unknown	26,170	8,828

Source: U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Probation and Parole in the United States, 2021; Prison Policy Initiative, Punishment Beyond Prisons

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Strategies for Improving Community Supervision Programs

Lawmakers should consider implementing the following measures to improve their state's community supervision programs and foster a more effective system that supports individuals in the transition to a productive and law-abiding life.

1. **Shortening Maximum Sentence Lengths:** Maximum sentence lengths vary widely across states. By reducing these sentences, individuals can be granted more timely opportunities for successful reintegration into society. This approach acknowledges that excessively long periods of supervision can hinder rather than support the transition back to a productive life.

2. **Streamlining Conditions:** The number of conditions placed on individuals under community supervision should be carefully evaluated and reduced when appropriate. An individualized focus on essential conditions that directly relate to protecting public safety and fostering successful rehabilitation can be more effective and manageable for both individuals and supervising officers.

3. **Shifting Focus towards Reintegration:** Instead of primarily emphasizing punishment and surveillance, community supervision should be oriented toward fostering successful reintegration. By offering comprehensive reentry programs, access to education and employment opportunities, and tailored support services, individuals under supervision can more effectively rebuild their lives and become productive members of society.

4. **Targeted Application of Drug Testing:** Drug testing protocols within community supervision should be re-evaluated to ensure they are appropriately targeted and aligned with each individual's unique risks and needs. By tailoring drug testing requirements to individuals with substance abuse histories or high-risk profiles, supervising agencies can allocate resources more effectively and avoid unnecessary incarceration.

5. **Elimination of Supervision Fees:** Imposing financial burdens on individuals working to reintegrate into society is counterproductive. States should consider eliminating supervision fees and other monetary costs associated with community supervision. By removing financial barriers, individuals can focus on their rehabilitation efforts and allocate resources towards crucial needs such as housing, education, and supporting their families.

6. **Leveraging Technology:** Embracing technological innovation can significantly improve probation and parole outcomes. As a recent Reason Foundation report found, implementing simple measures like sending text-message reminders for upcoming supervision appointments can enhance compliance and reduce the risk of technical violations. Additionally, electronic monitoring systems and virtual check-ins can streamline the supervision process while enhancing public safety.

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