Maryland Department of
Public Safety and Correctional Services:
Parole and Probation Agent Workload Study

Report on Agent and Officer Focus Groups

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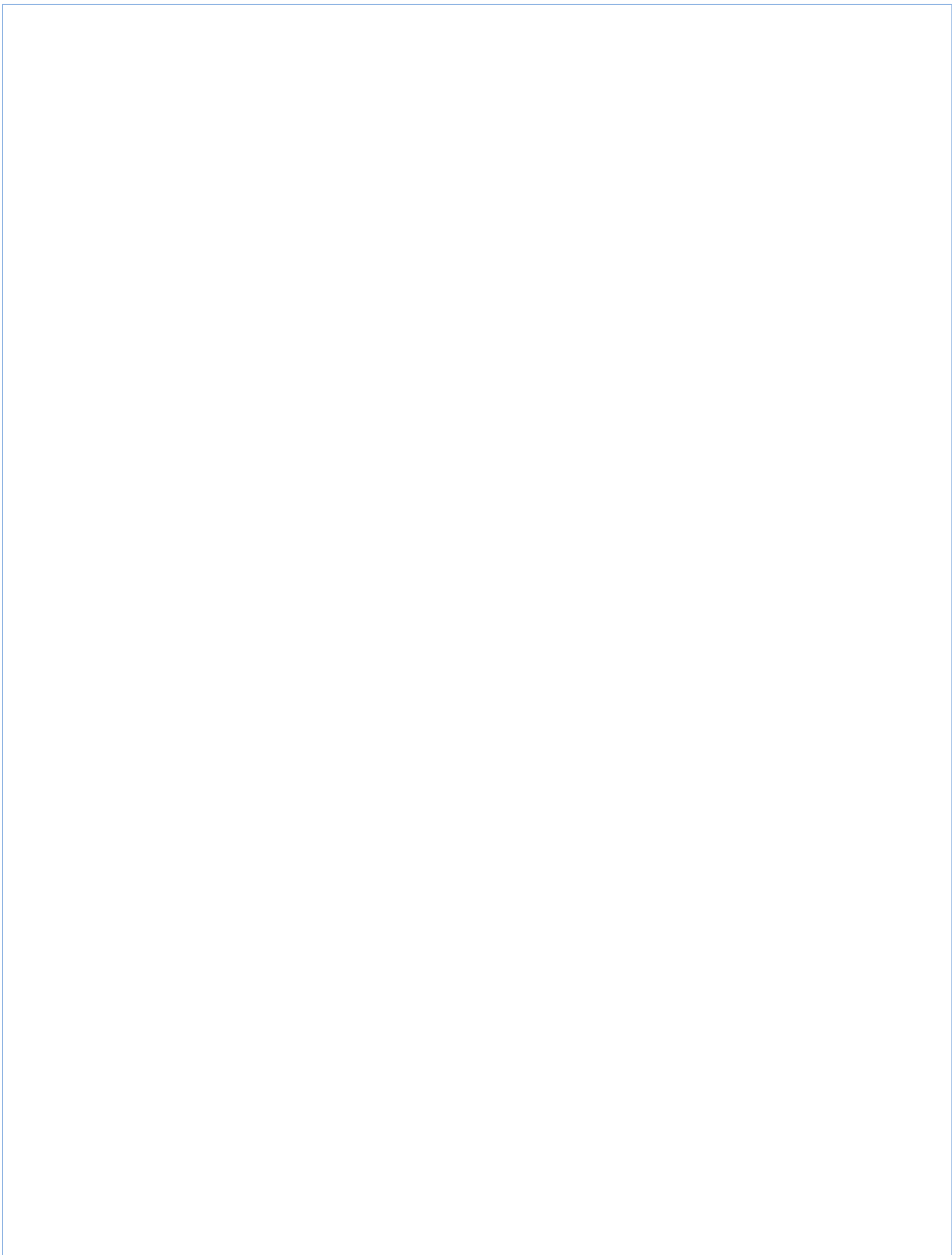AND **Nonprofit**
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Report on Agent and Officer Focus Groups

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Maryland General Assembly required the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to conduct a workload study of the department's parole and probation agents. The Office of Community Supervision Support (CSS), in turn, contracted with the Schaefer Center for Public Policy at the University of Baltimore's College of Public Affairs (Schaefer Center) to conduct a study that included a review of the literature relating to parole and probation agent staffing, an analysis of agents' workload including a time study of agents, an analysis of the supervision caseload, and the collection of comparative caseload data from other states. From the research, the Schaefer Center team was charged with producing staffing recommendations, average caseload counts, and recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of parole and probation supervision.

The primary focus of the research is agents who directly supervise offenders on parole and probation. As part of the research, the team also produced an analysis of how Court Liaison Unit (CLU) agents, Liaison Waiver (LAW) agents, and Warrant Apprehension Unit (WAU) officers spend their work time, and solicited input into recommendations for improving the effectiveness of their work.

To fulfill its charge, the research team employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative strategies listed below.
- A comprehensive literature review of all known English language articles on community supervision and staffing.
- A four-week time study with 114 parole/probation agents and Warrant Apprehension Officers. Participants recorded 25,743 hours of work activity. Time observations were reported for work relating to 6,388 offenders.
- A caseload analysis that included all offenders under supervision on September 29, 2014.
- A review of agent case notes for a 12-month period for 215 randomly selected offenders.
- A national survey of state parole and probation agencies.

To gain a good understanding about the work of the agents and variation in the work across regions, the research team conducted fifteen focus groups with 137 participants including: 71 supervising agents, 42 supervisors, 5 agents and 1 supervisor from the Court Liaison Unit, 9 agents and 1 supervisor from the Liaison Waiver Unit, and 9 Warrant Apprehension Officers.

The findings from the focus groups are presented in this supplemental report.

Presented below are key findings from the focus groups. Additional findings and analyses are presented in the body of the report.

ISSUES RELATED TO EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

In the focus groups agents and supervisors identified a number of barriers to effectiveness; made recommendations about how to improve supervision tools; identified organizational challenges; and noted areas where improved coordination could lead to improved effectiveness. The body of this report includes a detailed discussion of the findings and recommendations from the focus groups, the most significant findings are presented in this executive summary.

OCMS
OCMS is the most significant impediment to agent effectiveness. Instead of supporting agents in their work, OCMS is a significant source of frustration for agents and a major time waster. The CMS system is difficult and time consuming for agents to navigate. Key pieces of information that should be available on the casefile header are not. Agents report that OCMS cannot produce an accurate list of their cases, it does not provide alerts about actions that need to be taken on cases, and it often does not have current information on an offender. From the perspective of agents, OCMS has not lived up to its promise and has made their work more difficult. Most agents report having to maintain a shadow system in Excel or in a calendar to keep track of their caseload and the tasks they are required to perform.

Courts
On average, agents spend 14% of their time in court. In the jurisdictions that do not have dedicated court liaisons, the haphazard scheduling of agents' court appearances is a major barrier to effectiveness. Agents report having to regularly make multiple trips to court in a week, waiting hours for their cases to be called, or having their cases spread out in the docket. Better coordination of agent appearances, similar to how police officers' cases are scheduled, would increase the time agents have available for direct supervision tasks.

Another barrier to effectiveness is the disconnect between some judges and CS about judges' support for the zero-tolerance approach to supervision of VPI cases. Many agents report that judges will not sanction offenders for minor infractions. But the VPI model requires agents to "violate" offenders for any infraction. The violation process and subsequent court appearance is time consuming. If agents are not supported by judges, the sanctions are ineffective and do not represent a good use of time. Agents feel that it would be more effective, from a supervision and time perspective, if they had more discretion over the sanctions for minor infractions by VPI offenders.

Case Plans
Case plans were uniformly regarded as being worthless to agents. Agents report that their case plans now are just a recitation of the parole or probation order and the mandatory supervision standards rather than an agent developed plan to address criminogenic factors. The agents feel that in its current configuration, the plan duplicates information found elsewhere in the case file.

Agents expressed a desire have the latitude to create meaningful case plans that allow them to focus on the specific criminogenic needs of the offender. Agents felt this type of case plan would be a more effective offender management tool than the current case plan.

Kiosks
There was mixed reaction regarding the usefulness of the Kiosk system depending upon the jurisdiction. Some felt Kiosks are useful, but many others found problems with their use. Many agents said Kiosks impede rather than facilitate their ability to supervise offenders. Some of the challenges include Kiosks that are in locations that offenders cannot access after-hours; agents do not receive alerts when offenders check in – they have to go to the offender file to read the case note generated by the Kiosk visit; agents do not get an automated list of missed appointments – it must be downloaded manually; and finally, agents perceive that there are limited enforcement options for offenders who do not report to Kiosk.

Urinalysis Testing
The greatest dissatisfaction regarding the urinalysis testing program concerned the shortage of tests in some jurisdictions, the unavailability of technicians to collect samples, and most importantly, the failure of positive results to hold up in court hearings. There was a great deal of frustration by agents with having to send samples to California for testing rather than having it done locally. Agents also report that offenders know that they are likely to be successful if they challenge the results in court.

Staffing for urinalysis collection is a major challenge in some offices that do not have a dedicated technician. Some offices also report a lack of male agents to supervise urinalysis collection from male offenders.

Agents report that the tests do not test for all of the "right" drugs (e.g. PCP, alcohol, opiates, and amphetamines).[1] Since the current urinalysis contract supports testing for most drugs, this may indicate an opportunity for additional training. Finally agents feel that because scheduled tests are easy to cheat on, offenders should be given random drug tests.

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[1] Interviews with CSS management confirm that under the current urinalysis vendor contract, standard urinalysis testing screens for benzodiazepines, cocaine, marijuana, opiates, and PCP. If needed, additional drug screens can be requested. Urinalysis is not the appropriate test for alcohol use.

Agents would like to have more access to rapid drug tests that can be administered in the office. They feel this gives them a better opportunity to confront and effectively sanction an offender immediately.

Electronic Devices

Agents and WAU officers would like to have access to offender OCMS records in the field. WAU officers think that having laptops for use in their cars, similar to police officers, would help them be more productive. Both groups felt that laptops and remote access would make them more productive in the field.

SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

Personal Safety

Safety and security is a concern for agents. Agents are asking for better protection on home visits. They expressed the desire to have a police officer with them on certain home visits, especially for visits to sexual or VPI offender homes. Agents also expressed concern about the reliability of their bulletproof vests and pepper spray. Many report that their devices are past their expiration date.

Overtime

A majority of agents participating in the focus groups report that they work uncompensated overtime to keep current on their work. When asked about the availability of overtime compensation, most agents said that overtime was not available or very difficult to get approved. WAU officers also report that overtime to cover surveillance is difficult to get approved unless an arrest is a *"sure thing"*. On a related note, WAU officers report that offenders know when officers are generally on the on the street and only come out after the officers are off duty.

From the focus groups it is clear that overtime is not handled uniformly across the state and that agents have differing understandings about the overtime policy.

Training

Agents and WAU officers are mandated to attend professional development training annually. Many in the focus groups felt that continued training was critical. However, there was dissatisfaction expressed by agents and supervisors with regard to training. Specifically, participants felt that the academy does not do a good job of training new agents. Additionally, many felt that those who lead the training at the academy are out of touch with what goes on in the offices, and their knowledge is out of date. Some agents complained about having to take the same course several times, but with no new information being provided. WAU officers did not feel they had much choice in the classes they took. Agents and officers alike expressed a desire for new training to help them do their jobs better. Agents were very enthusiastic about training they receive from federal agencies and outside experts.

Coordination and communication with and across offices and with partner organizations is key to the ability of an agent to do his or her job. In the focus groups, agents reported significant challenges with regard to communication, consistency in practice and expectations across offices, consistency in expectations across supervisors, and challenges getting the information they need from partner organizations. These challenges are documented in detail in the body of this report. Improved communication and coordination would go a long way to improve organizational effectiveness and staff morale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented below are highlights of the research team's recommendations relating to possible improvements to efficiency and effectiveness, supervision and support, and inter and intra-agency coordination. Additional findings and recommendations are contained in the body of the report.

EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Offender Case Management System (OCMS)
CSS leadership has created an OCMS users group and is working with this group to identify problems with OCMS and recommend modifications to the system. The users group is also developing instructional materials to address common concerns. The research team recommends that DPP leadership continue to work with the users group to address agents' concerns with the operation of OCMS.

There is limited funding available to support making changes to OCMS that would enhance the effectiveness and productivity of agents. The research team recommends that additional resources be devoted to improving the effectiveness of the OCMS.

Courts
DPP managers should attempt to work with the court systems in each jurisdiction to establish an effective schedule for agents who appear in court; for example, dedicating a specific day or time to hear DPP cases or grouping cases for a specific agent. When this is not possible, and the case volume is high enough, jurisdictions should consider employing a court liaison system. This may be a challenge in some jurisdictions where judges only want to hear from the agent of record. Once again, this may be an issue where DPP and the court systems can have dialogue about the impact of this requirement on DPP's ability to effectively supervise offenders.

The research team also recommends that DPP leadership and representatives from the court systems discuss the zero tolerance philosophy of supervision and come to an agreement about

how high risk offenders should be supervised and sanctioned. Zero tolerance cannot be effective without consistent and sure sanctioning from the judicial system.

Case Plans
Given the uniform concern about the amount of time required to develop case plans and their general lack of utility for agents, the research team recommends DPP assess the usefulness and effectiveness of the plans as they are currently configured. The team recommends DPP leadership consider allowing agents more latitude to develop case plans that address offender-specific criminogenic factors and issues.

Kiosks
The research team recommends that DPP gather input and feedback from a representative group of agents regarding their experiences with kiosks, and reassess their role and function to determine what changes can be made to justify their continued use.

Urinalysis Testing
The team recommends that DPP switch to in-state analysis of urine specimens and/or switch to instant tests that allow the agent to confront the offender immediately with a negative test result. The team also recommends that DPP reassess the agent's role and responsibility for urine testing and devise a more efficient means for coordination of the drug testing program with others at the agency tasked with this function.

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

Personal Safety Equipment
The team recommends that DPP inventory the safety equipment on a scheduled basis to ensure that the inventories meet standards and are available to all agents who need them. The team also recommends DPP review and possibly revise safety protocols and standards when agents are on home visits, particularly in the more violent-prone areas with more violent-prone offenders. If appropriate protocols are in place, DPP must determine if additional training is required.

Electronic Devices
Taking into consideration potential security issues and cost considerations, the research team recommends DPP assess the feasibility of providing WAU officers and agents in the field access to OCMS and other electronic databases that would facilitate their work capabilities.

Overtime
Given that CSS has confirmed that overtime is available to parole/probation agents and WAU officers when needed, the research team recommends that DPP leadership train supervisors and agents on the overtime policy. The overtime policy should be implemented consistently across the offices. Additionally, with regard to WAU officers, DPP should review the effectiveness of the current schedule and consider a pilot project with expanded overtime for off-hours surveillance.

Training

With regard to training, the research team recommends that DPP formalize more of the agent on-the-job (OJT) training that is relevant for use statewide. DPP should conduct a formal assessment of the adequacy of academy training to include a gap analysis between what is offered and what is needed. On a regular basis, DPP should assess course offerings to ensure that agents' training needs are addressed as the job demands change over time. DPP should consider developing programs at the office or regional level so agents can share "best practices" they have learned from experience. The focus group section of this report contains specific recommendations from agents and officers about the courses they think would be valuable.

INTER AND INTRA-AGENCY COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

Workflow and Communication Assessment

The research team recommends that DPP conduct a comprehensive formal assessment of the current Work Flow Patterns (WFP) and communications patterns (CPs) between agents and others with whom they work. DPP should then implement a plan to redesign where necessary, the WFPs and CPs that are crucial for agents to do their job. Where necessary, DPP should investigate revising policies and procedures to ensure that the WFPs are effective.

Use Court Liaison Agents and Liaison Waiver Agents to Improve Quality and Effectiveness

Court Liaison Agents represent the agent of record in court proceedings in which an offender is accused of violating the conditions of their probation. LAW agents do the same thing but for cases of offenders who violate the terms of their parole or mandatory release. In this role, CLU or LAW agents must review the case file including the probation or parole order, case notes, and pertinent documentation to prepare to represent the department in court. From their unique vantage point, they are able to identify problems with case file documentation, case notes, and the implementation of supervision standards. Often the CLU and LAW agents have to go back to the agent of record to request additional documentation or secure the documentation themselves. It would be very helpful from an organizational learning and quality improvement perspective if the problems CLU and LAW agents find with case files could be documented in a systematic manner so that DPP leadership could use the information to identify areas where additional training or policy clarification are needed. The research team strongly recommends that the quality control information collected through this process be used solely for organizational improvement and not to punish agents.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The research team conducted an extensive investigation into the work of CS agents and warrant apprehension officers. In its research, the research team reviewed the literature on parole/probation agent staffing, reviewed policy manuals, analyze caseload data, collected time study data, reviewed case notes, and surveyed other states. While the Schaefer Center's research process was extensive, it does have some limitations.

Many of the recommendations for improved efficiency come from the focus groups. As such they reflect the opinions and perceptions of those who participated in the groups. For the most part, problems identified through the focus groups were common across groups. DPP should take the recommendations generated from the focus groups as a starting point for any efforts to improve efficiency in the organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research team recommends that DPP consider conducting an organizational climate assessment with employees on a regular basis. This information will be useful for identifying organizational challenges and measuring the impact of changes in policy and procedures on employee morale and organizational effectiveness.

Now that the workload study has been completed once, the research team feels that the process can be streamlined enough that the workload study can be updated on a regular basis to assess the impact that changes in OCMS, policies, and procedures have on workload.

The team also recommends that DPP conduct caseload analysis on a regular basis to rebalance caseload and staffing as needed.

STUDY OVERVIEW

The Maryland General Assembly required the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to conduct a workload study of the department's parole and probation agents. The Office of Community Supervision Support (CSS), in turn, contracted with the Schaefer Center for Public Policy at the University of Baltimore's College of Public Affairs (Schaefer Center) to conduct the study. The Schaefer Center was charged with conducting a study that included a review of the literature relating to parole and probation agent staffing, an analysis of agents' workload including a time study of agents, an analysis of the supervision caseload, and the collection of comparative caseload data from other states. From the research, the team was charged with producing staffing recommendations, average caseload counts, and recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of parole and probation agents.

The primary focus of the research is agents who directly supervise offenders on parole and probation. As part of the research, the team also produced an analysis of how Court Liaison Unit (CLU) Agents, Liaison Waiver Unit (LAW) Agents, and Warrant Apprehension Unit (WAU) Officers spend their work time and solicited input into recommendations for improving the effectiveness of their work.

This report discusses the findings from the focus groups with parole and probation agents, warrant apprehension officers, and liaison waiver agents. Based upon the analysis of the focus group data, the research team developed a series of recommendations for improving the operation of the parole and probation supervision function.

It is important to note that parole and probation agents faced significant organizational change from October 2012 to present. Prior to October 2012, local parole and probation offices reported to the Director of the Division of Parole and Probation. From October 2012 through April 2015, the offices were organized into three regions. Each office reported to a regional director who was also responsible for overseeing the correctional facilities in the region. In April 2015, the regional reporting framework was replaced with the functional reporting framework and the local parole and probation now report to the Director of the Division of Parole and Probation and the correctional facilities report to the Commission of the Division of Correction. The study was conducted under the regional management model and the report was released just before the organization switched to the functional management model.[2]

For the purposes of this report DPP-2012 is used to refer to the organization as it existed prior to the 2012 reorganization, CS is used to refer to the organization during the period from October 1 2012 – April 17, 2015, and DPP is used to refer the organization in its current structure. The recommendations in this report are directed to the current management recognizing that the new organizational structure may have addressed

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[2] The three organizational structures are discussed in more detail in Appendix A.

Research Strategies

To fulfill its charge, the research team employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative research strategies which are summarized in Table 1 below. Each of the research strategies is described in detail in the Parole and Probation Agent Workload Study Final Report

Table 1: Overview of Data Collection Strategies		
Data Collection Strategy	**Key Elements**	**How Utilized in the Study**
Literature Review	• Comprehensive review of all relevant agency studies and journal articles	• Informed study design • Provided context for the research • Results presented in literature review
Time Study	• 4 week period • 114 agents; 6 warrant apprehension officers participated • Data recorded relating to 6,388 offenders • 25,743 hours of work time recorded	• Results used to compute average number of hours per year required to supervise offenders • Input for the staffing model • Used to compute case weights for caseload analysis
Caseload Analysis	• Analysis of Offender Case Management System (OCMS) extract of all active offender records	• Used to compute the number of active cases per agent • Used to compute average caseload size by region, jurisdiction, and geographic isolation
Case note review	• 215 electronic offender records reviewed	• Review of agent supervision activities
Focus Groups	• 15 focus groups • 137 participants • 6 parole/probation agent groups • 6 parole/probation agent supervisor groups • 1 Court Liaison Unit agent group • 1 Liaison Waiver Unit agent group • 1 Warrant Apprehension Officer group	• Context of agent/officer work environment • Barriers to effectiveness • Recommendations for increased efficiency and effectiveness

Table 1: Overview of Data Collection Strategies		
Data Collection Strategy	**Key Elements**	**How Utilized in the Study**
Nationwide Survey of Parole/Probation Agencies	• 40 states participated in survey about caseload • 49 states and the District of Columbia participated in the survey about warrant apprehension	• Comparative caseload statistics • Comparative data on risk assessment tools • Comparative data on warrant apprehension.

OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUPS

The research team conducted 15 focus groups with agents, supervisors, and warrant apprehension officers from across Maryland. The groups included: six supervising agents groups; six agent supervisor groups; one Court Liaison Unit group; one Liaison Waiver Unit group; and one Warrant Apprehension Unit officer group. A total of 137 agents, supervisors and officers participated in the focus groups.

The purpose of the focus groups was to augment the time study data with qualitative in-depth information about how participants perform their jobs, what resources they rely upon, and what needed resources were not provided. Agents and supervisors were also afforded the opportunity to share concerns regarding agent workloads and recommendations for how to improve the efficiency of offender supervision. The findings from the focus group analysis are presented in the body of this report.

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ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS

The focus group portion of the data collection process consisted of fifteen on-site structured focus group interviews with agents, their supervisors, and warrant apprehension officers. The purpose of the focus groups was to augment the time study data with qualitative in-depth information from incumbents in four job classes within four units: (1) Probation and Parole Agents (agents), and their Field Supervisors, WAU officers, CLU agents, and (4) LAW agents. More specifically, the research team wanted to find out how participants performed their jobs, what resources they relied upon, and needed resources that were not provided. Agents and supervisors were also afforded the opportunity to share concerns regarding agent workloads and recommendations for how to improve the efficiency of offender supervision.

As shown in Table 1, the research team conducted 12 focus groups in six regional locations (six with agents and six with field supervisors and focus groups with the three other units). One hundred and thirteen (113) people participated in these focus groups including 71 supervising agents and 42 supervisors (FS I, II, III) participated. The agents represented a wide variety of caseload types and offices. More specifically, general agents, VPI agents, sex offender agents, domestic violence agents, and agents with mixed caseloads participated in the sessions. Participants included agents from all three regions: Central, North, and South. The focus groups included agents from different offices within each region. All jurisdictions in Maryland were also represented.

On December 2, 2014 at the Guilford Avenue location in Baltimore, the research team conducted the final three focus group interviews with a total of 15 agents and nine warrant apprehension officers from the remaining three other units, WAU (9), CLU (6), and LAWs (9). All focus group sessions were conducted between September 2, and December 2, 2014.

Moderating each focus group session were two facilitators, Dr. Ann Cotten (Director, Schaefer Center for Public Policy) and Dr. Thomas Mitchell (Professor of Organizational Psychology, University of Baltimore). Both facilitators are professionally trained focus group moderators. There was also at least one Graduate Research Fellow present at each of the sessions to take notes during the discussion. The facilitators used a 45-item structured interview guide to assist in directing the discussion. The number of participants in each session ranged from three to seventeen, with the majority of sessions having from 6 to 12.

Table 1: Focus Group Dates and Attendees			
Date	Location	Group Type	Number of Participants
09/02/2014	Anne Arundel County 251 Rowe Blvd. Annapolis, MD 21401	Agent	10
		Supervisor	3
09/03/2014	Baltimore City 2100 Guilford Ave. Baltimore, MD 21218	Agent	16
		Supervisor	19
09/09/2014	Frederick County 100 W. Patrick St. Frederick, MD 21701	Agent	11
		Supervisor	5
09/10/2014	Prince George's County 4990 Rhode Island Ave., Suite 101 Hyattsville, MD 20781	Agent	8
		Supervisor	4
09/11/2014	Talbot County 301 Bay St., Suite 301 Easton, MD 21601	Agent	12
		Supervisor	6
09/16/2014	Howard County 3451 Courthouse Dr. Ellicott City, MD 21043	Agent	14
		Supervisor	5
12/02/2014	Baltimore City 2100 Guilford Ave. Baltimore, MD 21218	WAU Officers	9
		CLU Agents	6
		LAW Agents	9
Total			137

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The focus group discussions centered on seven topics essentially common to all units. Agents, supervisors, and warrant apprehension officers were asked to describe and discuss:

1. Reactions to having participated in the online workload study.
2. Typical work week, time to complete work assignments, and overtime use.
3. How current workload affects their job performance.
4. How work functions are organized.
5. Adequacy of the resources provided.
6. Support from supervisors, personnel in other units they depend upon.
7. Suggestions for improving how they perform their jobs.

The research team's findings from the interviews were consolidated from seven to four topics with regard to factors that affect agent work performance. The four topics addressed for each job class are:

1. Factors that Impede Performance;
2. Adequacy of Resources Available;
3. Supervision/Managerial Support; and
4. Systemic Intra and Inter-organizational issues (communications, coordination of efforts, cooperation)

Along with the seminal findings for each topic, the report provides agents' suggestions and the team's recommendations that would help to ameliorate impediments to effectiveness and increase the quantity and quality of their productivity. If implemented, the research team is confident that the changes will substantially enhance agents' ability to accomplish their mission to effectively supervise offenders residing in the community and ensure public safety. Before providing findings for each of the four topics, the next section describes agents' reactions to participating in the online time study portion of the project.

AGENT REACTIONS TO PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE TIME STUDY

Participant comments about having participated in the study were consistent across all four units. A small, but significant number felt the process was too time consuming and cumbersome when trying to record their time on tasks in the detail required. Some completed their data input at the end the day after having taken notes on tasks they engaged in, but they felt that their entries were reasonably accurate. A very few (less than four) acknowledged having abandoned the process altogether. At the beginning of the study, some agents had difficulty finding the correct codes for entry. Early on in the process, however, these issues were resolved by adding or clarifying task codes available in the online data entry program.

One issue emerged specifically with regard to LAWS participants who completed the study. All eight completed the online workload study diary, but some felt that the time period was not representative of their typical work week given that many Court Liaison Agents were on vacation during the time of the study. Because of this, they were required to pick up tasks normally performed by the CLU unit.

By and large however, it appears that once agents had become familiar with the procedure they were able to provide a reasonably high level of accuracy. Participant reactions in this study were typical of those in other studies where such data entry is required. Therefore, based on their comments overall, there is good reason to believe that the data were reliable and valid[3].

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[3] Typically, some will overestimate times and others will underestimate time spent on tasks. However, the errors generally cancel out, thus rendering the results a reasonably good estimate of time needed to complete tasks.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the average times for completing tasks are reliable estimates and that the findings accurately reflected the actual durations of time spent on tasks.

The following are findings from the focus group Interviews from the four job classes. Included are participants' suggestions and the research team's recommendations to address the issues that emerged. Given that the purpose of this study was focused primarily on the work of parole and probation agents, the majority of focus group sessions were conducted with this unit of the Division of Parole and Probation workforce. As stated earlier, the team also conducted focus group sessions with CLU and LAW agents and WAU officers. Therefore, relevant findings from each of the other three units are embedded into the findings with the parole and probation unit.

FACTORS THAT IMPEDE PERFORMANCE

From the focus group interviews six issues were identified by agents that impeded their performance. These issues include: large caseloads; inefficient scheduling of court appearances and a disconnect between judges and DPP with regard to zero tolerance for VPI offenders; having to determine if offenders have met their financial obligations – ("money issues"); ineffective case planning process and supervision standards that are perceived to be too high; perceived unavailability of overtime; and inadequacy of the tools provided to manage their workload and excessive ad hoc reporting.

Findings from the focus group on these topics are presented in the following section along with suggestions from the agents and researchers about how to address these issues.

Caseload Size
General caseloads are thought to be overwhelming in many jurisdictions. Containment caseloads for sex offenders, domestic violence, and VPI cases are more labor intensive, but because caseloads for agents handling these types are typically smaller, the agents believe these caseloads are more manageable. Several agents reported intentionally switching from general to containment caseloads because the workload was more manageable. The rule of thumb appears to be that one general supervision case is equal to approximately two containment model cases (VPI or Sexual Offender).

Caseload size, while used to establish workload assignments, is not the best metric of workload – i.e., the amount of time required to adequately supervise offenders in a given caseload. This is due in part to the wide variance in time required to handle each type of case. For example, some sex offenders may require relatively little supervision time, and others, a great deal. In general supervision, there is much less variance in time required. Nevertheless, there is a consensus among participates that the numbers of cases will continue to rise going forward, thus increasing even more, a workload that is already too high. While this assumption is apparently at odds with the decline in the overall caseload that has occurred over the last few years, it may be a reflection of the increases general agents are seeing in their caseload size and more agents are pulled from supervising general cases to supervising special caseloads.

Many agents expressed concern that the heavy caseload affects their ability to do everything that is required of them. Specifically, they stated that high caseloads negatively impacts their work with new offenders. Because new cases are assigned so frequently the agents say they miss home visits and employment verifications. One agent said that she never does home visits because no one has time for that. Some supervisors feel that agents are being forced into a *"numbers mentality."* Thus, in their rush to meet expectations they feel the quality of work suffers. Many agents agree with this sentiment. More than one said they learned about criminogenic factors in college and training, but the supervision standards to so high, especially for VPI and Sexual Offenders that they spend their time meeting the mandatory requirements, but do not have time to actually work with the offenders in a more substantive and helpful manner.

For the CLU unit, only one of the eight agents participating said she had no problem getting her work done in the time allotted. Some who said they were not able to complete their work in a timely fashion reported that it was difficult to get the case notes done within the 24 hour deadline because the *"….court often gets in the way."* Four participants in the CLU focus group estimates of time spend beyond the required work hours varied from 2.5 hours to 10 hours a week. Much of the variance depended upon the demands from the docket load, the time of year, etc.

For the WAU unit, the participants said that the work that suffered because of their heavy workload involved difficulty in completing the following: (1) Case notes, (2) Rap Sheets, (3), Interviews, and (4) Surveillance. One WAU officer said that *"[in] terms of time needed, he can't justify taking his entire five person team to visit someone's mother, but we have to for safety reasons. This means the entire team's productivity is compromised."*

For the LAWS unit, most indicated that because of their heavy workload, they often work before and after work hours, without compensation, to stay on top of their caseload. They feel as though they have no choice to do otherwise because they do not want to appear in court inadequately prepared. In their words, *"the commissioners don't want to hear or see any incomplete work as that very heavily affects the cases brought before them."* Some LAWs agents feel that they are *"taking the place of parole/probation agents"* when they have to research offender information that is already supposed to be in the case record such as FBI checks, rap sheets, and copies of case notes and trial notes.

A number of FSI supervisors stated that the heavy workload obligations impede agents' ability to get work done, which in turn results in contacts missed or special conditions not being verified. *"When new arrests come in we fall behind again which results in weaker, lower quality reports being generated."* Supervisors say they would like to have more time to review agents' cases, but with the large caseloads per agent, they are unable to do so.

Agent Suggestions: Some agents recommend that DPP reduce the number of people on probation for relatively minor violations and focus on "high to moderate" offenders. One agent suggested that Maryland consider following Florida's lead on using probation only for felony offenders.

FSI participants argued that caseload count alone doesn't account for the fact that many agents supervise offenders who have multiple cases. Furthermore, they believe there is no real accounting for NAU (non-active, unavailable) cases which consist of those offenders who are in incarcerated or in treatment. Yet, the agent must still monitor these cases. Several FSI participants indicated that because of reduced staffing they are doing agents' work, even handling court appointments and completing agents' reports (to cover for them).

Research Team Recommendations: Agent workload must be addressed. This can be done through improving the effectiveness of the tools available to agents, making systemic improvements that allow agents to be more effective, and being more focused on the higher risk offenders. Additionally, the team recommends improving data collection about agent workload to more accurately measure the volume of work required to supervise the various types of offenders and continuing to monitor average time standards to accurately measure the amount of time requires to supervise offenders.

Court Attendance

Overwhelmingly, agents feel that much of their time is wasted traveling to and attending court, and is *"the bane of our existence"* according to one agent. Almost all agents agreed with this sentiment. Agents were frustrated with the large stretches of time spend waiting in court, particularly when having to deal with brief or trivial matters. One agent described a *"four hour wait for a five minute case."* These experiences were common in the offices that do not have court liaisons. Many of the agents who experience long waits or scattered court appearances are in jurisdictions with higher than average caseloads.

VPI cases also present a challenge for agents. One noted that the nature of VPI is that its *"no-tolerance structure results in agents spending time writing warrants and sending people back to jail."* According to the agents participating in the focus groups, policy requires agents to violate VPI offenders for minor infractions. This zero-tolerance approach means that agents are frequently going to court over minor violations, but the judges are often not in agreement with the zero tolerance approach and do not sanction the offender. This wastes DPP and court resources and according to some agents, minimizes the effectiveness of the intensive supervision.

From the focus groups it was clear that agents supervising containment caseloads such as VPI and Sexual Offenders have different interpretations of the degree of discretion they have regarding sanctions. More than one agent said they thought it was counterproductive to be required to violate a VPI offender for being five minutes late for an appointment. Others felt they had more discretion and tried to work with these offenders to help them be successful.

Agent suggestions: Several agents in offices without a court liaison system/unit felt this would save time and help them be more effective. All agents agreed that the consolidation of court date schedules would help. In several groups, agents suggested DPP leadership work with court system to ensure both sides support the zero tolerance approach.

In few groups, agents suggested that they be given more discretion in the types of sanctions imposed on offenders receiving intense supervision. The agents felt that being able to impose lesser sanctions immediately would be more effective than violating the offender and going to court only to have the judge not impose sanctions.

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP collaborate with the courts to explore ways to make scheduling more efficient and eliminate the long waits for hearings that can last from as little as 15 minutes to as much as three hours or having agents go to court multiple days per week. One option is to work with the courts to set aside specific days of the week or blocks of time for agents.

The team suggests DPP leadership review and clarify the policies regarding mandatory violations. This is an area where additional training could make supervision more consistent across offices and agents and increase agent effectiveness.

Money Collections
Many agents expressed concern that the amount of time they spend dealing with *"money"* issues takes away from time they should be spending on supervision activities. A significant proportion of agents felt they should not be required to address money issues such as restitution and court fees, especially when they believe that judges often ignore these issues anyway. They indicated that this is a very time-consuming, clerical activity that leaves them with less time for supervision.

Research Team Recommendation: The research team does not have a specific recommendation with regard to this issue.

Case Plans
A large percentage of agents stated that case plans are a waste of time and are used only for reports and record keeping. Agents said that the case plan usually consists of the terms of the probation order and the mandatory supervision standards. Agents believe they have no value, are not useful for supervision, and are not an effective functional tool. Many agents believe that they are used primarily to hold agents accountable and several thought they are used to appease legislators. In the words of one participant, but also reflective of others, is that case plans are *"worthless"* and *"add to the workload."* Several also indicated that *"mandated contact standards are too high."* An additional complaint expressed by many was that the case plans were initially designed for the purpose establishing rehabilitation strategies. Yet agents say they are neither trained to provide rehabilitation such as counseling nor are they expected to function as rehabilitation counselors. A number suggested *"getting rid of them (case plans) altogether."*

Agent Suggestions: Agents suggested that DPP review the original purpose of the case plans and decide if it is intended to guide agents in performing rehabilitation efforts. If so, then restructure the agent's job to reflect this and train them to do rehabilitation. There was much debate in two sessions about what their role should be. Should it be more focused on supervising and

monitoring offenders or rehabilitation, or both? Agents in these groups did not feel they have time to do both.

With regard to the usefulness of case plans, one agent described the following scenario. Their office is *"unable to truly help someone they're seeing once or twice a month, or every other month. But as long as you 'meet the numbers', your case can go to StateStat."*

Research Team Recommendations: Given the uniform concern about the amount of time required to develop case plans and their general lack of utility for agents, the research team recommends DPP assess the usefulness and effectiveness of the plans as they are currently configured. The team recommends DPP leadership consider allowing agents more latitude to develop case plans that address offender-specific criminogenic factors and issues. If the agent's job should focus on rehabilitation, their jobs should be restructured to support this goal.

Overtime

Only a very few agents indicated that they can usually get their work completed in a standard 40 hour week. The vast majority of agents and supervisors indicated that agents could not complete their work in a 40 hour work week. This puts pressure on agents to work on their own time to meet expectations

A majority of agents report that they work uncompensated overtime to keep current on their work. When asked about the availability of overtime compensation, most agents said that overtime was not available or very difficult to get approved. Some agents said that they could get overtime, but the request needed to be submitted two weeks in advance which means they usually cannot get overtime approved because the need for overtime is often driven by emergencies or unexpected events that cannot be predicted two weeks in advance.

Agents report that they often work additional hours when they are delayed in court or when they have to stay late to write an urgent report about an offender. Agents indicated that are allowed to 'flex' their schedule and take off at other times during the pay period to stay within their 40 hour work week. However, if the crisis occurs on the last day of the pay period or if the agent's reporting day is the last day of the pay period, the agents cannot adjust their schedule.

WAU unit officers noted that when they ask for overtime, supervisors will only approve the request if it's *"…a definite 'lockup' situation."* Since the officers cannot always guarantee that it is, the request is denied. One officer noted that there was a need for overtime especially when they get a *"hot"* lead in their off hours and have to move quickly before the *"trail goes cold."* He also pointed out that offenders generally know the officer's schedule and can therefore plan accordingly to evade them. Offenders *"come out"* on weekends and after five o'clock when they know that officers are generally not working.

From the focus groups it is clear that overtime is not handled uniformly across the state and that agents have differing understandings about the overtime policy.

Research Team Recommendations: Since DPP leadership confirmed that overtime is available when needed, the research team recommends DPP leadership train supervisors and agents on the overtime policy. The overtime policy should be implemented consistently across the offices. With regard to WAU officers, DPP should review the effectiveness of the current schedule and consider a pilot project with expanded overtime for off-hours surveillance.

Self-Developed Supplemental Work Aids
A substantial number of agents are using self-developed supplemental aids to help them manage their work. They rely upon aids such as stand-alone custom spreadsheets, personal diaries, paper calendars for appointments, and other office software to help them keep abreast of their reporting obligations and manage their work. Those who rely on these tools report that they do so due to the limitations of the databases available such as OCMS.

Agents reported that they could not get an accurate list of their cases from OCMS. Additionally, there is no one place or report from OCMS that will show them the status of their cases or what needs to be done on their cases. Some agents who are proficient with Excel report that they maintain their own shadow system to track who is in their caseload and what needs to be done next with their cases. Agents also stated that the two primary computer systems they use to manage offenders were not in sync.

Because the tools that are provided to the agents are not sufficient to help them stay on top of their work, many feel they are on their own to find a 'system' that works for them. This means that agents, who already feel overwhelmed by their caseload, also find themselves engaged in duplication of efforts and redundant record keeping.

There were also a number of agents who complained that the many ad-hoc reporting spreadsheets that they are required to complete as part of their job are a waste of time. Agents expressed frustration that the time they spent completing these spreadsheets took away from time that they could spend on supervision activities. Some also expressed the belief that if OCMS worked correctly, leadership could get the information they needed from the system.

Research Team Recommendation: The team recommends that DPP identify the types of aids in use, assess the extent of their use, and explore opportunities for utilizing those that may be useful agency-wide. DPP should also determine how OCMS may be altered or revised to better accommodate the functions the ad-hoc tools and reports serve.

From the focus group interviews, six resource related issues were identified by agents that impeded their performance. These issues include: challenges related to OCMS; risk assessment tool; kiosks; urinalysis testing; electronic tools; and personal safety aids.

OCMS

Overwhelmingly, agents and supervisors complained about the inefficiency of the OCMS system[4]. Some of the most common complaints were about how the system timed-out while agents were entering case notes, the frequently very slow response times, inaccurate information in the case record, difficulty in navigating the pages, lack of up-to-date information on offenders, and redundant codes. Many agents reported keeping Microsoft Word log of their case notes and pasting information from the Word document to an OCMS case note. Agents expressed frustration about the number of screens they had to go to see basic information about the case. Agents were frustrated that OCMS cannot produce an accurate case list. They were also frustrated that the system cannot generate alerts when action is needed on a case.

Additionally, a number of agents pointed out that VINELink did not sync properly with OCMS. Agents have to go to multiple sources to confirm, update or reconcile conflicting offender data. According to them, the right kind of computerized system could alleviate these problems, but *"OCMS is not it."* Several agents were not optimistic about the prospect of the monthly report being phased out in favor of an OCMS report. LAWS agents reported some of same deficiencies with OCMS. They also pointed out that they need access to the Division of Corrections database because they only have access to case notes in OCMS. The limitations and inadequacies of OCMS were by far the most frustrating impediments to their work.

Agent Suggestions: Agents suggested that DPP find a way to correct the deficiencies with OCMS so that it accurate and useful. Some specific suggestions include creating an alert system to notify agents when updates / entries are made from those other than agents themselves and when key tasks are due or overdue. They would also like all key offender information such as supervision level be added to the case file banner that appears in OCMS.

Research Team Recommendations: DPP leadership has created an OCMS users groups. DPP leadership is working with this group to identify problems with OCMS and recommend modifications to the system. The users group is also developing instructional materials to address common concerns. The research team recommends that DPP leadership continue to work with the users group to address agents' concerns with the operation of OCMS.

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[4] In later focus group sessions we heard reports that some features of OCMS had improved over the last couple of months.

There is limited funding available to support making changes to OCMS that would enhance the effectiveness and productivity of agents. The research team recommends that additional resources be devoted to improving the effectiveness of the OCMS.

Risk Assessment Tool
Agents say the effectiveness of the risk assessment tool varies for different offices and regions. A few agents say it's one of the *"better tools."* Another thought that risk assessment is simply a good starting point and that agents had to do their own assessment. Some do not think it is overly inaccurate but they occasionally override it – the consensus was about 20% of the time. Other agents, however, believe it is not accurate and feel that they often must override it based on their own personal judgment. For example, an offender may be classified as low risk yet the agent feels certain he should be classified as high. Some felt that it over-identifies those with a gang affiliation by including any offender with a weapon/gun charge. Agents say they almost never reassess downward; instead, they reassess up to be on the safe side. The domestic violence and mental health agents tend to keep offenders at *"high"* supervision regardless of circumstances. A number of agents reported that they kept offenders' supervision level at the level determined by the risk assessment, but still imposed a more stringent level of supervision.

Research Team Recommendations: DPP should revisit the algorithm used to set risk levels, establish clears protocols for setting the levels, and make certain that all agents understand clearly the rationale used and know how to apply the protocol.

VPI Screener
Several agents noted that VPI classifications are often inaccurate and over classifies offenders into this higher supervision category. Others felt the VPI screener "makes no sense." One example given was *"changing an offender's zip-code can trigger a VPI re-classification."*

Most agents are aware of the upcoming changes to the VPI screener. They expect that the changes will result in more VPI cases.

Research Team Recommendation: The research team recommends that DPP continue to reassess the validity of the VPI screener to ensure that it is correctly identifying the high-risk offenders.

Kiosks
There were mixed reactions regarding the usefulness of the Kiosk depending upon the jurisdiction. Some felt it was useful, but many others found problems with it. Many agents said it impedes rather facilitates their ability to supervise offenders. A short list of some of the problems associated with the Kiosk concerned a lack of information and it's accessibility to offenders:

- Offenders cannot always assess Kiosks after hours.
  (They are often not accessible either because the Kiosk is not operating or is in an inaccessible location.)

- Difficulty in monitoring the offender's mandated compliance. Agents do not receive a notification about offenders' kiosk visit. A case note is added to the file, but it is incumbent upon the agent to look for the note.
- Agents cannot download a list of missed appointments (this has to be done manually)

Many agents see no real value except that it serves as a nominal tracking device to satisfy court mandated offender contact requirements. One remarked, *"The Kiosk system, borrowed from New York, was more effective there, as kiosks were in areas that could be reached after hours."* Also, *"in New York, some offices had kiosk agents whose task was to handle all kiosk check-in and other issues." "The kiosks result in more work for our agents."*

Research Team Recommendations: Now that the Kiosk system has been in use for a sufficient period to assess its effectiveness, the research team recommends gathering input and feedback from a representative group of agents regarding their experiences with it, and reassess its role and function to determine what changes can be made to justify its continued use.

Urinalysis Testing
The greatest dissatisfaction regarding the urinalysis testing program concerned the shortage of tests available in some jurisdictions, the unavailability of technicians to collect samples, and most importantly, the failure of positive results to hold up in court hearings. There was a great deal of frustration with having to send samples for testing to California rather than having it done locally. Testing samples locally or using rapid tests would save time and make it easier to retest when it is needed. Without a local technician to testify (one cannot be flown in from California), often the positive test result does not stand up in court. Apparently offenders know to expect this and challenge the results, thus rendering the whole procedure ineffective and a failure.

Some jurisdictions have enough drug test kits available; others do not. Most offices are without a full-time technician. This necessitates pulling agents from their regular duties to help collect samples. Some jurisdictions need more male lab techs. When agents supervise sample collection they may be subpoenaed for court appearances. This additional court time leaves them less time to perform their supervision tasks. Additionally, many say that offenders are not tested for the right drugs (e.g. PCP, alcohol, opiates, and amphetamines). Finally agents feel that because scheduled tests are easy to cheat on, offenders should be given random drug tests.

Research Team Recommendations: The team recommends that DPP switch to in-state analysis of urine specimens and/or switch to instant tests that allow the agent to confront the offender immediately with a negative test result. The team also recommends that DPP reassess the agent's role and responsibility for urine testing and devise a more efficient means for coordination of the drug testing program with others at the agency tasked with this function.

The research team also suggests DPP leadership investigate why agents think that they cannot order urinalysis tests for the most likely abused drugs. Additionally, the team recommends that

DPP provide additional guidance to agents and their supervisors on how to ensure urinalysis samples are tested for the correct substances.

Electronic Tools (mobile phones, laptop computers)
The general consensus among agents was that there is a wide gap between what agents currently have and the state of the art electronic tools that could be available to help them perform their jobs effectively. Beyond the issues with OCMS and accessibility to electronic information sources, there were complaints regarding the inadequacy of mobile phones and laptop computers for use in the field. Many agents rely heavily upon public record sources rather than those from DOC or DPSCS. A substantial number use social media sources such as Facebook to gather information on offenders, information that assists them in their supervision activities.

Agents would like to have access to offender OCMS records in the field. This would require read-access privileges for them on their agency issued laptops. The convenience of having up-to-date information would in their opinion, help to make their work in the field much more efficient.

WAU officers also made this same argument, advocating for remote access to OCMS and other online information. When a WAU officer wants to look up information on an offender when they are not in the office, they have to go to a field office and log into a terminal or call back to the office to have someone look up the pertinent information.

Most agents would like to have upgraded agency-issued mobile phones rather than having to use their own personal mobile phones (many said they still have "flip phone" without texting capabilities).

Research Team Recommendations: Taking into consideration potential security issues and cost considerations, the research team recommends that DPP assess the feasibility of providing WAU officers and agents in the field access to OCMS and other electronic databases that would facilitate their work capabilities.

Personal Safety (protective vests, pepper spray, clothing)
Safety and security is a concern for agents. Agents are asking for better protection on home visits. They expressed the desire to have a police officer with them on certain home visits, especially for visits to sexual or VPI offender homes. They sometimes feel in danger when trying to keep an offender on site long enough to be taken into custody by police. A number of agents, particularly female agents in rural areas, feel vulnerable conducting home visits when phone communication is unavailable to call for back-up or assistance when it's needed. Agents also noted that their protective vests were often out-of-date and pepper spray devices had expired. Female agents in particular do not feel they are getting the protection they need.

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP inventory the safety equipment on a scheduled basis to ensure that the inventories meet standards and are available to all agents who need them. Review and possibly revise safety protocols and standards

when agents are on home visits, particularly in the more violent-prone areas with more violent-prone offenders.

Focus group participants identified eight issues relating to supervision and managerial support. They include:
- recognition
- agent autonomy
- overtime
- policy and procedures
- communication with supervisors
- inconsistent supervision:
- agent hiring/retention/turnover
- training

Recognition

Agents feel that top management doesn't acknowledge their good work. They believe doing so would go a long way towards increasing agent morale. *"If someone's case makes it to StateStat, it would be nice to have some kind of recognition to boost morale." "Because of heavy caseloads, they [DPP] are losing staff because high caseloads aren't correlating with the pay level. They are losing people to the federal system. In addition, there is no recognition from the top."*

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP implement formal and informal recognition initiatives for agents and officers so that their work is appreciated by upper management. Research evidence indicates that when employees feel they are recognized for their good work and their efforts are appreciated, they become much more engaged at work[5].

Agent Autonomy

The general consensus among agents is that they are given little autonomy in performing their job. They clearly understand that while policy and procedures dictate now much of their must be done, they think there are many areas where, if given some discretion in how they carry out their tasks, they could be much more effective in doing their job. For examples, one agent reported that in Arizona, *"agents had authority over an offender's 'bank book', could perform home and body searches, and could apply real sanctions to gain offenders' compliance."*

Agents feel they have little autonomy in terms of assessing risk, imposing sanctions, overriding classification levels, and tailoring supervision plans to meet offender needs. They feel overly constrained by policies that *"went from a binder to a novel."* They say they are given no role in

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[5]Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 21*(7), 600-619.

establishing how their work is done. *"It's only mandated from administration…and is designed only to address 'political' issues to placate the legislature."* Others mention that in many offices the FSI must *"sign off on everything."*

Several agents voiced concern that *"decision makers are out of touch with the realities of the field and don't make an effort to seek our input."* For example, agents in some cases are not apprised of how case assignments are made and often assume it's arbitrary rather than based on a plan to equalize caseloads. As with most agents, LAWS agents also felt they provide valuable input into management decision making, but their ideas and suggestions are seldom if ever solicited.

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP have FSIs and agents work closely together to determine what agent tasks and activities could be performed more effectively and efficiently if agents are given more discretion over how to execute them. DPP should also consider establishing protocols to identify boundary conditions for when and under what circumstances this discretion could be exercised. These procedures should be developed for implementation at the office-level to accommodate work procedures that differ among them. Research shows that when given autonomy to and input to decision making, employees become more engaged[6].

Overtime
Agents are generally not allocated overtime and because regulations forbid working while off duty and agents are reprimanded for doing so. Overtime is cumbersome to report and request. Requests must be made 10 days in advance when it is seldom possible to anticipate this far in advance when it's needed. Agents expressed a desire to perform more overtime work and to have more flex time incorporated into their schedules.

Policy and Procedures
Agents said that because of top down-controls from system (Agency) and local office policies, procedures are not consistent across jurisdictions. Often, local and state demands conflict thus leaving the agents in a dilemma as to how to accommodate these conflicting demands. Again, with regard to autonomy, because of the strict policies mandated from the state agents, they are given little or no autonomy in decisions they feel could best be made at the agent level.

Communication with Supervisors[7]
Across numerous offices, agents consistently remarked that they have insufficient direct communication with their   supervisors (FSI), and little or no communication with those above first level supervision. They feel certain that when given an opportunity to provide feedback and input on new and revised policies and procedures, they could provide valuable information to

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[6]Barrick, M.R., & Mount, M.K. (1993). Autonomy as a moderator of the relationships between the big five personality dimensions and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 78* (1), 111- 118

[7] Since 2013, DPP has been conducting Middle Manager training and engaging in agency-wide strategic planning to address communication issues.

help guide these decisions. They are convinced that management seldom anticipates how the policy changes will affect their work performance. In their words, "*Upper management needs to be in the trenches and see what they [agents] are going through.*"

Agent suggestions: Some agents suggested DPP have supervisors and upper management shadow and observe agents' work activities to get a first-hand view of how policies and procedures impact actual work activities agents perform.

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP develop closer collaboration and coordination between FSIs and agents by establishing scheduled periodic meetings to discuss issues that need to be addressed. It is important that this be an ongoing collaborative effort.

Inconsistent Supervision

Agents believe that supervisors exercise too much discretion in signing off on reports. There seems to be wide variation on the standards for approval of reports. Agents report that many supervisors interpret policy differently thus making it difficult to anticipate what will be acceptable report-writing practices. Agents feel that they have to learn each supervisor's idiosyncratic standards.

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP establish clear standards for writing reporting that are consistent for all offices.

Agent Hiring/retention/turnover

A recurring theme across regions centered on personnel issues involving agent hiring, retention and turnover. Agents attributed many of their difficulties to having a relative unstable workforce. They offer anecdotal evidence that many agents leave for the federal system because of better paying jobs with more manageable workloads. They seemed convinced that it is extremely difficult to attract and hire qualified candidates, in much part due the long time period that exists from recruitment to hiring. Several FSI participants indicated they had been informed that recruitment for new agents was open only periodically and that much of the recent hiring in the past has been from the least qualified applicants on the hiring roster. They were also informed that another recruitment phase would not be opened until the roster was exhausted. Many FSIs and agents felt they were not getting qualified applicants to replace those who have left. One agent estimated that it *"….can take over a year to hire a new agent after one departs."*

Some additional issues FSI participants mentioned with regard to hiring qualified applicants include:

- Training is not adequate for the times – agents have to retrain new agents following their initial academy training because "instructors are out of touch with modern realities of the field."
- MD's "JobApps" (online application process) is confusing

- The short timeline to get candidates investigated once an offer is made
- Applicants are not always getting confirmation e-mails that they've been selected for the next round in the interview process (possibly resulting in losing qualified candidates)
- The applicant exam was not offered continuously throughout year
- Long time delays between hiring announcements, interviewing, and the actual hiring

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP investigate the legitimacy of these claims and address those that are substantiated. Work with the Department of Budget and Management Recruitment and Exam Division to review the status of the current recruitment plan to determine if it is providing a sufficient number of well qualified applicants in a timely manner.

Training

Agents believe that much can be done to improve training both for new agents at the academy and in-service training. It is generally viewed by agents that the academy training provided to new agents is out dated and ineffective. Much of what agents actually do on the job does not seem to conform with what they are trained to do.

Better training is needed for report writing. According to several participants, many of the new recruits do not come with sufficient writing skills, and fail to develop them while at the academy. LAWS agents also mentioned agents' deficits in writing skills, but also added that *"agents can't maintain case notes."* Additionally, agents feel that there needs to be training to prepare them to deal effectively with offenders with mental health issues. Likewise, more realistic training is needed to educate agents on the dynamics of gang activity that is increasing.

WAU officers expressed concern about their ability to access training they think would enable them to do a better job. They felt that management did not support their efforts to obtain relevant training. Further, they feel that they have little discretion or choice of training, often hearing about it too late to register for a particular class. Some indicated that they have to take leave to get the training they need. They voiced a need for updated training in several specific topics:

- Narcotics training.
- Probable cause training.
- Legal procedures – they debated whether it's legal to apprehend a suspect if you see him in the window but don't have a search warrant.
- Handling evidence.
- Chain of custody.
- House/entry training.
- "Bunker" training.
- Weapons/defensive training.

Agent suggestions: Agents offered the following suggestions regarding training.

- Have new agents shadow experienced agents to get a realistic view of what agents actually do on the job.
- Have new agents spend time in court before being assigned to their post so they can learn how to anticipate what is needed to prepare and testify in court appearances.
- Solicit experienced agents from the field who are able and willing to teach in the academy
- Partner with community colleges to develop and offer in-service training that is consistent with what agents actually do on the job.
- Ensure that new developments in training are informed by changes in how agents perform their work.
- Provide tuition reimbursement programs that would enable agents to work toward a master's degree.
- Include at least a rudimentary course in Spanish to enable agents to communicate better with the increasing number of immigrant offenders from Central America.
- Include a course on crisis management to prepare agents to deal better with emergency situations in the field.

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP formalize more of the agent on-the-job (OJT) training that is relevant for use statewide; assess the adequacy of academy training to include a gap analysis between what is offered and what is needed; and assess the academy course offerings regularly to ensure that agents' training needs are addressed as the job demands change over time. Finally the team suggests that DPP develop programs at the office or regional level so agents can share "best practices" they have learned from experience.

SYSTEMIC INTER AND INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Many of the difficulties encountered by agents in trying to perform their jobs effectively center on poor communications and a lack of coordination among fellow agents, supervisors, support personnel, and with workers in other agencies whom they must rely upon to get their work done. Following is a cursory look at some of these impediments that were voiced by many of the focus group participants.

Courts
A common issue across jurisdictions concerns the lack of coordination and cooperation with the courts and the lack of consideration given to scheduling and accommodating agents' work demands that conflict with court appearances Scheduling issues are a major concern. A great deal of time is wasted because court appearances are not scheduled in an efficient manner. There is a widespread perception that the courts make no effort to consider agents' needs when scheduling appearances. For example, agents would like to be able to go to court and deal with one offender's entire case on the same day, rather than go back on different days for different

charges. They noted that the court liaison/clerks do this for police officers, often scheduling an officer's entire list of traffic violations on one day, thus making it very convenient. They would like to have the same consideration given to them. Further, the agents say that a true *"court liaison"* is not necessarily what they need. They actually prefer to be in court themselves to voice their *"personal explanations"* and to provide context to the judge.

There was also much agreement that the judges vary dramatically in how they prosecute cases. They feel that many judges are also quite arbitrary in this respect, leaving the agent to second guess what to expect in preparing the case for court.

Research Team Recommendations: The research team recommends that DPP management work with court officials to explore ways to expedite and streamline agents' court appearance schedules.

Health Department and Community Resources
Agents must work with state and local health departments to supervise offenders with mental health issues. The agents find it difficult to gain the timely cooperation with the workers in these agencies they must depend upon for information, referrals, etc. Agents find themselves spending an inordinate amount of time researching community resources for referrals that they feel could be available with a database that could be constantly updated. They also complain about the inadequacy of resources particularly in many rural areas that have very limited mental treatment centers.

Research Team Recommendations: Agents currently have access to the Maryland Community Service Locator website which provides information on community resources. The research team recommends that DPP leadership communicates the availability of this resource to agents and supervisors.

Division of Corrections (DOC)
Difficulties with the State Division of Corrections are primarily concerned with a lack of information when offender data are updated. Agents often find out about these updates only by press releases, and then must take it upon themselves to investigate and scramble to gather relevant facts that will enable them to decide how to handle the evolving situation. Agents complain that when the offender DOC database is updated, changes are not carried over to OCMS. Nor is the agent alerted when these important changes occur.

Research Team Recommendation: Have IT units from DOC and Community Supervision work together to ameliorate the DOC and OCMS issues.

Intra-agency Relations
Agents voiced concerns that within and between offices there was inadequate communication among workers both horizontally (with co-workers) and vertically (with supervision, i.e. FSIs and upper management). This seems to be in large part because there is a lack of both formal and

informal mechanisms in place to facilitate this communication. A second contributing factor is that they feel they do not have the time to spare when it is needed. Agents feel that their supervisors seldom provide feedback for work they perform and that supervisors do not invite their input before important decisions are made or before policy changes are implemented[8]. They feel quite confident they could provide valuable input to help guide these important decisions and policies that dramatically affect how they perform their work.

Another system-wide problem that agents discussed concerned the need for uniformity with office and agency-wide policies and procedures. This issue extends as well to dealings with the courts, other agencies, and other counties.

Additionally, agents reported an inordinate numbers of mistakes (intra and inter-agency) with information they must rely upon. They also experience delays in getting this information in a timely fashion. Failures with such document communication flow can severely hamper an agent's ability to perform his or work effectively. Agents also complained that clerical errors are often made by support personnel. Even simple clerical errors such as sending a new case to the wrong agent can lead to serious delays in getting work done and even result in critical errors that could endanger public safety.

WAU officers complained that they often find mistakes in case notes provided to them. They spend a great deal of time bringing the cases *"up to standard."* Errors in case records can be critical in the words of one, *"A bust on the wrong house is not good."* Such inaccuracies can result in wasted time and effort. For example, one officer noted that she was actively tracking an offender and it turned out that he was *"locked up all along."*

LAW agents said they get about 20% for the information they need for a case and when that agents often don't respond when they try to contact them to get the missing information. They felt that having closer communications with agents would improve the information flow that is so crucial for them in performing their job. They also expressed frustration in not be able to communicate with agents' supervisors when they felt it was necessary.

A number of Court Liaison agents complained that the agents submitted case reports and support materials that were incomplete, thus requiring them to search for the missing information. Often they have to call the field agent to supply the information and clarify what was written in the report. CLU agents felt that *"[field] agents are not well trained,"* and that they *"need to learn how to properly write reports and case notes."* The same participants felt that the frequent turnover among field agents contributed to this problem. They further indicated that often FSI supervisors signed off on reports that were not properly prepared. The large number of poorly prepared reports they received from field agents was their biggest impediment to getting their work done.

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[8] This issue is addressed in more detail in the above section: Supervision/Management

A better understanding of the importance of this function on the part of the field agents would help alleviate the problem, lead to a more efficient completion of the CLU agents' tasks and result in requiring less time required for field agents to reappear for hearings to clarify the history of the offender's behavior. This appears to be clearly an issue that needs to be addressed.

Research Team Recommendations: Conduct a comprehensive formal assessment of the current Work Flow Patterns (WFP) and communications patterns (CPs) between agents and others they work with. Implement a plan to redesign where necessary, these WFPs and CPs that are crucial for agents to do their job. This may require revision of some policies and procedures to ensure that the WFPs are effective. This process should be done with those who provide agents with information they need (e.g. intake), and also with those who use information provided by agents (e.g. to courts, court liaison officers). This can be accomplished using proven methodology such as the *Total Performance System*[9] or something similar. To devise and set up effective work flow practices and communication patterns, agents would collaborate closely with others they depend upon and those who depend upon them. This process should be pilot tested, and once it's determined to be effective, should be implemented and incorporated on an ongoing basis as part of standard work procedures. This will enable the system to accommodate changes in policy and procedures whenever they occur. This process should also be accompanied with build-in quality control measures, i.e. feedback loops that will make the system a sustainable over time.

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[9] Brethower, D. (1972). *A Total Performance System: Behavioral Analysis in Business and Industry*. Pub: Behaviordelia, Inc., Kalamazoo, MI.

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The focus groups provided rich insight into how DPP agents do their jobs, their work environments, and the tools available to do their jobs. It was clear from the focus groups that the job of the parole/probation agent is very stressful. This stress is due in part to the high caseloads, in part to the significant inefficiencies in their work environment, and the serious nature of their work.

Most agents who participated in the focus groups seem to take their jobs very seriously and want to be effective in their work. It is important to note that most supervisors and agents felt that agents could not meet all of the demands placed upon them given the caseload size and the tools available to do the job. Through the discussions they identified a number of situations that, if addressed, could significantly improve their effectiveness and decrease their job stress.

The stress of high caseloads is compounded by computer systems (especially OCMS) that are difficult to navigate and do not provide information in a format that is useful to the agent; caseload reports that are inaccurate; a Kiosk system that often creates more work for agents; a drug testing system that is often inaccurate and does not hold up in court; and regular requests to complete ad-hoc reports because the offender data system does not generate the information managers need to manage. The time agents waste dealing with these inefficiencies in the system is time taken away from offender supervision.

The findings from the focus groups and the research team recommendations are summarized in the next two sections. They are presented in two groups - sources of inefficiency and opportunities to improve supervision tools.

SOURCES OF INEFFICIENCY

Court Attendance
Sanctioning is an important component of the supervision process and this process often involves taking the offender to court for violating the terms of their parole or probation. Agents spend, on average, 14% of their work time interacting with courts. Much of this interaction is inefficient due to a lack of schedule coordination between the courts and some DPP offices. In focus groups, agents routinely reported that they could spend a whole afternoon in court to testify about a minor infraction. In some jurisdictions, agents reported that their cases were scattered across the week which required them to travel back and forth to court on multiple days. Many jurisdictions do not have a dedicated court liaison agent or unit.

Sometimes the process of taking an offender to court is ineffective because judges and DPP are not in agreement about how sanctions should be applied. During focus groups, agents often told of judges who did not believe the zero tolerance strategy of supervision applied to high risk

offenders and hence did not enforce sanctions for minor infractions. When this happens frequently enough, agents lose credibility with the offender and are less effective.

Recommendation:
DPP managers should attempt to work with the court systems in each jurisdiction to establish an effective schedule for agents to appear in court. For example, dedicating a specific day or time to hear DPP cases or grouping cases for a specific agent. When this is not possible, and the case volume is high enough, jurisdictions should consider employing a court liaison system. This may be a challenge in some jurisdictions where judges only want to hear from the agent of record. Once again, this may be an issue where DPP and the court systems can have dialogue about the impact of this requirement on DPP's ability to effectively supervise offenders.

The research team also recommends that DPP leadership and representatives from the court systems discuss the zero tolerance philosophy of supervision and come to an agreement about how high risk offenders should be supervised and sanctioned. Zero tolerance cannot be effective without consistent and sure sanctioning.

Case Plans
Case plans were uniformly regarded as being worthless to an agent. More seasoned agents recalled when the case plan reflected an agent's plan for supervising an offender and addressing their criminogenic factors. Agents used the plan as a tool to guide their work. Agents report that their case plans now are just a recitation of the parole or probation order and the mandatory supervision standards. Agents expressed concern that the plans were just a tool to hold them accountable and appease legislators and were of little benefit in the supervision process. On a related note, agent also uniformly expressed concern that they did not have time to address criminogenic factors with offenders because they spent so much time meeting the mandatory supervision requirements.

Recommendation:
Given the uniform concern about the amount of time required to develop case plans and their general lack of utility for agents, the research team recommends DPP assess the usefulness and effectiveness of the plans as they are currently configured. The team recommends DPP leadership consider allowing agents more latitude to develop case plans that address offender-specific criminogenic factors and issues.

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE SUPERVISION TOOLS

During the focus groups, agents and supervisors identified a number of opportunities to make supervision more effective. Each is discussed below.

Self-Developed Work Aids
A substantial number of agents are using self-developed supplemental aids to help them manage their work. They rely upon aids such as stand-alone custom spreadsheets, personal diaries, paper

calendars for appointments, and other office software to help them keep abreast of their reporting obligations and manage their work. Those who rely on these tools report that they do so due to the limitations of the databases available such as OCMS. While these shadow systems help agents manage their workload they also lead to a lot of duplication of effort, redundant record keeping, and time wasted reconciling information from multiple sources.

A related issue is the amount of time agents report responding to ad-hoc information requests and completing reporting spreadsheets. These requests seem to result from the inability of OCMS to provide accurate management data in a timely manner.

Recommendation:
The team recommends that DPP identify the types of aids in use, assess the extent of their use, and explore opportunities for utilizing those that may be useful agency-wide. DPP should also determine how OCMS may be altered or revised to better accommodate the functions the ad-hoc tools and reports serve.

Inadequacy of OCMS to Support Effective Supervision
OCMS is a major impediment to agent effectiveness. Instead of supporting agents in their work, OCMS is the most significant source frustration for agents and a major time waster. Specifically, the system is slow, often logs out while agents are entering information requiring them to reenter information or maintain a separate electronic file with case notes and other important information. The OCMS system is difficult and time consuming for agents to navigate. Agents report having to switch between multiple screens to get basic information about a case. Agents said that OCMS cannot produce an accurate list of their cases, it does not provide alerts about actions that need to be taken on cases, and it often does not have current information on an offender. Additionally, a number of agents pointed out that VINELink did not sync properly with OCMS. Agents have to go to multiple sources to confirm, update, or reconcile conflicting offender data.

Recommendations:
DPP leadership has created an OCMS users group and is working with this group to identify problems with OCMS and recommend modifications to the system. The users group is also developing instructional materials to address common concerns. The research team recommends that DPP leadership continue to work with the users group to address agents' concerns with the operation of OCMS.

There is limited funding available to support making changes to OCMS that would enhance the effectiveness and productivity of agents. The research team recommends that additional resources be devoted to improving the effectiveness of the OCMS.

Risk Assessment Tools
While there was general support among agents for the use of a risk assessment tool and consensus that the current tool is good, many felt that the tool provided a starting point for their

risk assessment. Agents, especially in the North and South regions, reported that they often overrode the findings of the tool and kept offenders at a high level of supervision based upon their professional judgment. Agents reported that they almost never downgrade an assessment. From the interviews, it does not appear that the findings of the risk assessment tool are used on a uniform basis to establish the supervision plan.

Recommendation:
DPP should revisit the algorithm used to set risk levels, establish clear protocols for setting the levels, and make certain that all agents understand the rationale used and know how to apply the protocol.

Kiosks
Kiosks pose a problem for a significant number of agents. Many agents saw no real value in using Kiosks except that they serve as a nominal tracking device to satisfy court mandated offender contact requirements. Because the Kiosk system does not send a notification to the agent about an offender's kiosk visit, agents have to check the case notes to determine if the offender was compliant. Agents also report that the system often does not work or that it is inaccessible to offenders after hours.

Recommendation:
Now that the Kiosk system has been in use for a sufficient period, the team recommends that DPP gather input and feedback from a representative group of agents regarding their experiences with it, and reassess its role and function to determine what changes can be made to justify its continued use.

Urinalysis Testing
Urinalysis testing is a standard tool for monitoring offenders. However, in Maryland, the urinalysis testing system does not work effectively. In focus groups, agents reported a shortage of tests in some jurisdictions, a lack of technicians to collect samples, and most importantly, the failure of positive results to hold up in court hearings. There was a great deal of frustration with having to send samples for testing to California rather than having it done locally. Testing samples locally, or using rapid tests would save time and make it easier to retest when needed. Without a local technician to testify (one cannot be flown in from California), the positive test result often does not stand up in court. Apparently offenders know to expect this and challenge the results, thus rendering the whole procedure ineffective and a failure.

Agents also report that the urinalysis tests do not test for the right drugs (e.g. PCP, alcohol, opiates, and amphetamines)[10]. Finally, agents feel that because scheduled tests are easy to cheat on, offenders should be given random drug tests.

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[10] Interviews with DPP management confirm that under the current urinalysis vendor contract, standard urinalysis testing screens for benzodiazepines, cocaine, marijuana, opiates, and PCP. If needed, additional drug screens can be requested. Urinalysis is not the appropriate test for alcohol use.

Recommendation:
The research team recommends that DPP switch to in-state analysis of urine specimens and/or switch to instant tests that allow the agent to confront the offender immediately with a negative test result. Reassess the agent's role and responsibility for urine testing and devise a more efficient means for coordination of the drug testing program with others at the agency tasked with this function.

Electronic Tools
Agents and WAU officers generally felt that they were behind in terms of access to technology. Agents and officers alike rely on social media tools and internet-based resources to supervise and track offenders. Agents complained about the inadequacy of laptops and mobile phones for use in the field. WAU officers reported that they do not have laptops in their cars. When they need to follow up on a lead or get additional information, they must call back to their office or stop into a DPP office to use the computer. Given that officers spend 19% of their time traveling and they usually travel in groups when serving a warrant, it would be cost effective to give officers laptops that can be used when they are traveling or on surveillance, as regular police officers. Additionally, agents and officers alike would like to have access to offender OCMS records in the field. This would require read- access privileges for them on their agency issued laptops.

Recommendation:
Taking into consideration potential security issues and cost considerations, the team recommends that DPP assess the feasibility of providing WAU officers and agents in the field access to OCMS and other electronic databases that would facilitate their work.

Management and Supervision
There was a general feeling among focus group participants that management does not acknowledge the good work of the agents. They also perceived that management style was based upon compliance and negative consequences and that morale among agents was generally very low.

There was a general sentiment among agents in the focus groups that management is out-of-touch with what goes on in the field. They believe the disconnect is manifested in overly proscriptive policies and procedures that allow for little agent discretion, policies that are difficult to implement in the field, and systems that do not work for agents. Agents and supervisors felt that *'. . .upper management needs to be in the trenches and see what they [agents] are going through."*

In contrast to the belief that policy provides little opportunity for discretion, agents also reported that supervision in the field is often inconsistent. Agents reported that each supervisor has their own way of doing things and what is acceptable for one supervisor may not be for another.

Agents were also concerned about the time lag between when an offender is sanctioned and when the offender goes before judge. For more minor offenses, agents would like the latitude to sanction the offender more informally thus making a more direct connection between the infraction and the sanction.

Recommendation:

The research team recommends that DPP develop closer collaboration and coordination between FSIs and agents by establishing scheduled periodic meetings to discuss issues that need to be addressed. Make certain this is an ongoing collaborative effort. The team also recommends that DPP consider conducting an organizational climate assessment to identify problem areas and work to address agent concerns where possible.

Recruitment and Retention

From the focus groups with supervisors and agents, there are perceived challenges with agent recruitment and retention. There is a perception that because the agency has to work completely through the roster of people who meet the minimum qualifications before recruitment can be reopened, the department is getting less qualified people now than in the past. There is also a perception that agents routinely leave to become federal probation agents where they earn more money and have an easier to manage workload.

Recommendations:

The research team recommends DPP investigate the legitimacy of these claims and address those that are substantiated. DPP should work with the Department of Budget and Management Recruitment and Exam Division to review the status of the current recruitment plan to determine if it is providing a sufficient number of well qualified applicants in a timely manner.

Training

Training was a major concern for focus group participants both in terms of the quality of training provided to new agents as well as the quality and relevance of training provided to current agents and officers. Across the board, agents and supervisors believe the training being provided to new agents is outdated, ineffective, and does not conform with what agents are expected to do on the job.

Agents are required to attend continuing education classes. Many felt that the instructors who teach classes at the academy are not current in the subjects they are teaching. Additionally, many expressed concern about the limited availability of classes. Agents expressed a desire for more training especially in how to deal with people with mental health issues and the dynamics of gang activity.

WAU officers expressed concern about having little choice in the classes they take. Some reported using personal leave to take the classes they thought they need.

Recommendation:
With regard to training, the research team recommends that DPP formalize more of the agent OJT training that is relevant for use statewide. DPP should conduct a formal assessment of the adequacy of academy training to include a gap analysis between what is offered and what is needed. On a regular basis, DPP should assess course offerings to ensure that agents' training needs are addressed as the job demands change over time. DPP should consider developing programs at the office or regional level so agents can share "best practices" they have learned from experience. The focus group section contains specific recommendations from agents and officers about the courses they think would be valuable.

Overtime
The vast majority of agents interviewed in the focus groups reported that they routinely worked uncompensated overtime just to keep up with their work. Supervisors also reported that it was almost impossible for most agents to do everything that is required of them in a standard work week. The need for overtime seems to stem from three issues. The first is the perception that agents cannot keep up with the requirements of their job within the allotted amount of time due to their high caseload. The second is the fact that some agents spend a significant amount of time in court waiting for their cases to be called or they must go to court several times per week which does not leave enough time in the office to complete their work. The third reason is emergencies that occur near the end of the pay period and when agents have limited options for flexing their schedule to accommodate for the additional hours. Typical emergencies include serious violations and situations where agents have a very short window of time to complete their report and issue a request for a warrant.

Flex scheduling is one tool currently in use to address the overtime issue. Flex time allows agents to adjust their schedule on their flex day to accommodate for the days in the pay period when they worked more than 8 hours. This is a good strategy, but as stated above, it is not effective for the times when agents are required to work hours near the end of the pay period than can be accommodated on the flex day.

In the focus groups, most agents said that overtime was not available or very difficult to get approved. Some agents said that they could get overtime, but the request needed to be submitted two weeks in advance which means they usually cannot get overtime approved when needed.

Warrant Apprehension Officers indicated that overtime is available if an arrest was a *'sure thing',* but that overtime was not generally available for off-hours surveillance. Officers reported that offenders knew their schedules and stayed out of sight until after their shifts were over.

Recommendation:

There seems to be a lack of clarity among agents and supervisors about the department's overtime policy. Agents from different interpretations about the availability of overtime and the process for getting overtime approved. The research team recommends that DPP train supervisors and agents on the overtime policy and ensure that the policy is implemented consistently across the offices. With regard to WAU officers, DPP should review the effectiveness of the current schedule and consider a pilot project with expanded overtime for off-hours surveillance.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION

Use Court Liaison Agents and Liaison Waiver Agents to improve quality and effectiveness
Court Liaison Agents represent the agent of record in court proceedings in which an offender is accused of violating the conditions of their probation. Liaison Waiver Agents do the same thing but for cases when offenders who violate the terms of their parole. In these roles, the CLU or LAW must review the case file including the probation or parole order, case notes, and pertinent documentation to prepare to represent the department in court. From their unique vantage point, they are able to identify problems with case file documentation, case notes, and the implementation of supervision standards. Often the CLU and LAW agents have to go back to the agent of record to request additional documentation or secure the documentation themselves. It would be very helpful from an organizational learning and quality improvement perspective if the problems CLU and LAW agents find with case files could be documented in a systematic manner so that DPP leadership could use the information to identify areas where additional training or policy clarification are needed. We strongly recommend that the quality control information collected through this process be used solely for organizational improvement and not to punish agents.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Many of the recommendations for improved efficiency come from the focus groups. As such they reflect the opinions and perceptions of those who participated in the groups. For the most part, problems identified through the focus groups were common across groups. DPP should take the recommendations that result from the focus groups as a starting point for any efforts to improve efficiency in the organization.

The Schaefer Center was hired to conduct the Parole and Probation Agent Workload Study April 1, 2014 by the Director of Community Supervision Support. At the time, local parole and probation offices were organized into three regions: North, Central, and South; each region was supervised by a Regional Director. The Regional Directors also supervised the corrections facility in their region. The Division of Pre-Trial Detention Services reported to the Director of the Central Region. The Office of Community Supervision Support provided support services for the parole and probation functions at the direction of the Deputy Secretary for Operations.

The regional organizational structure was created to take advantage of expected efficiencies in the new Offender Case Management System (OCMS) that was developed to track offenders from pre-trial, through custody, and supervision. It was expected that the reorganization would allow better offender management and achieve cost savings through the reduction of duplicated services.

During the data collection and analysis phases of study and most of the report writing phase, the parole and probation supervision function was organized regionally.

In April of 2015, about six weeks after the final draft of the study was submitted, the supervision of offenders was reorganized back to a functional structure with the Division of Pretrial Detention, Division of Correction, and the Division of Parole and Probation.

Table 2 below summarizes the recent history of DPSCS' organizational structure as it relates to offender supervision. For the purposes of this report DPP-2012 is used to refer to the organization as it existed prior to the 2012 reorganization, CS is used to refer to the organization during the period from October 1 2012 – April 17, 2015, and DPP is used to refer the organization in its current structure.

Table 2: Recent History of DPSCS Reorganizations		
Organization Title	**Effective Date**	**Key Features**
Division of Parole and Probation Acronym used in report (DPP-2012)	Prior to October 1, 2012	• The custody and supervision of offenders was organized functionally in three divisions: Division of Corrections; Division of Parole and Probation; and the Division of Pre-Trial and Detention. • The local parole and probation officers reported to the Division of Parole and Probation. • The Division of Correctional Services and the Division each used its own software to track offenders.
Office of Community Supervision Acronym used in report (CS)	Effective October 1, 2012[11]	• DPSCS' offender supervision functions were reorganized into 3 regions: North; Central; and South. • The Director of each region reported to the DPSCS Deputy Director of Operations. • Key functions of human resources, human resources, were moved to the Office of the Secretary budget and administration • The Director of Community Supervision Support provided support services for parole and probation. • In each region, the Corrections Operations units and the Community Supervision (Formerly Parole and Probation) offices reported to the regional director. The Division of Pre Trial Detention Services was included in the Central Region. • The reorganization was viewed as a way to leverage the new Offender Case Management System (OCMS) and improve offender management.

[11] House Bill 198 which took effect on October 1, 2012, gave authority to the Deputy Secretary of DPSCS to "exercise any power, duty, or responsibility, or function of any unit, unit head, or appointing officer in the Department." This expanded authority was required to implement the reorganization of offender supervision into the regional structure.

Table 2: Recent History of DPSCS Reorganizations

Organization Title	Effective Date	Key Features
		• During the time of the study, parole and probation agents were using OCMS and the legacy parolee/probationer data management system.
Division of Parole and Probation Acronym used in report (DPP-II)	April 17, 2015	• The custody and supervision of offenders was reorganized from a regional structure back to a functional structure with three divisions: Division of Corrections; Division of Parole and Probation; and the Division of Pre-Trial and Detention. • The local parole and probation officers report to the Division of Parole and Probation. • The Division of Correctional Services and the Division each used its own software to track offenders.