
Introduction

Minnesotans are concerned about—and often fearful of—sex offenders who live in their communities. In response to heightened concerns, there have been many changes in state laws during the past two decades. For example, the Legislature has set stricter criminal sentences for convicted sex offenders, initiated a statewide registry of information about known sex offenders, and established public notification procedures regarding sex offenders released from prison.

Minnesota relies considerably on the Minnesota Department of Corrections and various county corrections agencies to supervise convicted sex offenders, but there has been limited legislative review of the extent and nature of this supervision. Thus, in April 2004, the Legislative Audit Commission directed our office to assess community-based supervision by corrections agencies, in addition to looking at related issues such as treatment and transitional housing. Our evaluation addressed the following questions:

- **How many sex offenders live in Minnesota communities? To what extent are these offenders subject to supervision by community-based corrections agencies?**
- **Is there adequate supervision of sex offenders who are under correctional supervision in Minnesota communities? Is there sufficient statewide coordination of sex offender supervision practices?**
- **Is there a sufficient amount of community-based treatment available for sex offenders? Does the Minnesota Department of Corrections conduct enough oversight and evaluation of sex offender treatment programs?**
- **Has there been adequate transitional housing for sex offenders released from prison?**

To help us examine the nature and extent of supervision, we reviewed a random sample of nearly 300 cases involving individual adult sex offenders who were under the supervision of six corrections agencies in June 2004.¹ These agencies accounted for about 80 percent of the adult sex offenders under community supervision. We examined offenders' court-assigned or Department of Corrections-assigned "conditions of supervision," the number and types of agent-offender contacts, and records of treatment, polygraphs, and drug/alcohol tests. We talked with more than 50 probation officers about individual cases, plus we interviewed many corrections agency supervisors about more general issues.

¹ The six supervising agencies were Hennepin, Ramsey, Dakota, and Dodge-Fillmore-Olmsted Community Corrections, Arrowhead Regional Community Corrections, and the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

We also collected information through several surveys. First, we surveyed directors of Community Corrections Act (CCA) agencies and Department of Corrections (DOC) field offices to determine which of their individual staff were supervising sex offenders. Second, we surveyed halfway house directors to obtain information regarding offenders on supervised release who lived at these facilities during calendar year 2003. Third, we surveyed CCA and DOC agency directors about the nature of their agencies' sex offender supervision activities and their perceptions about supervision, treatment, and other services. In each of these surveys, we obtained responses from 100 percent of the directors.² An appendix to this report provides additional details on our case reviews and surveys.

For our statewide analyses of the number of sex offenders in the community, we relied primarily on two sources of data. First, to identify offenders who were under community correctional supervision for a sex offense in June 2004, we obtained data from the Minnesota Department of Corrections' Statewide Supervision System. This information system has data on all offenders under supervision in Minnesota's 87 counties. Second, we obtained information from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension on offenders who were registered as predatory offenders in June 2004.

In addition, we obtained criminal sentencing data from the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission, and we obtained statewide data from the Minnesota Department of Corrections regarding expenditures, grants, and offenders released from prison. We also reviewed previous research on sex offender assessment, supervision, treatment, and recidivism.

Chapter 1 provides a context for the rest of the report—discussing sex offender laws and sentencing practices, Minnesota's community corrections structure, estimates of Minnesota's number of sex offenders, and information on offender characteristics and recidivism. Chapter 2 discusses how sex offenders are supervised by community corrections agencies in Minnesota. Chapter 3 examines the extent to which sex offender treatment programs meet the needs of offenders on probation or supervised release. Chapter 4 discusses other issues, including transitional housing, statewide policy coordination, and state funding.

It is worth noting several issues that were outside the scope of our study. We did not evaluate sex offender sentencing policies, although we comment in Chapter 2 on the requirements of supervision that are contained in sentencing orders and prison release plans. We did not evaluate individual sex offender treatment programs, but Chapter 3 examines treatment-related issues from a statewide perspective. We also did not evaluate the content or quality of prison-based sex offender treatment, but we examined the availability of this treatment. We did not examine the process by which DOC assesses inmates' recidivism risks prior to their release from prison, although we examined issues pertaining to the sex offender assessments conducted by community-based corrections agencies (or their contractors). We did not evaluate how well Minnesota's laws regarding

² We surveyed directors of 12 DOC agencies (from 11 district offices and the Intensive Supervised Release unit) and 15 CCA agencies. (We solicited information from one additional CCA agency—representing Rock and Nobles counties—but this agency has an agreement with DOC to supervise adult, felony-level sex offenders. Thus, the director of this agency deferred to DOC for our August 2004 questionnaire regarding agency practices.) We also surveyed the directors of all four halfway houses that had contracts with DOC during 2003.

predatory offender registration and community notification are working, but Chapter 1 briefly describes these laws. In addition, we did not evaluate the process by which offenders are referred for civil commitment. Most of our research focused on adult sex offenders' supervision and treatment, although we also solicited suggestions from corrections officials regarding juvenile offenders. Finally, Chapter 1 discusses previous research on sex offender recidivism, but we did not conduct new research on sex offender recidivism for this study.