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# Minnesota's Diverse Probation System Complicates Funding Options

## SUMMARY

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**T**he nature and scope of probation services vary considerably across Minnesota, according to a study by the Legislative Auditor. Such variations reflect the fact that 42 separately-administered probation agencies have designed services to meet their own preferences and the expectations of the courts and communities they serve.

There may be advantages to this diversity, but it also complicates the task of developing a uniform method of allocating state probation funds. The 1995 Legislature asked the Legislative Auditor to examine ways to distribute newly-appropriated probation funds "based on uniform workload standards and level of risk of individual offenders." Currently, however, Minnesota probation agencies use varying approaches to evaluate offender risk and determine the levels of supervision needed by the nearly 100,000 adults and juveniles on

probation in Minnesota. The study concludes that if the Legislature is interested in allocating funds based on uniform risk assessments of individual offenders, this approach would take time to implement and could not be used to allocate state probation funds in 1996.

The study also found that the use of probation varies considerably across Minnesota. In 1994, Minnesota had 24.6 adults on probation statewide per 1,000 population, which was more than all but four states. The number of adults on probation per 1,000 residents ranged from 2.9 to 52.4 in individual counties, largely reflecting differing judicial practices. There were particularly large variations in the use of probation for juveniles and adult misdemeanants.

In addition, the study found variation in the types of services provided by probation offices, including the

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**Funding for Probation Services**  
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**Key Findings:**

- Minnesota uses probation more than most other states.
- The nature and scope of probation services vary considerably across Minnesota, contributing to differences in probation workloads.
- It would not be possible to allocate probation funds in 1996 based on uniform offender assessments, but there are several other funding options.

**Recommendations:**

- The Legislature should require service providers to monitor offender outcomes, implement offender classification policies, and keep more consistent caseload information.

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number of presentence investigations conducted for the courts, the frequency of contacts with offenders, and the range of duties for which probation officers are responsible. Consequently, while it would be possible to determine the average time that probation officers statewide spend with certain categories of offenders, it is likely that many service providers would vary from such averages considerably.

According to the Legislative Auditor, few Minnesota probation agencies systematically measure and report on the outcomes of their services. For example, while many agencies classify persons on probation based on their risk of reoffending, few agencies measure actual rates of recidivism.

The report discusses several options for allocating state probation funds in the absence of a uniform offender classification system. None would perfectly reflect the risks of offenders or the workloads of probation agencies, but they represent plausible options for

allocating funds, at least for the short-term. The study estimates that all of the options examined would provide a larger share of new probation funds to Minnesota's 31 Community Corrections Act counties than the percentage of total state funds for probation services that these counties now spend.

The report recommends several actions that the Legislature should take to improve accountability, regardless of the funding option selected. Specifically, the Legislature should clarify the state's probation goals, require service providers to report on outcomes and keep more consistent caseload information, and clarify the respective roles of county probation offices and the Department of Corrections.

Copies of the report, entitled *Funding for Probation Services*, may be obtained from the Office of the Legislative Auditor. A summary may be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/probat.htm>. For further information, contact Joel Alter or Roger Brooks at the Office of the Legislative Auditor (612/296-4708).



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