

Minutes of Meeting
of Members of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission
Research Subcommittee
March 25, 2011
Central Connecticut State University

A meeting of members of the Research Subcommittee met at 9:00 AM on Friday, March 25, 2011, at The Student Center, Central Connecticut State University, 1615 Stanley Street, New Britain. Members in attendance were the Honorable Joseph M. Shortall, chair of the Commission, Susan Pease (CCSU), Susan Storey (Chief Public Defender), Michael Norko (DMHAS), Kevin Kane (Chief State's Attorney), William Carbone (CSSD), and Thomas J. Ullmann (Public Defenders)

Also in attendance were representatives from criminal justice agencies and potential research partners who had expressed an interest in working with the Commission on research projects. Buck Grimes(CSG), Gary Wollman (CJIS GB), Sean Thakkar(CJIS GB), Brian Hill (CSSD), Steve Cox (CCSU), Donna Decker Morris (Univ. of New Haven), Andrew Clark (CCSU), Sarah Russell (Quinnipiac Law School), Amy Meek (Yale Law School) , Amy Smoyer(Yale School of Public Health).

Judge Shortall addressed the committee and asked that the University Deans provide more detailed information regarding the resources each University could provide the committee. He also distributed the Memorandums of Understanding between the Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission and Pennsylvania State University and Duquesne University Law School.

Sean Thakkar summarized the available data through the Criminal Justice Information System.

First it was agreed that a knowledge and resource base needs to be established in a central location that can be easily accessed by the Commission. A significant amount of research has already been conducted by a variety of scholars working closely with criminal justice agencies. These technical reports and publications should be organized and catalogued by subject area and made available to the Commission and researchers on line.

There are several data sources housed in different state agencies. The group agreed that it would be helpful to have a list of the different data sources and the name and contact information of data managers in a central location.

In addition, it would be helpful to prepare a literature review and bibliography of up to date material on sentencing. Perhaps a graduate student or students working under the supervision of one or more of our research partners would be interesting in pursuing such a project as an independent study, thesis, or course requirement.

The group spent some time brainstorming and discussing a variety of topics of interest to members. Some areas for research that were discussed included:

- An examination of why there appears to be a significant increase in the pre-trial population being detained
- Determining the impact of mandatory sentencing at all stages of the criminal justice system
- There was a suggestion to consider conducting a cross court comparison of sentencing outcomes.
- There was discussion regarding the social and economic costs of incarcerating women particularly those with minor children. What is the economic cost per year and how do we calculate the social costs in terms of community instability, lost ties to employment, and the psychological and social development of the minor children.
- The issue was raised about whether we were handling older offenders in the most efficient and cost effective manner.
- There was a question regarding the impact of intervention programs. For example when dealing with DWI pre-trial interventions there are three options available and we don't know which option has the most positive outcome.
- It was suggested that the research addressing the effectiveness of jail diversion in Connecticut be updated.
- The issue of sentencing disparity was discussed and the following emerged as an important area for study:

There are occasions when what might appear as sentence disparity is not disparity at all but the product of plea bargaining. It was suggested that an examination be made of the facts underlying the instant offense and the seriousness of the instant offense be coded. When comparisons are made of sentencing outcomes the seriousness of the instant offense should be taken into consideration. For example, someone may have been initially arrested for a serious sexual assault that was plea bargained to a simple assault. Yet, there may appear to be disparity

when this sentence is compared to other sentences for simple assault. If the instant offense were coded for seriousness, then the comparisons could be made based on the underlying facts of the instant offense rather than the plea bargained outcome. The research question is: to what extent are variations in sentencing outcomes explained by variations in the seriousness in the instant offense as determined by an examination of the underlying facts?

Next steps:

Determine a central location for agency heads to send a paragraph description of any data bases maintained in their agency and the name and contact information of the data manager.

Determine a central location for agency heads to forward any research/technical reports they had conducted that would be of interest to the Commission.

A file consisting of the resources offered by the Universities and resumes of research faculty and practitioners is being prepared by Susan Pease in electronic and paper form.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan E. Pease, Ph.D.