

Chief Justice and Alabama Sentencing Commission Announce Pilot

Sites for Community Punishment Project

Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb and the Alabama Sentencing Commission announced the selection of four local jurisdictions to participate in the first phase of the Cooperative Community Alternative Sentencing Project (CCASP), a project focused on building a broad range of effective community-based punishment and intervention programs in Alabama. The Statewide Steering Committee, made up of key criminal justice stakeholders at both the local and state levels, invited all interested jurisdictions in the State to apply to become the initial pilot sites to participate in this project. From a competitive field of applicants, the Statewide Steering Committee selected Lawrence, Jefferson, Marshall, and Montgomery Counties to participate as pilot sites in this innovative project. Through a collaborative effort at the local level, these jurisdictions will build model community-based supervision and punishment programs, defining the responsibilities and services provided by local and state agencies at each stage of the continuum of graduated sanctions. Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb was pleased to see such a high level of interest and commitment expressed by all of the jurisdictions that applied to participate. Emphasizing the importance of this project to our state, she said: “We recognize that a clear continuum of community-based punishment and intervention programs has the potential to protect public safety by reducing recidivism and making more effective use of limited state and local resources. Through cooperative efforts such as this, we can provide more effective treatment and intervention programs, thereby doing the hard work of fixing people instead of simply filling prisons, and thus making for a safer Alabama.”

Chief Justice Cobb appointed Judge Philip Reich, III, Presiding Circuit Judge of the 36th Judicial Circuit, as Chair of the Local Steering Committee for Lawrence County, which will be the first pilot site in the Project. Each site will receive national technical assistance and engage in facilitated strategic planning, that include a research and data analysis on its criminal justice population and development of a comprehensive community corrections plan tailored to the local jurisdiction's needs. Judge Reich led the effort from his jurisdiction, commenting that, "Lawrence County is ready, willing and able to build the best community supervision program in the State of Alabama. Through these programs, we will hold the offender accountable, while at the same time reducing recidivism and improving public safety. We can offer the offender hope of sobriety, meaningful employment and the ability to pay fines, costs and restitution, and also support their own family."

The goals of the CCASP are to decrease local and state incarceration costs by reducing recidivism and diverting non-violent prison-bound offenders into community-based programs, improve offender accountability to their communities and victims, and to move the state towards achieving truth-in-sentencing by ensuring sufficient prison capacity to incarcerate serious and violent offender for an appropriate length of time.

The Alabama Sentencing Commission is charged with the task of implementing voluntary truth-in-sentencing standards. It is anticipated that such standards will divert appropriate non-violent prison-bound offenders into community-based punishment options while lengthening the time-served for serious violent offenders. Critical to the

success of truth-in-sentencing, and to avert even further prison over-crowding, the State of Alabama must first develop an effective continuum of community-based punishment options to divert low-level prison-bound offenders. The CCASP is designed to create that continuum of community-based punishment options in each local jurisdiction.

The CCASP will receive technical assistance from two national groups, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) and the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI). Both groups are supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project. Vera and CJI will offer technical assistance, research and planning services to the CCASP, on both the state and local levels. These consultants are dedicated to assisting states such as Alabama in their reform efforts by importing lessons about approaches and structures, encouraging data-driven decision-making, and facilitating discussions informed by their knowledge of the national criminal justice landscape and experience advancing system change.