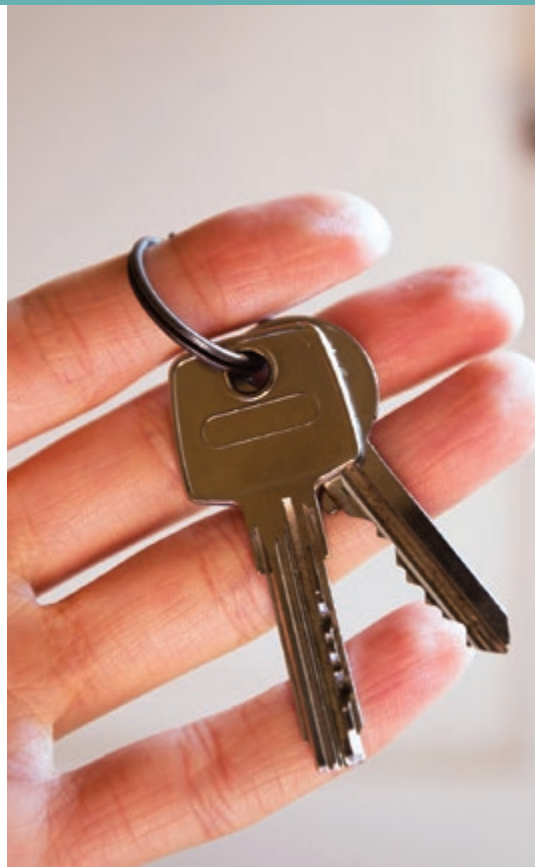


Graduated Reintegration: Smoothing the Transition from Prison to Community

Angela Hawken and Mark A. R. Kleiman



MISSION STATEMENT

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We believe that today's increasingly competitive global economy demands public policy ideas commensurate with the challenges of the 21st Century. The Project's economic strategy reflects a judgment that long-term prosperity is best achieved by fostering economic growth and broad participation in that growth, by enhancing individual economic security, and by embracing a role for effective government in making needed public investments.

Our strategy calls for combining public investment, a secure social safety net, and fiscal discipline. In that framework, the Project puts forward innovative proposals from leading economic thinkers — based on credible evidence and experience, not ideology or doctrine — to introduce new and effective policy options into the national debate.

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NOTE: This policy proposal is a proposal from the author(s). As emphasized in The Hamilton Project's original strategy paper, the Project was designed in part to provide a forum for leading thinkers across the nation to put forward innovative and potentially important economic policy ideas that share the Project's broad goals of promoting economic growth, broad-based participation in growth, and economic security. The author(s) are invited to express their own ideas in policy proposals, whether or not the Project's staff or advisory council agrees with the specific proposal. This policy proposal is offered in that spirit.

BROOKINGS

Abstract

High recidivism rates—some 50 percent of released prisoners return within three years—constitute a major factor driving both high crime rates and high incarceration rates. The unduly sudden process of prisoner release contributes to recidivism by confronting releasees with unnecessarily difficult problems of subsistence and adjustment.

Graduated Reintegration addresses that problem by making the release process less sudden. This paper offers a proposal to pilot and evaluate Graduated Reintegration, which would move prisoners from their cells to supported housing before what otherwise would have been their release dates. Participants would be subject to prison-like rules (curfew, position monitoring, drug testing, no use of cash, directed job search) enforced by a system of swift, certain, and fair rewards and sanctions. Compliance and achievement would be rewarded with increased freedom, and noncompliance sanctioned with temporarily increase restriction. Graduated Reintegration aims to transform the releasee continuously rather than suddenly from a prisoner in a cell to an ordinary resident with an apartment and a job.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In 2014, approximately 600,000 of the 1.6 million people serving state or federal prison sentences in the United States were released (Carson 2015). Half of releasees will return within three years, either for new crimes or for violating the conditions of their release (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS] 2014). Those who have already been imprisoned more than once are at even higher risk of return (Rhodes et al. 2016).

Failure on reentry is tragic for the person re-incarcerated and those who care about him, expensive for the state, and potentially catastrophic for victims of crime. Failure and return also contribute to high rates of incarceration in the United States; parole violators account for more than one quarter of prison admissions (Carson 2015).

The current process of release from prison creates far too abrupt a transition from being confined and cared for to being free but needing to find shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and a job to pay for these necessities.

The proposal here called “graduated reintegration” (GR) would, for some prisoners, replace the current system of incarceration, release, and post-release supervision. Instead, prisoners would undergo shorter prison stays followed by release to supported housing, with very close supervision enforced by a system of swift, certain, and fair rewards and sanctions. Rewards would take the form of progressively looser rules, leading eventually

to the termination of supervision. The transition from being a prisoner in a cell to being a free person with conventional housing and a conventional job would thus be gradual rather than abrupt. If the process works as intended, it will decrease the prison population, reduce crime, and improve outcomes for those leaving prison as well as for their families and neighbors.

GR draws elements from work-release, furlough programs, halfway houses, and home confinement; from swift-certain-fair community supervision; and from services-oriented reentry programs that focus on jobs and housing. Past experience with each of those approaches can help guide program design. But the ensemble is new, and the details of GR need to be worked out in practice by correctional officials—including frontline staff—social service providers, and the releasees themselves. The program might need to try several different approaches before finding one that works satisfactorily with a specific group of releasees in a specific jurisdiction, and it is likely that different designs will prove optimal in different situations.

The state of Illinois will undertake the first practical test of GR starting in the winter of 2016–17. Evidence from this and other implementations of GR will be critical in making the proposal work as effectively as possible.¹

Chapter 2. The Challenge

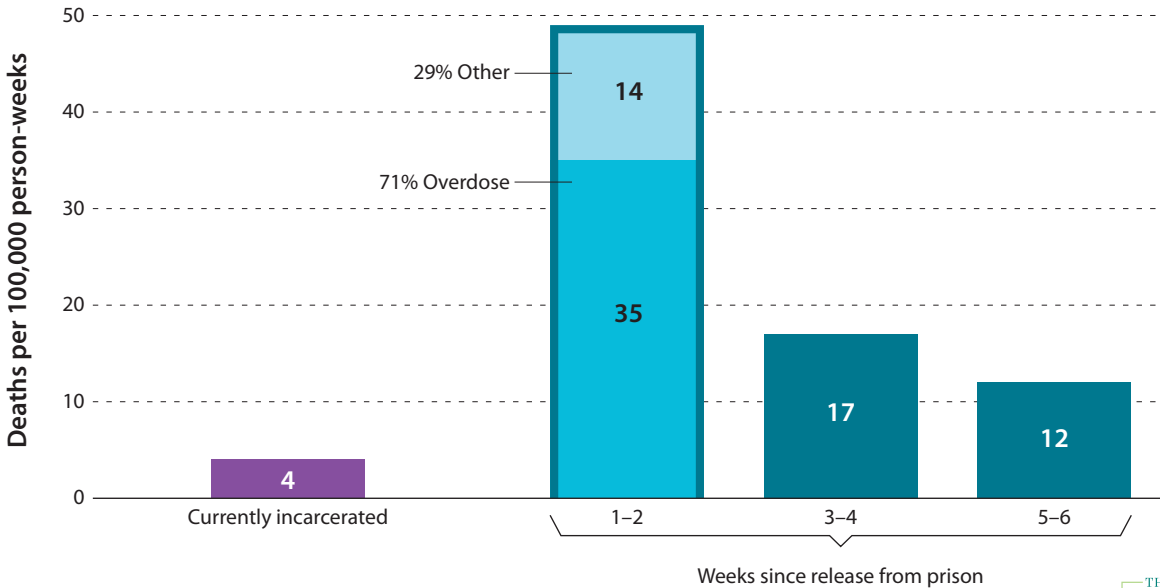
Far too often, individuals are released from prison with little or no real support provided for their reintegration into the community. The transition they are expected to make—from complete lack of control to complete autonomy—is fraught with difficulties that impair their chances of success. In the immediate wake of release from prison, releasees experience tremendous stress, as shown by high criminal recidivism, by a high risk of homelessness, and even by sharply elevated mortality.

The current process of abruptly moving a prisoner from a cell—in some cases, even from solitary confinement—to freedom under (at most) parole supervision, and with rather minimal transition help, seems destined for failure.² Releasees are regularly deposited outside prison walls with a one-way bus ticket; most but not all states provide assistance with transport from the prison. Releasees are also given a bare minimum of “gate money,” which is typically less than \$100, but can sometimes be nothing at all.

In addition, prisoners are sometimes released wearing clothing that marks their status almost as clearly as would a prison uniform, rather than clothing that would help them find jobs. If they have preexisting medical problems, they leave prison with at best a limited supply of the prescription medications they require and inadequate preparation for applying to Medicaid or other insurance plans. Many exit prisons with chronic illnesses or serious mental health challenges and no appropriate handoff for continuing care; failure to maintain a regiment of antipsychotics, for example, puts the releasee and the public at risk. Many have been exposed to tuberculosis, HIV, and hepatitis C in prison, but few are tested for these conditions before release.

Lack of transition planning means that prisoners frequently leave incarceration without even adequate identification documents, presenting a barrier to their ability to access

FIGURE 1. Mortality Rates by Incarceration Status and Time since Release



Sources: Binswanger et al. 2007; authors' calculations.
 Note: Results are for the incarcerated population in the state of Washington from July 1999 to December 2003.

services and employment. Releasees often lack the means to navigate the administrative path to obtain a state identification card. While release plans formulated to guarantee housing with family members or in institutional settings such as halfway houses are common, they are not universal, nor is there enough oversight to make sure ex-prisoners actually have beds to sleep on and meals to eat the night they are released. Very few release plans include a path to employment, and even work-release programs do not guarantee job security after release.

Too little attention is given to factors such as the time of day at which prisoners are released or the locations of release centers. Failure to account for these factors means that individuals being released might be unable to find housing or show up at their first parole meetings. Many releasees quickly become homeless. The process also puts these releasees, especially women, at risk of victimization.

To call the process “stressful” is no exaggeration. Serum cortisol (a physiological measure of stress) rises in inmates during the period just before release from prison (Claudon and Masclet 2005), suggesting that as much as prisoners want to get out, they also recognize the extent to which they are ill prepared for release. And they are not wrong to be fearful. In the first month of liberty, releasees die at 13 times the rate of others with similar characteristics in the same neighborhoods

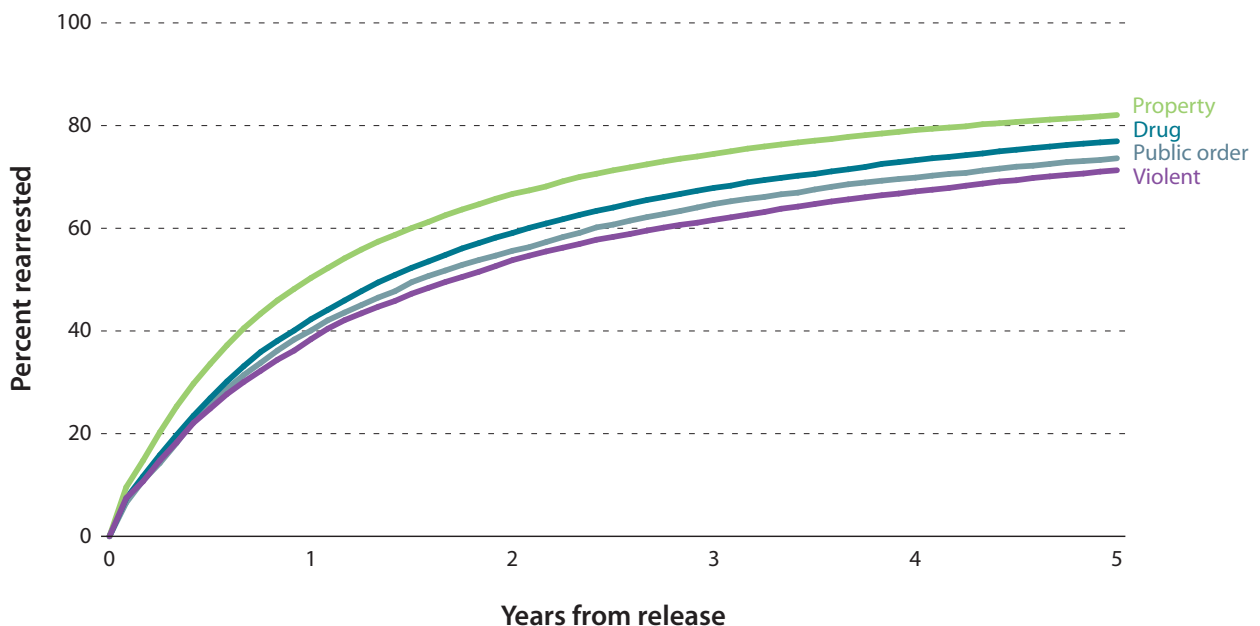
(Binswanger et al. 2007). The most prevalent causes of death are injury (suicide, homicide, and accident), drug overdose, and cardiovascular disease.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this moment of extreme stress is associated with high rates of relapse into criminal activity, with the risk of return concentrated in the months immediately following release. In California, 74 percent of those who committed a new crime within three years of release did so during their first year out. National statistics reveal similar patterns, as shown in figure 1. This suggests that a focus on the months immediately following release might yield substantial benefit.

A study of inmates released from California state prisons showed a three-year return rate (defined as returned to state prison) of 44 percent for first-time releases, compared with 69 percent for rereleases (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2015). When recidivism is measured in terms of rearrests, rates of reoffending are high across crime categories: as shown in figure 2, 82 percent of those who served sentences related to property crimes and 71 percent of those who served for violent offenses are rearrested within five years (BJS 2014).

Recidivism statistics are inflated by individuals who cycle in and out of the criminal justice system (Gaes et al. 2015).

FIGURE 2.
Recidivism of Prisoners, by Most Serious Commitment Offense



Source: BJS 2014.

Note: Monthly data are reported for state prisoners released in 2005, and prisoners are tracked for five years following release. Public order includes 0.8 percent of cases in which the prisoner’s most serious offense was unspecified.

Targeting resources and crime control strategies at these high utilizers has the potential to slash recidivism rates and prison budgets.

Even releasees who do not return to crime might nonetheless return to prison. The current system of post-release supervision generates a high rate of return to prison for technical violations (Burke and Tonry 2006; Gaes et al. 2015). 28 percent of new admissions to state prisons are for parole violations (BJS 2015). Parole (or other supervised release) tends to have many rules, some of which are burdensome and not properly customized to reduce reoffending. Additionally, inadequate monitoring and enforcement means that many violations go undetected; when they are discovered, the system lacks a means to punish the behavior other than return to incarceration. Here as elsewhere in the criminal justice system, random draconianism is a bad substitute for swift, certain, and fair responses to misconduct.

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Why is it undesirable to confront releasees with small chances of a severe outcome (i.e., re-incarceration) rather than high chances of more moderate consequences? The economic theory of crime (Becker 1968) implies that the likelihood of punishment and its severity are substitutes, and a person contemplating a criminal act will be deterred by either. On the other hand, Cesare Beccaria ([1764] 1963) argued that swiftness and certainty are relatively important, and severity relatively unimportant, in deterring crime. The actual deterrent effects of punishment likelihood versus severity is a question that can be settled only by empirical research. Though researchers have in some cases found that punishment severity deters criminal activity (Kessler and Levitt 1999) and specifically recidivism (Drago, Galbiati, and Vertova 2009), certainty of apprehension generally matters more than the severity of punishment (Doob and Webster 2003; Nagin 2013; Witte 1980).

Thus it seems likely that the current system, with its low probability of misconduct detection during parole but high severity of punishment in the event of detection, could be significantly improved.

PROBLEMS WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF RELEASE SUPPORT

More attention has been paid of late to release planning and to services in the crucial hours immediately following release. Some correctional departments are assisting new releasees by providing them with access to transition centers. The services provided through these transition centers vary, but most offer support for job search, life-skills training, and locating drug treatment and mental health services providers; some even have primary health care on site. Some correctional departments are providing short-term housing vouchers, varying in duration from a few nights to a few months following release. Other new programs are focusing on more-intensive direct contact on release. The First 72 Plus program in Louisiana provides food, clothing, and transportation during the first three days after release and afterwards; however, the program serves only inmates who can secure a referral. The Seattle Police Department is preparing to launch a similar pilot, relying on volunteer officers who will serve as community mentors and help new releasees navigate their first three days of freedom. But most inmates leave prison without the benefit of such interventions.

A variety of services-oriented reentry programs have attracted both attention and funding, but the results have been mixed (Visher et al. 2016; Hunter et al. 2015; Cook et al. 2015).

Integrating services with supervision remains a difficult problem. Funding for services is limited, and in cases when funding is available, often local service slots are not or waitlists are long (Peles et al. 2013; Sigmon 2014). And in many places there is a philosophical objection toward a service orientation from frontline supervision staff, many of whom—considering their primary responsibility to be law enforcement—resist adopting a more supportive role.

UNDERSTANDING THE GRADUATED REINTEGRATION TARGET POPULATION

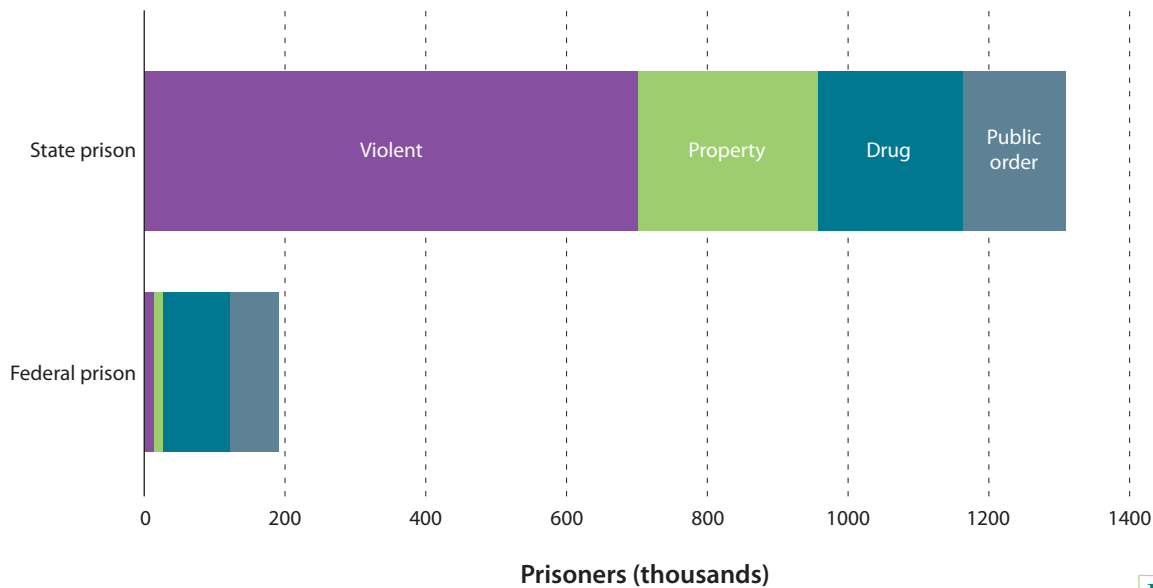
Reducing sentence length while protecting public safety is challenging; half of those now confined are serving time for violent crimes, as shown in figure 3.

Changes in law and policy affecting the actual conviction and sentencing process could reduce the number of people confined, the average length of confinement, and perhaps the racial/ethnic disparities in incarceration; these front-end approaches have attracted substantial attention. But there is

also work to be done on the back end of the system: decreasing the number of those who return to custody as punishment for violating the conditions of supervised release or for committing new crimes.

By contrast to the overall prison population shown in figure 3, the population of those leaving prison is much less likely to have been imprisoned for violent offenses. Because sentences are longer for those convicted of violent offenses, they make up a smaller portion of releasees than they do of the overall prison population (BJS 2014).

FIGURE 3.
Prison Populations, by Most Serious Commitment Offense



Source: Carson 2015.

Note: Prison population numbers are reported for 2014. Public order includes weapons offenses, driving under the influence, and "other public order" offenses.



Chapter 3. The Proposal: Graduated Reintegration

The current release process demands that prisoners make too sudden a transition from round-the-clock supervision and support to liberty and self-sufficiency, requiring more coping capacity—both cognitive and emotional—than many of them have at the time of reentry. Making the process more gradual and more comprehensible to releasees, and providing resources—especially housing—and structure to cushion the transition will promote more-successful reintegration. Since stable employment in the licit market turns out to be a strong predictor of desistance from offending and non-return to incarceration, a well-designed release process would focus on employment.

We propose to conduct pilot programs exploring the potential of a more gradual transition out of incarceration. These pilots would explore the impact of GR in a variety of settings, building an evidence base that would both hone the details of the program and facilitate its extension to the broader incarcerated population.

KEY CONCEPTS

Graduated Reintegration is designed to shorten prison stays while providing both supervision and services designed to make the transition into the community successful. Its principles are:

- Early physical release from prison into assigned and supported housing;
- Retention of prisoner status until the original earned release date;
- Closely monitored initial release conditions, including movement restrictions, limitations on visitors, position monitoring, alcohol and other drug testing, and restrictions on the use of cash;
- Swift and certain rewards for compliance and achievement (in the form of relaxed restrictions) and sanctions for noncompliance (in the form of tightened restrictions);
- No return to prison except for new crimes, absconding, or deliberately and repeatedly flouting the rules;

- A subsistence allowance, provided as a debit card or electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card usable for approved purchase categories;
- Encouragement and help in seeking and holding employment; and
- Encouragement and help in forming pro-social relationships and advancing in education and skill.

SUPERVISION

Graduated reintegration should start long before the prisoner leaves the institution. Inmates should know about GR and have the ability to move toward eligibility: in effect, eligibility for early release should be a reward for compliance and accomplishment. That would set the stage for post-release conditions designed to offer resources and incentives for pro-social behavior. Moreover, some forms of release preparation are more effectively and easily done while a person is incarcerated.³

An ideal GR process would commence with merit-based selection of inmates for prerelease training and, eventually, transition—during a period when they otherwise would have been in prison—to paid-for apartments in the community. This living situation would allow releasees to work and reestablish controlled social interactions, but would also allow enforcement, through electronic monitoring, drug testing, and a clearly articulated set of rules with swift and predictable responses to violations and equally predictable rewards for success. Return to custody would be reserved for those who commit new crimes and those who deliberately refuse to abide by the rules (e.g., by absconding), as opposed to those who merely violate the rules occasionally, as most probably will.

Evidence is still mixed as to whether electronic monitoring reduces recidivism compared to traditional forms of supervision (Avdija and Lee 2014; Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, and Rooney 1999; Byrne, Lurigio, and Baird 1989; Renzema and Mayo-Wilson 2005; Roman et al. 2012; National Institute of Justice 2011). It is also expensive relative to normal post-release supervision: at \$4 per day, the cost of electronic monitoring would be about half the parole budget for an individual (Bales et al. 2010; Roman et al. 2012). Since GR would be implemented in place of much-more-expensive

incarceration, adding the cost of electronic monitoring to the GR budget would not be a deal-breaker and electronic monitoring under GR would be used in a very different way than under traditional supervision.

Supervision under GR differs from most forms of supervised release in its use of rewards and sanctions to encourage compliance and achievement. Most systems of post-release supervision suffer from twin deficits: insufficient capacity to monitor compliance (leading to most noncompliance going unobserved) and a sanctioning system that is not swift or predictable and in many cases too severe. In particular, if the primary sanction is re-incarceration, officials will reasonably choose to ignore many infractions rather than to respond drastically. Ideally, sanctions should be designed to enhance, rather than interfere with, the releasee's progress back into normal civil life. Current supervision processes also make too little use of rewards, as opposed to sanctions.

When the level of restriction is excessively loose, it fails to provide adequate structure, leading to an excess of choices, straining the client's cognitive and emotional capacity, and risking failure. When it is too tight, it makes a different sort of excessive demand: a typical parolee is supposed to be able to remember and observe numerous different rules and regulations. When excessively tight restrictions result in re-incarceration, this can also interfere with the reintegration process, for example by causing participants to lose jobs.

The optimal level of restriction will not be the same for all participants or for any given participant over time. As the participant's capacity to manage his own affairs improves, he will function better under a less restrictive regime. The ideal system would therefore be self-adjusting, modifying the restriction level in response to each participant's demonstrated success or failure.

The GR model is designed to resolve the rewards-and-sanctions problem and the self-adjustment problem by using reduced restriction—increased liberty—as the primary reward, and (temporarily) tightened restriction as the primary sanction. Participants are, in effect, invited to earn their freedom. Participants would gradually gain more independence as part of the reward system, transitioning steadily from being prisoners to being people with jobs, homes, savings, and the experience of successful independent life in the community.

For example, the initial post-release condition might require participants to be at home from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. except for rather tightly defined pro-social activities. Violations could lead to an earlier curfew, or even restriction to the apartment for a period of time, perhaps a weekend.

Conversely, a week's compliance with program terms might earn a relaxation of the curfew to 6:30 p.m. Alternatively,

such a relaxation could be one of several available, at the participant's option. Other options might include having a visitor or increased flexibility in the use of the participant's weekly budget. New technologies such as tablets (there are now many tablet pilots under way in custody, even in the most restrictive settings), provide an efficient vehicle for delivering reintegration programming, as well as rewards for compliance, such as earning opportunities to download movies or music. A tablet could also provide an alternative use of evenings not spent on the street due to curfew.

By the same token, infractions could be sanctioned by tightening conditions, starting with removing relaxations previously earned. Re-incarceration would be reserved for new crimes or for violations that amount to a refusal (rather than merely a failure) to abide by the program's rules: absconding, or violating a condition previously imposed as a sanction (e.g., walking away from a period of home confinement).

The design of a rewards-and-sanctions schedule is among the central tasks involved in setting up a GR program. Experience in other settings strongly suggests that having prisoners participate in that design process would not only increase the perceived fairness of the resulting system, but also do a better job of identifying relevant rewards and sanctions. It seems likely that the sanctions would be largely designated by the system, while the rewards would be chosen from menus based on a points system. On the other hand, once a participant has earned some relaxed conditions, he might be offered a choice of which ones to give up as a result of having incurred a sanction.

In general, it seems best to make rewards permanent (unless forfeited by future misconduct) but sanctions temporary. This approach is intended to serve several purposes at once. If the rewards and sanctions are properly chosen, they will provide incentives for program compliance, making the rules more effective than typical probation and parole conditions. In addition, the tight coupling between behavior and consequences might have the effect of providing participants with a more predictable—and thus less-stressful—environment, perhaps even increasing participants' actual capacity for impulse control as well as their confidence in that capacity (i.e., self-efficacy). During the initial pilot phases, we expect to learn whether—and to what extent—benefits actually accrue, and also how participants vary in their responsiveness to incentives offered under a GR regime.

As already noted, the principle of earned freedom could be extended backward by using prisoners' records of behavior and accomplishments to select candidates for early release under GR. That would have a triple benefit: providing an incentive for compliance with prison rules, selecting for the program those most likely to succeed in it, and improving potential participants' chances of success by encouraging

them to do “inside” those things that best prepare them for life “outside.” One possibility is to have each newly admitted prisoner sit down with a counselor to discuss a plan of action: a set of activities that, once completed, would qualify that person for release under GR, thus shortening his prison term.⁴

SERVICES

Supervision is one half of the story of GR. The other half is services. Most important of all, GR provides housing. This not only prevents homelessness and eliminates economic pressure to commit crime to pay the rent, but also keeps releasees somewhat separated from their old social networks. This separation will have costs as well as benefits, but there is reason to think that—for many releasees—rejoining one’s old acquaintances is linked to returning to one’s old ways. For other releasees, prior friendships and family networks might help in creating a stable, lawful life; for them, GR programs should be modified accordingly (to the extent that we can distinguish among these situations). Perhaps the housing-included version of GR will prove to be optimal only for inmates who would not otherwise have suitable housing and supportive networks waiting for them. Conversely, transitional or longer-term supported work—not included in the current proposal or the pilot programs planned for Illinois—might prove to be valuable, especially for those with fewer skills, low job-readiness, and no or limited preprison employment histories. Additional experimentation and evaluation is necessary to determine whether and how supported work would be structured.

GR is also designed to provide a basic subsistence budget for food and other necessities. Again, this both helps releasees directly and reduces the complexity of the environment they need to deal with, conserving their cognitive resources. If that budget were provided in cash, it might be spent on contraband; instead, releasees would be given a debit card or EBT card with limited allowable expenditures and account reviews to ensure those rules are kept.

Of course, there is always the possibility that a participant will engage in barter, but having to do so in order to break the rules will create some additional disincentive. For some people with substance use disorder, cash serves as a use cue, and there are observable correlations between the timing of benefit checks and the timing of positive drug tests (Rosen 2011). As a potential participant told one of us, “When you’re just getting out, the most dangerous day of the week is payday.”

Participants will have many other needs: medical and dental care, mental health care, drug treatment, help in finding and keeping employment, educational services, and so on. How many of those needs should a post-release program try to meet by offering services? Also, to what extent should participants be required to avail themselves of those services? The right answers

to these questions can be determined only by experience, and are sure to vary widely from one participant to another and perhaps from one jurisdiction to another. Our proposal is to offer as many services as possible consistent with keeping the costs of the program down, but to limit mandates to accept services to situations where those who would not accept the service voluntarily, but who would accept it under mandate, would clearly benefit. One example would be someone suffering from schizophrenia who is averse to taking medication. Otherwise, we are inclined to offer services—along with incentives for the accomplishments the services are designed to facilitate—but not order releasees to use services. A participant who thinks he can find a job on his own, for example, should be allowed some time to do so before being required to accept job counseling. An intermediate option would be to require—or offer incentives for—sampling various types of services, with continuation entirely at the participant’s discretion.

Some of the essential service work can and should be done before release: general education; preparing paperwork to apply for a driver’s license or substitute photo identification card; enrollment in Medicaid or other health insurance (if eligible); provision of transitional supplies and prescriptions for necessary medicines, including maintenance opiates for those who need them; physical and mental health inventory, personality and cognitive testing, and educational inventory (to guide program design and job search).

Certain skills—such as literacy—seem to be effectively transferred post-prison, suggesting that focused prerelease training can be useful.⁵ There is room for substantial experimental work on the value of a variety of programs designed to facilitate personal change that have demonstrated value in other contexts—journaling, mindfulness practices, twelve-step programs, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)—in improving post-incarceration outcomes for various categories of releasees.

Services that cannot be effectively provided before release will have to be offered in the community, and part of the practical work of setting up a GR program would involve identifying and securing access to appropriate community and online resources.

In addition to the challenge of finding and holding employment, GR participants face the challenge of establishing social connections that will be helpful rather than harmful to the project of reintegration into law-abiding society. Finding community groups (e.g., hobby-oriented associations) willing to provide mentorship is one option. In addition, once a GR process is working in some jurisdictions successful early participants could be asked to sponsor later participants, with benefits on both sides.

Employment is a central goal of the program, as steady licit employment is among the strongest predictors of desistance

from crime. Employment or work-release programs are strong predictors of recidivism (Benda, Harm, and Toombs 2005; Benda, Toombs, and Peacock 2003; Harer 1995; Uggen 2000).⁶

The baseline statistics are discouraging: two months after release, only 31 percent of ex-prisoners report being employed (Visher, Debus, and Yahner 2008). It is likely that some off-the-books work—employment not reported in order to avoid taxes, criminal-justice financial obligations, and child support obligations—is not reflected in that measurement, but informal-sector employment does not build the sort of employment history that leads to steady licit work. Since GR participants will be pushed to find formal employment and forbidden to handle cash, off-the-books work should be less attractive to them. With housing and basic subsistence provided under GR, new releasees will have the opportunity to seek out employment that is suited to their personalities and skills, improving the odds that they will maintain employment. To further improve the match between worker and firm, personality and skills inventories can be used to steer participants to appropriate workplaces. For those without the necessary skills or cognitive functioning to secure employment, it might be necessary to provide subsidized work and voluntary-service opportunities to build skills, habits, and a résumé.

Some of the services previously described might have beneficial impacts that occur only when they are provided in combination. For instance, employment opportunities might be useful only when housing is also provided. Learning more about these interactions is a key objective of the proposed GR trials.

LIFE UNDER GRADUATED REINTEGRATION

GR releasees will be given as much preparation and counseling as possible while in prison, followed by transfer to the apartments selected for them. They will have clothing appropriate for a job search, appropriate identification, enrollment in Medicaid or other health insurance, and access to necessary medications.

The housing units will be scattered rather than congregated, rented either from Section 8 property owners or from the private market. We can draw some lessons here from research evaluating alternative Housing First approaches; participants assigned to congregate housing—in which some living spaces are shared with other participants—were more likely

to be involved with injection drug use and more likely to experience a follow-up contact with police than those assigned to scattered-site housing (Whittaker et al. 2015). There is some reason to think that, while men will tend to do better in scattered housing, women might do better in congregate housing, but this is also worthy of testing.

As currently envisioned, GR scattered-site housing units would be just like the other apartments in their buildings, with one key exception: discreet cameras (to avoid stigma) mounted on each exterior door to record entry and exit from the unit. The cameras would be capable of being monitored remotely, either in real time or in retrospect.

GR releasees will be given as much preparation and counseling as possible while in prison, followed by transfer to the apartments selected for them.

Legally, the apartment will be a cell: the participant will be allowed to leave only at specific times or for specific purposes, and approved visitors will be allowed only as scheduled. Each participant's whereabouts will be continuously monitored electronically, using some combination of GPS, cellular, and RF (radio frequency)–detection technology. That information will not be under constant human observation (i.e., active monitoring). Instead, it will be compared automatically with where that person was supposed to be at that time, with deviations reported to the supervising corrections officer (i.e., passive monitoring). Moreover, each participant's position will be matched against the times and places of gunshots and of crimes known to the police, as much in hopes of deterring crimes as of detecting them if committed.

The participant will meet the designated parole or probation agent prior to release to discuss program expectations. The releasee will meet with the supervising agent again immediately after release, and frequently thereafter. The supervising officer will administer the prescribed system of

rewards and sanctions, with the dual purpose of facilitating the releasee's integration into the community and maintaining public safety. The supervisor's salary, along with the cost of housing, will constitute most of the cost of the program; we anticipate that those officers will have smaller caseloads than is typical of parole agents.

The rules of the program—curfew, drug abstinence, active job-seeking, restricted use of cash—will have been explained before the release date, but will be reviewed with the participant by the community corrections officer.

If the participant secures employment, his paycheck will go into an account held for his benefit, with a portion deducted for rent and to meet legal financial obligations (fines, restitution payments, child support).⁷ Some of what is left after rent and other obligations will be available for the releasee to spend on an expanded list of approved purchases, and some of it will go into a savings account that will become the participant's full property on program termination. At the earned release date, the participant will make the transition to routine supervision.

By contrast with prisoners, releasees will not be allowed to receive remittances from family and friends. That alone will tend to relieve some of the financial burdens that having an incarcerated relative imposes on the family, even if the releasee is unable to contribute much directly. The "no-remittance" rule is important from the viewpoint of equity; by contrast with, for instance, home-confinement programs, a releasee's standard of living will not depend at all on his former wealth or on his family's wealth. In addition, remittances would tend to

undermine the rewards-and-sanctions schedule that underlies GR and the goal of making the releasee self-sufficient.

Illicit drug use is forbidden. Compliance with that condition can be monitored in a variety of low-cost ways, from random urine or saliva testing to the use of sweat patches or hair testing. About half of state prisoners had illicit-drug problems before entering prison (Mumola and Karger 2004), and many will have found means to continue at least some level of use while incarcerated. Even those who have remained abstinent might still find that craving returns after release. Appropriate medication-assisted therapy—either substitutes such as methadone or buprenorphine, or antagonists such as the Vivitrol naloxone implant—should be made available to those with opiate problems.

Whether and to what extent GR participants should be allowed the use of tobacco and alcohol (and perhaps even of cannabis in states where that drug is legal under state law) remains an open design question. The default setting presumably should be "no," if only for personal-budget reasons. Perhaps the right to use these substances, in limited quantities, might be one of the privileges available under the reward system.

The details described above are a starting point for a conversation around GR. Any agency implementing GR would have to invite its staff, both administrators and frontline corrections officers, to weigh in on the design details. Implementation choices that suit one agency might be impracticable in another due to political feasibility, agency culture, or resource constraints.

Chapter 4. The Proposal: Evaluation

DESIGN, TESTING, AND ROLLOUT

GR is not intended to be a rule-bound, manualized program in a box. Rather, it embraces a broad category of possibilities for early release with levels of support, supervision, and expenditure intermediate between incarceration and parole. These proposals can protect public safety by providing deterrence, incapacitation, retribution, and rehabilitation, while reducing hardship and maximizing long-term benefit for the person released and his or her family. There is no reason to think that a one-size-fits-all program would be appropriate for every jurisdiction or every population, and we would balk at any attempt to create a GR “how-to” booklet.

Making a substantial reduction in the prisoner headcount would require new ideas that can be tested on small populations and scaled up if successful. A small number of custom-designed pilots each involving only a small number of releasees will help to keep the pilots manageable and avoid resource challenges. Small pilots have the added advantage of accommodating a quick midcourse correction as problems emerge, or even a quick shutdown if outcomes remain poor after repeated modification. A program that produces good outcomes at the pilot phase can be scaled up, and then extended cautiously to other places and other categories of releasees. We expect that differences in conditions, capacities, and institutions across jurisdictions, and differences in releasee characteristics along many dimensions, will require many variations on the theme of GR.

An important first step is to get a proof-of-concept pre-pilot implementation study under way, in order to determine whether the concept is feasible and effective in practice. Unorthodox Philanthropy and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation have independently funded two pilot implementations of GR in Illinois, the design of which is being informed by a large group of stakeholders, including inmates who might be eligible for the program. It is also essential to build a record of protecting public safety by preventing new crimes, and especially violent crimes; the corrections system remains under the long shadow of Willie Horton.

If it can be determined that GR will work on *some* populations, then custom-designed programs can be tested on particular groups of potential releasees, disqualifying those releasees for which the program would be ineffective or dangerous.

The composition of GR populations in the experimental stage is as important as the size of those populations. We are interested in seeing GR ultimately extended to violent offenders, both because (as noted) they constitute a majority of all prisoners and because reducing their future crime rates would yield the greatest benefit in reduced victimization. Moving inmates from maximum-security settings to full freedom in the community (a practice that occurs routinely across states) constitutes an incredibly abrupt transition. These inmates, many of whom have been socially isolated for years, are ill-prepared for freedom, and the result is that most are returned to custody in short order. Reducing the recidivism of this violence-prone group would pay greater dividends than changing the behavior of chronic shoplifters. Indeed, there is evidence that high-risk offenders respond the most to intensive rehabilitation supervision programs (Andrews, Bonta and Hoge 1990; Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, and Rooney 2000; Gendreau et al. 1996). However, much as we hope that inmates with histories of violence will eventually gain access to GR, it is likely that participants classified as no more than moderate-risk will be selected for the pilot stage.

Since GR is designed to end on what otherwise would have been the prisoner’s release date (or earlier, if the participant earns it), eligibility criteria should include having enough time left to serve to accommodate the maximum GR period. How long the program should ideally last is a crucial question, and one that can be answered only by experience. Based on consultations with others, we have set the initial design term at twelve months, but we expect that it might be appropriately made shorter for low-risk, low-needs prisoners and longer for those with long histories of serious crime and those facing greater barriers to reintegration, and especially to employment.⁸

Prisoners vary in a number of ways, and it would be natural to think of making the pilot-phase participant group representative of the larger population. That would probably be the wrong choice, since different kinds of people will likely benefit from somewhat different program designs, and the more homogeneous the pilot-phase population is, the more closely the program can be designed with the specific characteristics of that population in mind.

Assuming that a small (five-participant) pre-pilot—where the focus is on implementation details, rather than an outcomes

analysis—has been successful, the next step would be a 30-person pilot using the same program and the same participant profile in the same jurisdiction. If that in turn proved successful, it should be followed by a trial large enough to support an evaluation of program outcomes.

If the first pre-pilot, pilot, and trial proved successful, the program could be adapted to new types of participants, again running through pre-pilot, pilot, and full randomized controlled trial before expanding system-wide within a jurisdiction and perhaps then, with appropriate caution for variations in local conditions and institutions, to other jurisdictions. As noted, the initial pre-pilot will probably involve prisoners presenting no more than moderate risk of serious (especially violent) re-offending, but subsequent pilot groups might be drawn from almost any subpopulation.

GR is intended to be an alternative to custody, bridging the gap between prison and freedom, and not an alternative form of parole. We would not want to see GR tried on those who would otherwise have been released on ordinary parole, unless the GR start date were advanced ahead of what would have been the parole date. Otherwise, the program would represent a shift up in cost and down in liberty compared to the status quo. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that some of the people now being sent to prison, or some of the people now in jail awaiting trial, or some of the people now being returned to prison from parole or probation, could benefit from a GR program, and there is no reason not to try those options as well, should GR succeed.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND OUTCOME CRITERIA

In one way, GR will be more difficult to evaluate than other reentry programs. In those programs the alternative condition is to be at liberty (or on parole) but not participating in the program. In the case of GR, by design the comparable option is to be behind bars. If we randomly assign eligible participants to treatment and control groups, we cannot start to gather recidivism data on members of the control group until they are released from prison. That problem can be dealt with to some extent by creating a comparison group from people currently being released who would have been eligible for GR, but all such substitutes for true randomization raise eyebrows. The alternative is to wait and eventually observe recidivism rates for the control group after members of that group are released from prison, but that has the disadvantage of delaying our ability to say what worked and what did not.

The conventional measure of success in reentry programs is recidivism, variously defined in terms of new arrests, new convictions, or returns to prison. That measure, however defined, seems problematic because of its binary character. Not all new arrests, not all new convictions, and not all returns to prison are created equal, and one new arrest is not

the same as five new arrests. But those distinctions get lost in simple percentage counts. In practice we expect to use a mix of historical comparisons and true randomization.

We propose instead to use a seriousness-adjusted crime measure (taking into account the number of offenses and offense severity, as defined by maximum sentence length or by public opinion) averaged over the entire group, and total days behind bars (prison plus jail) over some time period, again averaged over the entire group. The conclusion of such an analysis would be of the form, “Over the five years from release, the experimental group committed x percent fewer (or more) seriousness-weighted crimes and spent y percent fewer (or more) days confined than the control group.” New crimes, of course, are the key measure of public safety, whereas days behind bars drive incarceration costs.

Since GR also aims to make its participants better off in addition to reducing recidivism, we should use the full range of measures employed in evaluating other social-service, health-care, and educational programs: inventories of physical and mental health, including substance-use disorders; health-care utilization; employment status and earnings; housing status; family status; measures of social connectedness (such as the social capital questions on the General Social Survey); physiological measures of stress and self-reported happiness and life satisfaction. Insofar as the program succeeds in reducing stress, and insofar as stress detracts from measured cognitive ability, we might also look for changes in scores on culturally unbiased IQ tests, such as the Raven’s Progressive Matrices. We might also hope to find changes in decision-making and behavior styles (as measured by, for example, stop-action performance, locus of control questions, self-efficacy measures, and reward-delay tasks), and perhaps even on some personality measures such as conscientiousness. Changes in the composition of participants’ social networks might show up in changing self-reported trust and trustworthiness and changing performance in the Trust and Ultimatum games, and perhaps in measures of altruism such as the Public Goods Contribution game.⁹

Another reason to examine a full set of cognitive and psychological measures is to help in program customization. To start with, we imagine different programs for different offender groups as reflected in the official record: age, sex, criminal history, current offense. But we might well find that outcomes, and optimal program designs, vary as much or more by personality and cognitive factors as they do by the contents of the official record.

Other measures worth collecting would reflect the program process and its effects on the participants’ attitudes toward the criminal-justice system. To what extent do the participants’ perceptions of how they were treated match the program design? For example, do they believe that the rewards-and-

sanctions response was applied fairly and consistently? Do they consider the corrections department or the criminal justice system generally, and their own corrections officer in particular, to be favorably inclined toward them or hostile to them? If a participant had a friend in prison, would he recommend that his friend volunteer for GR?

If, as we strongly suspect, GR will need to be designed differently for different persons and circumstances, then it is important not to overinterpret any given evaluation result. We can try to learn whether programs of this type can be designed and operated to out-perform the current system for some populations. But we cannot generalize from “GR worked (or did not work) with older drug dealers in Chicago” to “GR will work (or will not work) for younger burglars in Miami,” in part because the populations will be different and in part because the programs and the implementing institutions will be different.

GR will therefore present a moving target to the evaluator, because the program will continually evolve in response to day-to-day experience as well as to formal evaluation results.

Process evaluation will be as important as outcome evaluation. As noted above, we want to know how fair the program seemed to the participants; understanding the experience of staff is no less important, since the success or failure of the program will depend largely on their performance. It is important to learn not only how the program implementation went from their viewpoint, but also what its effects were on their job satisfaction and professional skills.

COST ESTIMATES AND BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

GR can be thought of as a modification of current release procedures. Alternatively, it can be considered as trying to fill the gap between prison (roughly \$30,000 per person per year) and parole (roughly \$3,000 per person per year) in terms of both expense and the level of restriction imposed on participants.

By contrast, typical reentry programs necessitate a budget increase, at least in the short run, though that money might be recouped if reentry support were to reduce re-incarceration. The same is true of more-intensive parole supervision, which has the additional disadvantage of reducing the liberty that parolees would otherwise enjoy.

The GR idea avoids these problems by starting before, rather than on, what otherwise would have been the prisoner’s release date.¹⁰ Thus, GR starts with a decrease in expenditure and an increase in liberty. Insofar as GR programs can be operated by corrections departments (which is the case in states where the corrections department manages prisons and parole), they avoid having to re-budget funds, and might avoid labor-

relations problems if the people supervising releasees are in the same bargaining unit as the correctional officers. Where that is not the case, the resulting additional difficulties will have to be confronted.

Actual savings on the institutional side are not automatic. The marginal cost of a prisoner is a fraction (typically around half) of the average cost of incarceration; a pod with 29 prisoners needs no fewer corrections officers than a pod with 30 prisoners. Even closing pods does not create savings near the average-cost level; to accomplish that, it is necessary to close (or not open) wings, or entire institutions, which can be both operationally and politically difficult. Still, if GR can be brought to scale, in the long run it should be able to budget approximately the average per-prisoner cost of incarceration for each of its participants without requiring a net budget increase.

It is possible that GR could save money, either by running at a lower net cost than incarceration (quite possible once participants are employed and contributing to their living expenses) or by reducing recidivism and thus future prison costs. But if GR turned out to be no better than cost-neutral, while reducing reoffending and incarceration rates and improving outcomes for potential victims as well as for prisoners and their families, that should be sufficient justification for the program. Excessive focus on cost savings might lead to unfortunate program choices. Since housing is a

TABLE 1.
Daily Participant Costs

Program costs	Average cost per day
Rent (unemployed participant)	\$20.00
Rent (employed participant)	\$12.00
Food/Other (unemployed participant)	\$15.00
Supervising officer	\$8.22
Video Monitoring	\$ 6.67
GPS Monitoring	\$ 5.00
Transport (unemployed participant)	\$ 3.33
Capital improvement	\$ 2.74
Tablet	\$ 1.37
Wireless Internet	\$ 1.17
Drug Testing	\$ 0.71

Note: Cost assumptions include: rent costs \$500/month plus \$100/month in utilities; employed participants contribute \$8/day towards rent; drug testing occurs once a week at \$5/test; the annual cost of a specialized corrections tablet is \$500; the monthly cost of internet is \$35; GPS monitoring costs \$5/day per resident, which includes outsourced monitoring on weekends and evenings; video monitoring costs \$200/month per camera; there is a capital cost of \$1000/bed; unemployed participants receive \$15/day for food but employed participants cover their own food costs; unemployed participants receive \$3.33 towards transportation but employed participants cover their transportation costs; a supervising officer dedicated to the caseload will cost \$90,000 per year.

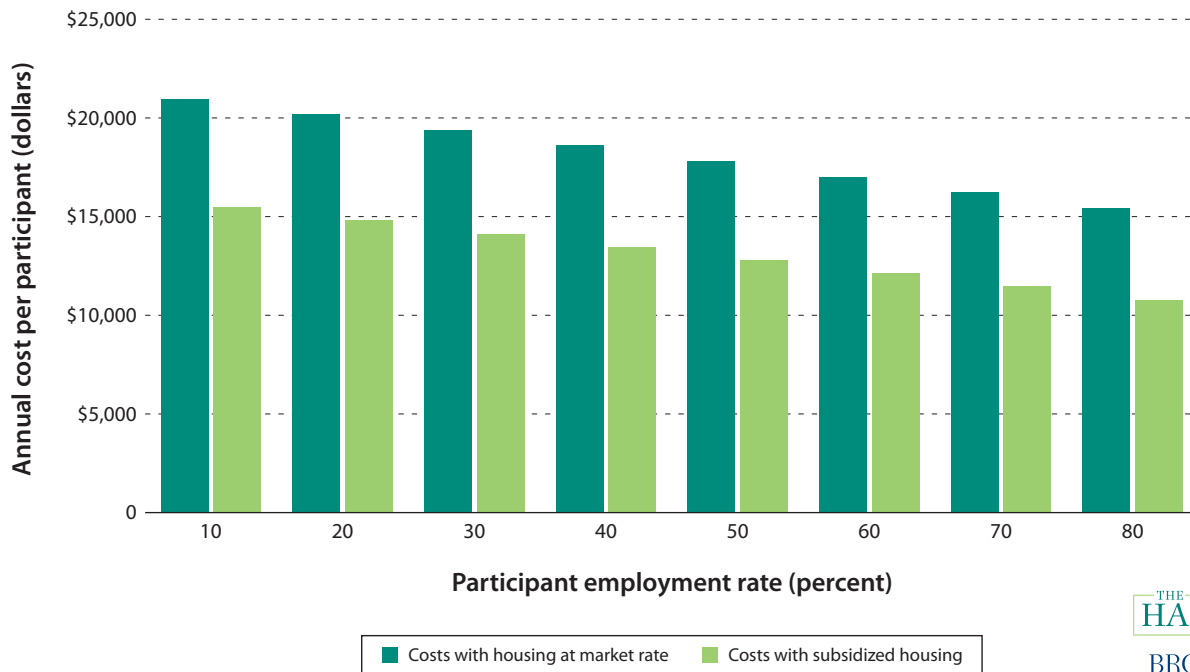
major cost element, GR will be more expensive in cities where rents are high; although there might be a case for offering participants the option to be housed elsewhere for their own benefit, it would be unwise and unjust to exclude GR from high-rent cities.

Cost Estimates

Estimates are necessarily preliminary and would vary substantially by jurisdiction due to geographic cost differences and differences in key programming decisions, such as the size of the caseload. Here we provide a rough outline of anticipated cost to demonstrate that GR, even with conservative cost assumptions, is less expensive than prison, but more expensive than routine supervision (i.e., parole).

Figure 4 shows the average annual cost per participant given the assumptions outlined above, but with a variety of possible participant employment rates. Costs are also sensitive to assumptions about housing: if the program has access to subsidized housing (e.g., if housing units were made available through a housing authority), cost are lower. Under the most conservative assumptions—housing is priced at market value and only 10 percent of participants are employed—the annual cost is roughly \$21,000 per participant. An optimistic scenario, with subsidized housing and a GR participant employment rate of 50 percent, implies annual average participant costs of about \$13,000 per participant.

FIGURE 4.
Annual Participant Cost



Source: Authors' calculations.

Note: See notes of table 1 for specific cost estimates, estimates. Subsidized housing refers to housing units made available through a housing authority.

Chapter 5. Questions and Concerns

1. How will inmates be selected for the program?

Eligibility criteria will be set by the implementing agency. We recommend decisions regarding eligibility, as well as implementation details, be made in consultation with corrections administrators and frontline staff. GR should be voluntary; inmates should volunteer for the opportunity to earn their way onto early GR release through good behavior and prerelease program completion. For initial implementation pilots, GR should focus on those inmates who are most likely to succeed outside of prison. That is, participation should initially be restricted to inmates who have demonstrated that they are ready to embrace the complexities of living in the community. If GR shows promise at the pilot level, it can then be extended to more-challenging subpopulations, including inmates with histories of violence who might benefit from much closer monitoring in the community following release (e.g., inmates releasing from maximum-security settings).

2. Under what conditions are participants removed from the program?

Compliance will be closely monitored and missteps will be responded to, but participants will be removed from the program and returned to custody only if they commit new crimes or abscond. This includes failure to comply with home-detention sanctions. It may be desirable to impose short terms of confinement in jail or prison as intermediate sanctions short of complete termination; that will require solving both legal and operational problems.

3. Will GR put the public at risk?

All consequential criminal justice reforms affect public safety; the question is how to manage that risk. The vast majority of prison inmates (about 95 percent) will be released someday (Durose and Mumola 2004). Our proposed program will test whether changing the circumstances surrounding release,

and providing a bridge from prison to community, can alter criminal trajectories, and whether providing inmates with better opportunities to succeed in the community can reduce negative behavior. The question is not whether some GR participants will re-offend; of course they will. The question is whether the program reduces crime in the long run compared to current practice.

4. How much flexibility will agencies have in implementing GR?

GR provides a menu of interventions that can be used to improve the reentry process for prisoners. Corrections agencies and the populations they serve differ across a variety of dimensions (culture, philosophy, resources), and the optimal combination of GR interventions will vary based on those characteristics. Agencies should tailor the interventions appropriately, harnessing the ingenuity of their own staff members and including perspectives of the public they serve to create a version of GR that will work within their system. Of course, the experience of any successful implementation will be of great interest to those contemplating GR, and variation in implementation details across agencies will be useful for learning what is effective.

5. Is GR justified as a cost-saving strategy?

Due to its lower annual cost relative to incarceration, we predict that early release and managed reentry into the community under the GR program, tied with gradual tapering of resources, will generate budgetary savings in the short term. If GR is successful in reducing recidivism, it would provide larger savings in the long term.

But even if the program is only a break-even proposition from a fiscal perspective, it will be justified if it improves the lives of those who pass through it (and the lives of their families) and protects public safety by reducing the chances of prisoners re-offending.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Early release and managed reentry into the community under the GR program, tied with gradual tapering of support and control, could help reduce both the prison headcount and the crime rate by reducing the rate at which releasees return to prison. GR takes advantage of the expenditure gap between community supervision and prison by releasing individuals from expensive prison cells into an intensive in-community experience. That would replace the current system under which inmates move at one step from custody to liberty and the daunting (and high-risk) process of attempting to eke out an existence. By contrast, individuals in GR, on the day of earned release, will already have spent months of experience living and working in the community. We hypothesize that the recidivism risk of a GR inmate who has been gradually reintegrated (and learned the customs and habits of living and working in the community) will be lower than those of an inmate released under current practice. We propose to conduct pilot studies and trials to explore the possibilities of GR. If it succeeds, prisoners, their families, and those who would otherwise have become the victims of their future crimes could all benefit.

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Endnotes

1. New York University's Marron Institute will collaborate with the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) and BOTEC Analysis to support the Illinois Department of Corrections.
2. A survey of the 24 states that keep such records showed that in the last year some 10,000 prisoners were released directly to the community from administrative solitary confinement.
3. Parole offices have begun to reach into prisons to prepare inmates for the obligations of their release. Programs now under development attempt to ensure that released offenders will have logistical support for the crucial first days after release (relying on peer networks, supervising officers, and law-enforcement volunteers). Not enough is currently known to justify bounding experimentation within a single rigid model, and it seems unlikely that a single program design would do well with all releasees, who vary in location, age, sex, criminal history, health status (somatic and mental), disability, cognitive capacity, educational level, social connection, and skill, job readiness, and labor-market engagement. Rather, success requires a template around which specific implementations can be created for specific groups of releasees in specific jurisdictions. Those implementations would have in common the principle of early release into tightly supervised community settings, appropriate services as needed to assist successful reintegration, and gradual relaxation of supervision as a reward for compliance and achievement.
4. The extent to which judges and parole boards would permit such a return to indeterminate sentencing remains to be seen. In addition, any such approach runs the risk of effectively discriminating by race, disability status, and program availability, and those questions would have to be worked out in practice.
5. The first logical step is to inventory the skills inmates need when they get out. Seventy percent of U.S. inmates read at or below a ninth-grade level (Kutner et al. 2003). Almost a fifth are functionally illiterate at the time of their release, a condition that prevents participation in GED classes and other useful certification (Amodeo et al. 2009). Approximately 40 percent of federal and state prisoners lack a high school credential, as compared to less than 20 percent of the general population (Durose and Mumola 2004). There is strong evidence that improvements in reading levels achievable with prison programming can measurably improve employment outcomes and reduce the probability of return to prison (Kutner et al. 2003).
6. One study found that although employment did not significantly decrease the likelihood of re-incarceration, it was significantly related to the time to re-incarceration: parolees who obtain employment typically spend more time crime-free before returning to prison (Tripodi, Kim, and Bender 2010). Another study used random assignment to the Center for Employment Opportunities reentry program in New York City, which provides life skills classes focusing on job readiness issues, helps participants obtain official identification and documents necessary for employment, and places participants in transitional jobs at worksites around New York. It found that releasees who joined the program within three months after release were significantly less likely to recidivate, to have their parole revoked, and to be convicted of a felony (Bloom et al. 2007). A separate Urban Institute study found that the same reentry program produced the largest reductions in recidivism for releasees who were at the highest risk of recidivating (Zweig, Yahner, and Redcross 2010).
7. Negotiation with the holders of those obligations might be necessary to ensure that some part of the paycheck in fact accrues to the participant; in most states, wages can be garnished up to 35 percent to repay legal fees and up to 65 percent to cover child support.
8. A substantial proportion of older prisoners serving long terms, or even life terms, for violent crimes might be safely released under GR, and that might be better than continued incarceration even if the GR term extended for years, or even indefinitely.
9. Trust games are two-player games in which one player decides how much money to give to the second player, and this amount is multiplied by a certain number. The second player then decides how much of the increased portion to give to the first participant (Cesarini et al. 2008). Ultimatum games are two-player games in which one person receives a certain amount of money, and proposes a way to split the money between the two players. If the second person accepts the proposed allocation, it is allocated; if not, neither player receives any money (Güth, Schmittberger and Schwarze 1982; Charness and Gneezy 2003). Public Goods Contribution games allocate money to multiple players; the players then secretly decide how much money to contribute to a public fund, which is multiplied by a certain factor, and then divided evenly among the participants (Browne-Kruse and Hummels 1993).
10. A similar design could also be used as a preprison or even pretrial diversion program, or as a halfway-back alternative to probation or parole revocation.

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Highlights

Angela Hawken and Mark Kleiman, both of New York University, propose to test a new approach to the reintegration of recently released offenders (to be called graduated reintegration) that would make prisoners' transition from incarceration to the community more gradual and better supported.

The Proposal

Implement pilots of graduated reintegration, a program intended to ease released inmates' transition into the community. This program would make the transition back into society smoother and more sustainable, with services and supervision provided to address the unique difficulties associated with reintegration.

Test the effectiveness of graduated reintegration. Pilot evaluations would provide information about the feasibility and impacts of graduated reintegration in a variety of settings.

Benefits

This proposal would benefit released inmates and their families by facilitating a more successful transition back into the community. Public safety would be enhanced as recidivism is reduced. Finally, time spent in prison would fall, potentially reducing costs for federal and state governments.



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