Law and Justice Interim Committee
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1. **What is the official name of your program and its mission, goals, and objectives?**
   The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) victim program manager's office offers opportunities for victims to have direct and indirect facilitated contact with adult offenders under department supervision. These restorative justice programs are voluntary and directly support the DOC mission to support victims, enhance public safety, and promote positive change in offender behavior. All restorative justice programs focus on healing for all parties harmed by crime, including offenders and their families. Programs include victim-offender dialogue, offender accountability letters, and victim impact panels (excluding boot camp and prerelease centers, which operate independently).

2. **How are the programs staffed (including volunteers)?**
   The full-time DOC victim programs manager in the director's office dedicates about .4 FTE to administering restorative justice programs. (The victim programs manager also responds to victim phone and email information requests, provides referrals to various assistance programs, manages the VINE automated victim notification service and conducts victim services training within the department and communities.) The manager is the only FTE for victims, but the victim services strategy at DOC relies on cooperation from probation and parole officers, treatment specialists, prison records and victim information staff, case managers, administrators, and the Board of Pardons and Parole.
   Trained volunteers co-facilitate victim-offender dialogue cases with the victim programs manager. This entails advance preparation meetings with the victim and offender individually, plus a two-day commitment for the actual dialogue. Crime victims volunteer to speak on victim impact panels. Volunteers are reimbursed for mileage, meals, and an occasional overnight stay required by a victim-offender dialogue. The victim programs manager and victim information officers at Montana State Prison and Montana Women's Prison administer the offender accountability letter program.

3. **How is the program funded? (How much and from whom?)**
Programs under the victim programs manager are budgeted under the director's office. The restorative justice programs received $4,290 for the current biennium, compared to the victim program manager's request for $7,000 to maintain the programs at their current level. Victim impact panels at the boot camp are funded under the boot camp budget. The Great Falls Prerelease Center operates its own victim impact panel program, independent of DOC.

4. **What are the basic components of the programs...i.e., how do they work?**
(a) Victim impact panels: Crime victims volunteer to visit DOC facilities, where they talk to offenders about how crime has harmed them, their loved ones, and communities. Offenders may ask questions. Victim impact panels at boot camp operate independent of the DOC, although the victim programs manager assists staff with identifying new panel speakers. Victim impact panels at the Great Falls Prerelease Center operate with no DOC involvement.

   The victim programs manager provided staff assistance and volunteer speakers for a victim impact panel at Helena Prerelease Center beginning in 2009. Victim impact speakers accompany the victim programs manager to the annual probation and parole officer basic training, and to certain conferences for probation officers, other DOC and contracted staff, law enforcement, and victim advocates. Examples include the Montana Correctional Association 2009 annual convention and the (upcoming) 2011 Sex Offender Management Symposium.

   (b) Victim-offender dialogue: Crime victims whose offenders are under DOC supervision may request a face-to-face meeting with their offender to discuss the crime. The program is voluntary, and the dialogues occur after months of individual preparation with the victim and the offender. Trained volunteers co-facilitate the dialogues with the victim programs manager. The program is strictly regulated to preserve public safety and assure no harm.

   (c) Offender accountability letters: Offenders who demonstrate a sincere desire to apologize to their victims may write an accountability letter for deposit in the victim programs manager office, and victims may access them if they choose. Offenders may not mail their letters directly to victims. The victim programs manager may inform the victim that a letter is available. The letter remains on file indefinitely.

5. **How many offenders have been involved in the program? Any historical data you have would be helpful**.
(a) The victim impact panels under the victim programs manager, including the Helena Prerelease Center panel, are new in the past five years, and have probably reached 300 offenders so far. But the boot camp victim impact panel, which serves as a model for the DOC, has reached thousands of offenders since it began in 1997.

   (b) DOC has conducted victim-offender dialogues in 10 cases since 2007, including deliberate homicides, aggravated assault involving weapons, negligent (DUI) homicide, felony assault on children, and incest. The victim programs manager, prison staff, and volunteers have conducted initial interviews with victims and offenders in dozens more cases that have not resulted in actual dialogues. DOC does not envision victim-offender dialogues as a means of effecting substantial change in the prison population, but remains committed to the program because some victims desperately need answers from their offenders in order to move forward in the healing process.

(c) DOC receives about 10 offender accountability letters a month, mostly from prison inmates who write the letters in conjunction with programming. Some of these letters are returned to the offenders for revision, and about 70 percent ultimately are deposited in the letter bank. Sentencing orders and orders of protection preclude the victim programs manager from delivering many of the letters to victims.

6. **How do you evaluate whether program mission, goals, and objectives are being met?**
   DOC has no formal or scientific evaluation process for restorative justice programs, due to funding and staff time limitations. The goal of these programs is to promote healing for all parties involved.

   (a) Offenders who attend victim impact panels at boot camp write letters to the victim speakers. The letters reflect a 100 percent positive response from offenders. However, the offenders write these letters immediately after attending the panel and so do not reflect whether attending the panel had any long-term effect.

   (b) The victim programs manager and volunteer facilitators conduct post-dialogue interviews and periodic follow up visits with all victims and offenders who participate in a victim-offender dialogue. The program is relatively new and the response from all parties so far has been 100 percent positive. Prison treatment staff members report that offenders who participated in dialogues with their victims are more settled and relaxed, posing fewer management problems for staff. The facilitators confirm through periodic interviews that the offenders are just doing better.

   (c) MDOC gauges the success of offender accountability letters on victim response. Because the letter program is confidential, victims are not required to comment. The victim programs manager often follows up with victims who have received the letters and the response has been positive.

7. **What have the results of that evaluation been?**
   See 6.