

Weiss, Rachel

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State Corrections agency to analyze factors driving increase in offenders

HELENA - The Montana Department of Corrections has teamed up with a national research team from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the National Governors Association (NGA) to do a four-month study that will analyze the department's population and program data and make policy recommendations, Corrections director Mike Batista said today.

"Historically, Montana has taken a progressive approach to developing community corrections programs, so we have treatment and other placement options that give us alternatives to sending every offender to prison," Batista said. "My concern is that the department's secure facilities and these community programs are now operating at capacity."

According to Batista, this is causing pressure in the county jails where offenders are housed while they wait for a placement in the state system to open up.

"It's important that the review and policy recommendations take a balanced approach to strengthening public safety and reducing spending on new prisons," Batista said. "Part of achieving that balance is making sure we are using prison space for the violent offenders who represent a real threat to community safety."

In the coming weeks, Pew, consultant Dennis Schrantz and a team from NGA will analyze comprehensive offender data provided by the department. The team will then come to Montana to get an on-the-ground understanding of how offenders come into and move through Montana's criminal justice system.

Schrantz, a consultant on the project, is director of the Center for Justice Innovation in Michigan. He has worked in corrections for 35 years and has extensive experience in community corrections, parole systems, risk assessment and offender population management. The team from NGA will be led by Thomas MacLellan, director of NGA's Center for Best Practices, Homeland Security & Public Safety Division. MacLellan oversees the NGA Center's work on justice and public safety policy issues.

"With the expertise Pew and NGA bring to the table, we have a tremendous opportunity to review alternatives to prison for low-level offenders, as well as strengthen supervision and interventions that reduce recidivism, and establish performance objectives and measures," Batista said.

Batista said that he has been in discussions with Pew staff since August last year, when a bi-partisan group from Montana attended a conference on justice reinvestment in South Dakota.

Pew and NGA are providing their staff and the consultant to Montana at no cost.

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Law and Justice meeting
June 27, 2014

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