



Legislative Audit Division

Performance Audit Summary

Board of Pardons and Parole

November 2000

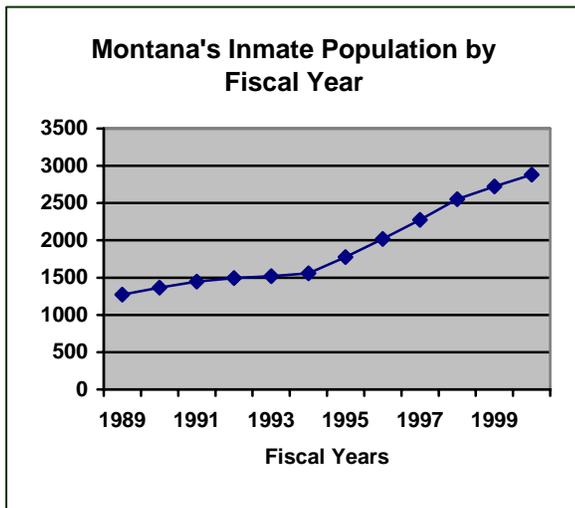
Introduction

The Board of Pardons and Parole (Board) is responsible for determining whether a parole-eligible inmate may serve a portion of his prison sentence in the community under parole supervision. The Board consists of three regular members and two auxiliary members who serve when a regular member is unable to attend hearings. Members of the board are citizen volunteers appointed by the governor. The Board is attached to the Department of Corrections (DOC) for administrative purposes only.

We examined Board compliance with statutes and efficiency of operations. Since many Board and DOC activities are inter-related, we also examined inter-agency communication and coordination.

Montana's Expanding Correctional System Has Affected Board Activities

Rising inmate populations and a rapid expansion of Montana's correctional system have affected Board activities.



Historically, the Board conducted most activities at the state prison in the Deer Lodge valley. The Board's structure has remained unchanged despite rising populations and transformation to a multi-facility system. The existing Board structure limits the Board's presence at some facilities, as well as their interaction with inmates.

Today, the Board conducts parole-related activities at six prisons located in different areas of the state and at community-based correctional programs located in larger communities.

While the Board has continued to meet its statutory obligations, the Board has changed its practices. This has led to differences in types of parole hearings and pre-parole preparation. Inmates placed in facilities outside the Deer Lodge area typically appear before a hearing officer instead of making a personal appearance before the Board. In addition, these inmates also have less contact with Board staff for pre-parole preparation. By using hearing officers for conducting initial parole hearings, the Board has continued to ensure initial parole hearings are held in a timely manner. However, the Board needs to seek clarification from the legislature to address the inconsistency in law.

We recommend the Board: Seek legislative clarification for authorizing the use of hearing officers to conduct initial parole hearings; and conduct a detailed analysis of its future resource needs and present the analysis to the 2003 legislature.

The Board Can Improve Reporting Its Activities

Board biennial reports provide accurate information about general activities, such as numbers of hearings conducted, or inmates paroled. However, the Board does not track information related to goals and objectives. While the existing information system may have adequately served the Board at one time, those systems are becoming obsolete and expansion of the correctional system has placed new demands on the existing systems.

Additionally, the Board has not established clearly defined criteria for making parole decisions. Without comprehensive information, the Board, legislature, and other agencies cannot fully evaluate Board activities or their impact on the correctional system.

We recommend the Board: Revise its current management information collection effort to report more information regarding how its activities relate to goals and objectives; and define and document criteria used for determining parole release decisions.

The Board and the Department of Corrections Can Improve Formal Coordination

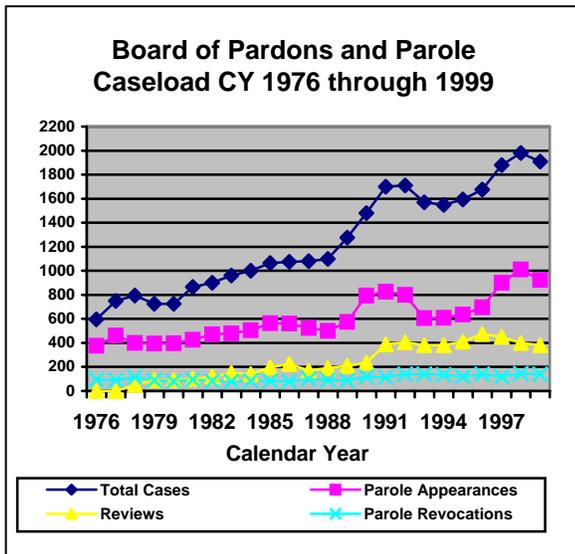
The Board and DOC have good communication and coordination on individual cases. However, the two agencies have not fully coordinated the use of correctional system resources.

While board members are knowledgeable about the correctional system, they are part-time volunteers facing a complex array of programs, agencies, and procedures. In some instances, Board decisions may not be consistent with the availability or intended use of DOC resources.

We recommend the Board develop a comprehensive resource manual for guiding agency activities; and coordinate development of a resource manual with the Department of Corrections to ensure the manual is consistent with department practices and policies.

The Board Can Increase Efficiencies by Improving Automation of Management Information

The Board relies on multiple manual and automated management information processes for tracking agency activities.



The existing systems are becoming obsolete, which adversely impact staff productivity and limit the Board's ability to collect and compile management information.

DOC is implementing an automated offender management information system called PROFiles. The Board and DOC share similar offender information, and the Board expects to utilize the new system. The two agencies have started to cooperatively work on development of applicable system components.

We recommend the Board continue to examine its administrative processes to identify management information and automation options for ongoing agency operations; and the Board and DOC continue to coordinate the collection and sharing of management information as part of the development of PROFiles.

Formal Communication Strategies Would Improve Board and Department Operations

While many Board and DOC activities are inter-related, the two agencies have limited formal communication and coordination and have not established strategies to ensure agreement on the use of correctional system resources. Improved interagency communication and coordination can increase the efficient and effective use of available resources and ultimately decrease correctional system costs.

We recommend the Board of Pardons and Parole and the Department of Corrections further develop formal processes for coordinating interagency activities.

For a complete copy of the report (00P-02) or for further information contact the Legislative Audit Division at 406-444-3122; e-mail to lad@mt.gov; or check the web site at <http://leg.mt.gov/audit>.