

Maryland's Parole Supervision Fee

A Barrier to Reentry

The Problem

- In Maryland, persons on parole are billed \$40 per month for their supervision.
- The fee is largely uncollectible. Only 17 percent of the supervision fees are collected by the end of parole.
- The imposition of the fee is out of line with Maryland's commitment toward policies that protect the public by promoting successful reentry of parolees.

The Impact

- When exemptions are not granted, the fees accrue as debt owed by persons on parole.
- At the end of the parole term, the paper debt is transferred to the state's Central Collection Unit, which continues the process of attempting to collect the fee – often marring credit reports – and adds a one-time 17 percent surcharge onto the underlying debt.
- Consequently, the majority of parolees incur substantial debt from a fee from which they would be exempt if the process worked as intended
- Many parolees do not meet with their parole agent because they are unable to pay the fee.

The Current System

- Under the current system, the Parole Commission, a body that has little ongoing contact with parolees, has the sole authority to grant fee exemptions.
- The Parole Commission routinely imposes the fee, without conducting evaluations of whether parolees should be granted exemptions.
- As a result of this process, Maryland rarely grants exemptions to parolees even though most are likely eligible. In FY 2007, only 7% – or 538 of the 7,524 individuals on parole – were exempt.

Exemption Criteria

- When the Maryland Legislature authorized the fee in 1991, it knew that many parolees would be unable to afford the fee, and therefore created categorical exemptions.
- Supervisees may be exempt due to an inability to secure employment, school or job training enrollment, disability, responsibility for dependents, or other extenuating circumstances.

The Solution

- Authority to grant exemptions should be moved to the Division of Parole and Probation, whose agents meet regularly with parolees and are better positioned than the Parole Commission to evaluate an individual's ability to afford the fees and make payment.
- The legislature should ensure that the obligation to pay the fee does not commence until a Division of Parole and Probation agent has conducted an upfront evaluation of whether an individual should be considered exempt based on disability, enrollment in job training and other educational programs, family obligations combined with undue hardship, and other extenuating circumstances.
- A person should not be re-incarcerated because they can't pay the fee.

Fiscal Impact

- Although the parole fee raises a small amount of revenue for the state's general fund – \$334,752 in FY 2008 – the fiscal benefit is outweighed by the risk that the fee contributes to recidivism, and thereby results in higher incarceration costs.
- The average cost to incarcerate someone for one year is almost \$32,000. If the supervision fee has a role in just 11 parolees returning to prison for a year, the costs to the state would surpass the \$334,752 raised by the fee in fiscal 2008.
- The fee is not being abolished. Those who are not exempt and are able to pay will do so, which means the effect on the general fund will be minimal.