

Identifying Drivers of Absconding

March 2025

About the Crime and Justice Institute

The Crime and Justice Institute (CJI), a division of Community Resources for Justice, bridges the gap between research and practice with data-driven solutions that drive bold, transformative improvements in adult and youth justice systems. With a reputation built over many decades for innovative thinking, a client-centered approach, and impartial analysis, CJI assists agency leaders and practitioners in developing and implementing effective policies that achieve better outcomes and build stronger, safer communities. CJI works with local, state, tribal, and national justice organizations to provide nonpartisan policy analysis, implementation consulting, capacity-building assistance, and research services to advance evidence-based practices and create systems-level change.

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Whereabouts Unknown: **Identifying the Factors Driving Absconding Behavior**

Between 2019 and 2022, the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI), with support from Arnold Ventures, conducted a [comprehensive assessment](#) of community supervision policies and practices in four states: Colorado, Florida, Mississippi, and Montana. Collectively, the four states include five state agenciesⁱ that are responsible for the oversight of the community supervision population. As part of this assessment, CJI sought to identify the factors driving revocations from probation and parole through quantitative and qualitative analyses. One of the common themes that emerged across community supervision populations was that abscondingⁱⁱ was frequently reported as a violation behavior. However, the results of this assessment also indicated that additional analysis was necessary to better illuminate who is most likely to abscond, for what reasons, and at what point during their supervision term.

While research on the wider subject of parole and probation is plentiful, studies that focus on the reasons people abscond from supervision are more scarce, especially qualitative research with justice-involved individuals. This gap in research could be related to the difficulty of contacting people who have absconded. Thus, there is a need to not only understand absconding risk factors from a quantitative standpoint, but to also find a way to speak with those who have absconded, after the fact, to understand in more detail what their perceived barriers were.

Absconding in Literature and Practice

Many supervision agencies are interested in learning more about the frequency with which absconding occurs, who is most at risk for absconding, and how best to respond to absconding behavior. However, the absence of much research on the subject impedes the development of this knowledge, as well as limits the development and implementation of evidence-based policy solutions. CJI undertook an extensive literature review on absconding and identified only ten studies conducted between 1997 and 2018, eight with quantitative methodology and two with qualitative. (Two of these studies used samples of youth released to parole and one took place in England, limiting their generalizability to the subject of absconding among American adults.)

Some findings from the literature are inconsistent; studies identified both women and men and individuals assessed as low risk or high risk as more likely to abscond, as well as identifying individuals with drug offenses as both more and less likely to abscond.¹⁻⁶ More consistent findings, however, indicate that absconding is more likely among people of color, unmarried individuals, individuals with longer criminal histories (including more youth convictions, prior arrests, more felony convictions, and more prior prison terms), individuals with substance use and mental health needs, individuals with histories

of unemployment, and individuals with lower levels of education.⁷⁻¹⁵ Those who absconded also tended to have a higher number of assigned supervision conditions and violations, as well as having their first violations occur earlier in the supervision period.^{16,17} Studies also found that a higher intensity of supervision made absconding more likely, while reduced levels of intensity decreased the likelihood of absconding.^{18,19}

A lack of clear definitions of and policies surrounding absconding also hampers more extensive understanding of this behavior. There is no national consensus on what absconding from supervision entails and definitions differ across agencies; some states do not define it clearly, but cite it in statute or policy. For example, the Montana Code Annotated specifies that absconding “means when an offender deliberately makes the offender’s

ⁱ The Department of Corrections oversees all community supervision populations in Montana, Florida, and Mississippi; in Colorado, while the Department of Corrections is responsible for parole administration, probation is overseen by the Division of Probation Services under the Department of Justice.

ⁱⁱ Here used to refer to any behavior resulting in an individual on community supervision making themselves unavailable to their supervising officer, including but not limited to: ceasing to report as scheduled without notice, changing residence without permission or notification, or changing contact information without notification.

whereabouts unknown to a probation and parole officer or fails to report for the purposes of avoiding supervision, and reasonable efforts by the probation and parole officer to locate the offender have been unsuccessful.”²⁰ Mississippi defines absconding as “the failure of a probationer to report to his supervising officer for six (6) or more consecutive months.”²¹ Florida and Colorado do not have a formal definition of absconding in statute or policy, although Colorado Revised Statute §16-11-207 advises that a warrant may be issued for a person on probation when “there is reason to believe that a condition of probation has been violated and the alleged violator is not in the state or cannot be apprehended in the state”, and Florida’s Standard Conditions of Supervision stipulate that “you will remain in a specified place.²² You will not... leave the county of your residence without... the consent of your officer.”²³

State policies also vary in their responses to absconding behavior. Mississippi’s Graduated Sanctions and Incentives Policy treats absconding for less than six consecutive months as an intermediate violation, while absconding for more than six months is a major violation.²⁴ Montana’s Probation and Parole Division defines “reasonable efforts” for officers and sets out a timeline by which officers should complete those efforts before reporting a person as having absconded, as well as guidance on what to do after making that determination.²⁵ Florida does not have a specific procedure, but provides that people who have absconded are ineligible for the state’s Intensive Supervision Program and Alternative Sanctions Programs, and specifies that victims of people on community supervision must be notified when the person who committed an offense against them absconds.²⁶ As noted above, Colorado provides for the issuance of a warrant when a person may have absconded, and Colorado’s parole agency has a detailed list of procedures on responses to absconding, while its probation agency treats it similarly to other high-level violations.^{27,28}

An Analysis of Revocation Trends and the Connection to Absconding Behavior

As stated earlier, CJI’s current work in absconding originated from previous work involving a comprehensive effort to examine sentencing and community supervision practices in Colorado, Florida, Montana, and Mississippi.

The goal of this effort was to equip state leaders with the information necessary to inform the adoption or expansion of evidence-based supervision practices, specifically related to revocations from probation, parole, and other forms of community supervision.

Over the course of 18 months, CJI worked collaboratively with these agencies to determine the factors impacting community supervision outcomes, using both quantitative (data analysis of ten years’ worth of supervision terminations, as well as more thorough case file reviews of smaller samples from Colorado and Montana) and qualitative (statute and policy review, interviews, and focus groups) methods. To guide its analyses, CJI examined six assessment areas that captured both the breadth and depth of supervision populations and practices, including trends in revocation data; condition-setting and modification processes; supervision officers’ responses to behavior, including revocation; agencies’ use of research-informed practices; availability of and access to community-based programming and resources for people on supervision; and the agencies’ organizational culture. The findings from this work pertaining to absconding as a main driver of revocations in each state helped inform the scope of the subsequent effort focused specifically on this issue.

In Mississippi, there were 1,022 revocations for absconding across the state’s probation and parole populations during the study period, the most commonly occurring violation leading to revocation across both groups. In 78 percent of absconding cases, the officer recommended that the person be revoked. Absconding was also common across both Colorado agencies. Absconding-related violations were one of the two most common violation categories cited on complaints for people revoked from parole in 2019, and 44 percent of people in CJI’s file review sample had at least one absconding-related violation on their complaint. Among people on probation in Colorado, absconding rates increased 25 percent from 2010 to 2019, while the absconding rate for people on probation for a drug offense nearly doubled, from 8 percent in 2010 to 16 percent in 2019. By 2019, absconding made up more than 10 percent of all terminations and 32 percent of all unsuccessful terminations. In Florida, while there is statutory guidance for officers responding to absconding,

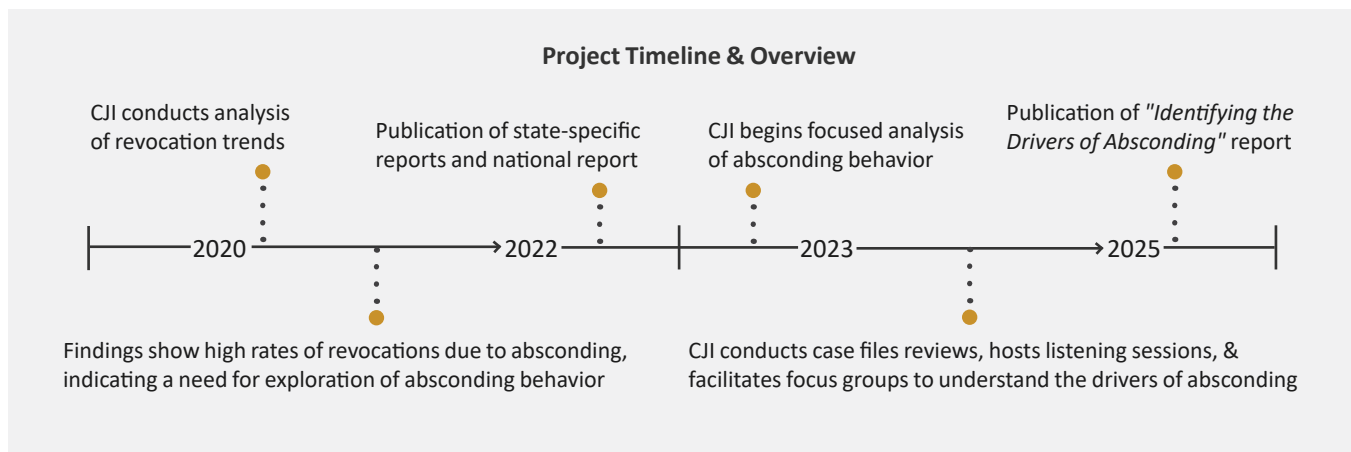
the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) reported gaps in streamlined mechanisms for officers to consistently track behavior leading to absconding, which made tracking absconding data very difficult.²⁹ Finally, in Montana, CJI’s file review sample reflected that absconding violations were present for 32 percent of individuals revoked from parole, 23 percent of those revoked from probation, and 39 percent of those revoked from conditional release (an alternative to parole). Although Montana had a definition of absconding in statute, CJI found that different Montana officers had inconsistent responses to absconding behavior, with some officers making lower levels of effort to determine that a person had genuinely absconded before filing a revocation. Additionally, CJI found higher rates of absconding- and reporting-related violations among Native American individuals on conditional release.

Probation and parole officers across several different agencies cited external trends or factors that they believed were contributing to high or increasing numbers of revocations due to absconding. Officers in Mississippi shared that people who are unable to pay their supervision fees, or court fines and fees, abscond from supervision because they fear the consequences of nonpayment. Colorado Parole officers reported that a lack of affordable and available housing was one of the primary factors driving absconding behavior on their caseloads. Montana Probation and Parole officers, as well as public defenders in Montana, said that homelessness was a main driver of absconding in the state. According to those groups, while some unhoused people simply stop reporting, the precariousness of being unhoused means that people may also accidentally violate other conditions

– for example, staying at a friend’s house where there are drugs or alcohol, or encountering another person on supervision while at a friend’s home.

To address these trends, CJI recommended that all agencies develop a standardized definition of technical violations and absconding to promote transparency, fairness, and equity. State-specific recommendations included expanding the use of remote reporting and text notifications for Colorado Parole, prioritizing early contacts with people newly assigned to supervision for Colorado Probation, reducing fines and fees or adopting a different collection approach in Mississippi, and identifying and addressing barriers specific to Native American people on supervision in Montana. Additionally, CJI recommended to all jurisdictions that they conduct a deeper analysis around absconding in their states, as well as factors driving racial and ethnic disparities.

The next step for CJI, with continued support from Arnold Ventures, was a more focused analysis of absconding behavior among individuals on community supervision. The analysis investigated the following questions, including (1) what characteristics are more common among individuals who abscond from supervision, (2) at which point individuals are more likely to abscond from supervision, and (3) what the reasons behind absconding behavior are. In order to gain a deeper understanding of absconding behavior, CJI sought to employ both quantitative and qualitative methods, conducting descriptive analyses of community supervision data to identify static and dynamic factors of interest and organizing voluntary focus groups of individuals formerly or currently on supervision who may have, at some point, absconded or stopped reporting to supervision.



What We Learned

While CJI extended invitations to each of the five agencies involved in the original revocations work, CJI ultimately worked primarily with the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) to collect community supervision data and conduct focus groups with individuals currently or formerly on supervision. In addition, CJI led focus groups with individuals currently or formerly on supervision receiving services through community-based organizations in Florida.

Montana Listening Sessions

Background Information

Although the primary goal of this absconding project was to address the topic from the perspective of individuals who have absconded from supervision, it was also important for CJI to explore the subject from the perspective of officers who have experience with witnessing and responding to absconding behavior. As a continued extension of the original revocations work, CJI conducted in-person listening sessions with Montana DOC probation and parole officers to hear their perspectives on individuals' compliance with conditions of supervision. Their perceptions on absconding behavior provide additional context for the qualitative and quantitative absconding data collected from individuals on supervision in Montana.

Officers noted a wide spectrum of behaviors leading to absconding, starting from failure to appear for initial supervision sign-up appointments immediately following sentencing and continuing all the way to initial engagement in appointments devolving over time when challenges such as substance use relapse, job loss, lack of transportation, mental health barriers, or other obstacles occurred. More specifically, officers indicated that the evolving barriers over the course of supervision, coupled with the lack of outreach by the individual on supervision to discuss the problems and potential solutions with their assigned officer, contributed to inconsistent reporting or total lack thereof. Officers additionally suggested that when individuals requested travel permits to travel across the state for work or applied to move out of Montana through interstate compact processes and were denied permission, they might take it upon themselves to proceed with the move or impermissible travel, leading to a violation.

When asked about absconding behavior that officers recognized as less volitional behavior or not intentionally avoiding supervision, officers discussed circumstances in which individuals were unhoused or unstably housed,

since keeping upcoming appointment dates, paperwork, or other organizational structure was harder without a consistent place to store one's belongings. Additionally, recognizing that many justice-involved individuals have served several supervision terms, officers shared that people who had absconded during previous supervision terms were often revoked and sent back to prison as a sanction for their absconding behavior. When individuals were struggling during their most recent supervision term, knowing they might fail a urinalysis test or have to report losing a job, they might choose to skip supervision appointments entirely until their circumstances improve. Then, if they fail to do so and several appointments or calls have already been missed, the individual may assume, based on prior responses to previous failures to report, that they will be sent back to prison. Instead of this previous experience deterring continued absconding behavior, the absconding behavior continues to avoid being revoked and returned to prison.

While officers reported that the addition of absconding as a specialized condition in 2022 made clearer to individuals on supervision what constituted absconding behavior and enhanced officers' ability to document absconding as a reason for revocation, they also suggested that additional clarity and structure around tracking absconding behavior would be beneficial to the process of responding to these violations. Some officers suggested a more structured checklist of outreach tasks officers are expected to accomplish when determining whether the person is reachable or the person is avoiding supervision contact. Some spoke about the importance of collecting multiple collateral contacts (e.g., family members, employers, treatment providers, sponsors). Officers indicated that being able to refer to tangible guidelines outlining the types of outreach necessary for officers to document attempts and lack of contact (e.g., phone calls, home visits, texts, emails, employment checks) would make perceptions of absconding more consistent and potentially reduce disparities in revocation hearing outcomes.

Montana File Review

Methodology

Montana DOC stores most of their community supervision data in the Offender Management Information System (OMIS), the system that supervising officers use to track individuals' status and compliance. Montana DOC provided CJJ with the full list of individuals terminating community supervision (parole, probation, or conditional release) in FY2022 (the last full year of data available at the time of data collection); CJJ subsequently split the group into individuals who successfully terminated supervision, individuals who were revoked from supervision for reasons other than absconding, and individuals who absconded from supervision. CJJ's aim was to compare all three groups, with a particular focus on absconders, so it was essential to ensure an adequate sample size for each rather than randomly generating a sample from the full population. The original sample was comprised of 105 individuals who successfully completed, 105 who were revoked, and 150 who absconded.

CJJ subsequently collected data from OMIS including demographic and offense information, **risk/needs/responsivity factors**, offending history, conditions of supervision, detailed violation information, and information about communications between an individual and their supervising officer. These data were collected from several modules entered directly into OMIS, as well as scanned copies of documents such as the court judgment, the pre-sentence investigation report (PSI), and the report of violation (ROV). This information was then analyzed to identify factors correlated with absconding, as well as the ways in which the population of absconders differed from both individuals who successfully completed supervision and those who were revoked for other reasons (to avoid mistakenly conflating correlates of revocation as a whole with correlates specific to absconding). The final sample contained 322 individuals: 97 who successfully completed, 100 who were revoked, and 125 who absconded.



Risk, needs, responsivity framework: speaks to the likelihood of reoffending, changeable attributes, and individual characteristics that, when targeted, help individualize interventions and reduce recidivism.

Information Considered in File Review:

- ✓ Demographics
- ✓ Offense Information
- ✓ Risk/Needs/Responsivity Factors
- ✓ Conditions of Supervision
- ✓ Communication with Supervising Officer
- ✓ Violation & Revocation Information

Findings

File Review Sample is Demographically Representative, But Higher Risk Due to Oversampled Revocations

Similar to the full population of community supervision terminations in FY2022, the file review sample was about three-quarters male and about three-quarters white and one-fifth Native. The average age of individuals at termination was 40, with about two-thirds of the sample between 25 and 44 years old. As with the full community supervision population, most individuals were terminating a period of probation supervision, though the file review sample had a higher proportion of probation terminations (74 percent compared to 65 percent of the full population), with 10 percent of the sample terminating parole and 16 percent of the sample terminating conditional release. As a result of oversampling revoked populations, the risk levels of the file review sample lean higher than those of the full termination population; 36 percent of men and 50 percent of women in the file review sample were assessed at the two highest risk levels, compared to 17 percent and 35 percent, respectively, in the full population. The file review sample also had a higher proportion of individuals with prior criminal history than the full population, with 60 percent having had prior prison terms and 73 percent having had prior supervision terms, compared to 33 percent and 53 percent, respectively, of the full population.

More Women, Native Americans, and Younger Individuals Represented Among Absconders

Identifying the characteristics of those most likely to abscond can highlight areas for more focused policies and practices to reduce the likelihood of absconding. When breaking down demographics by type of termination—successful completion, revocation, or absconding—more women absconded from supervision than were revoked for other reasons, but an even higher proportion successfully completed. Meanwhile, men were least represented among successful completions, but fewer men absconded than were revoked for other reasons. **Figure 1** shows that the highest proportion of white individuals successfully completed and the lowest proportion absconded (81 percent and 70 percent of those termination types, respectively), while the opposite was true for Native Americans (16 percent and 28 percent, respectively), indicating a higher likelihood of absconding among Native American individuals.

Absconders also trended younger. **Figure 2** shows that a higher proportion of individuals aged 25 to 44 was represented among absconders compared to other termination types (71 percent compared to nearly 60 percent of successful completions and revocations), as was a lower proportion of those aged 45 and older (just under one-quarter compared to over one-third of successful completions and revocations).

Figure 1. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Race

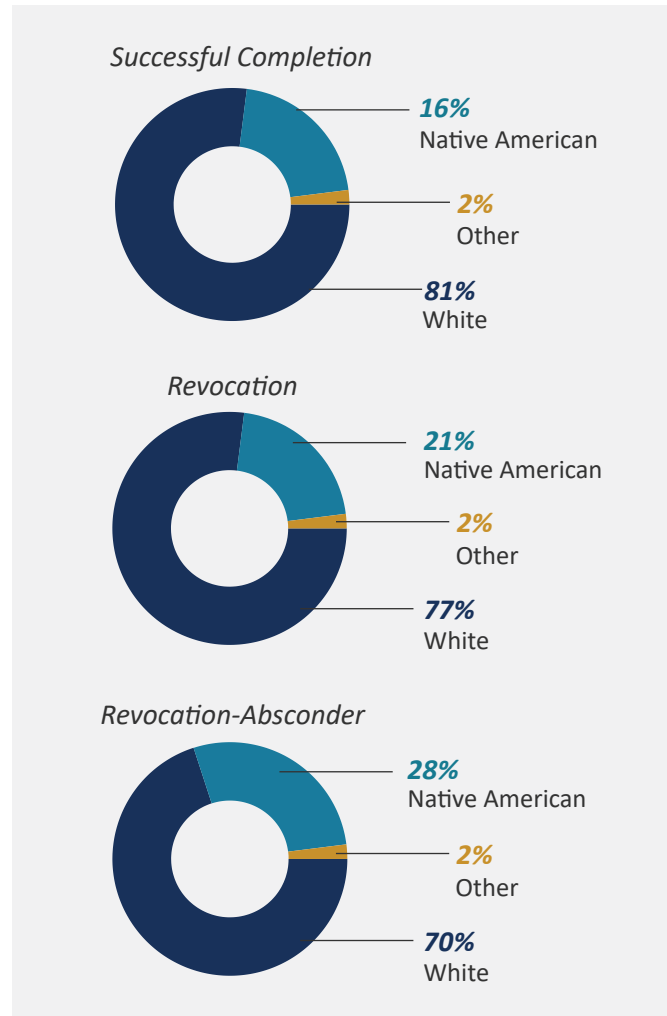
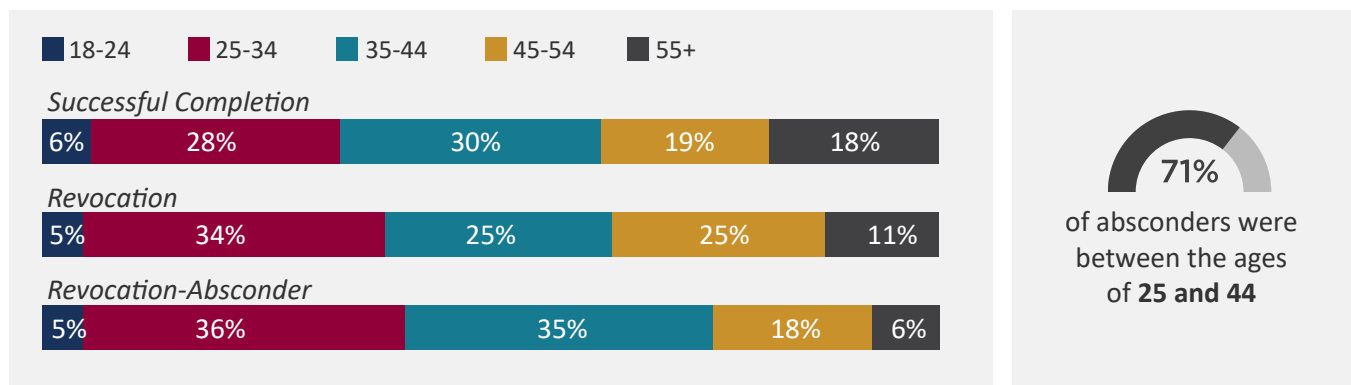


Figure 2. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Age Category

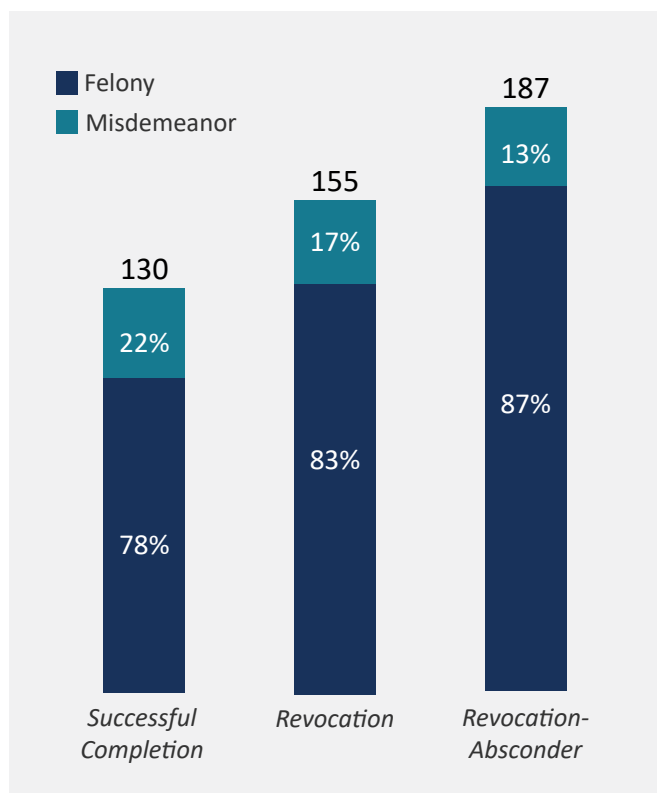


A lower proportion of absconders were partnered (married or common law) and a higher proportion formerly partnered (divorced or separated) than those revoked for other reasons, but successful completions had the lowest proportion of partnered individuals and the highest proportion of formerly partnered individuals. A similar proportion of absconders and revocations were single, both higher than the proportion of successful completions.

Absconders Had Higher Number of Felony Charges, More Violent Offenses, More Youth Criminal Histories

Recognizing the difference in supervision outcomes by number and type of underlying offenses is vital to creating comprehensive, appropriate plans for individuals on community supervision. **Figure 3** illustrates the number and type of total underlying offenses for individuals in the file review sample by termination type. Not only are absconders most likely to have underlying felony charges (and least likely to have underlying misdemeanor charges), they also have the highest number of underlying charges in total, 44 percent more than successful completions and 21 percent more than revocations for other reasons. Additionally, while a smaller number of absconders were charged with misdemeanors, a higher proportion of absconders had between three and six misdemeanor charges than individuals with other termination types (9 percent compared to 6 percent of revocations and 4 percent of successful completions).

Figure 3. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Underlying Felony/Misdemeanor



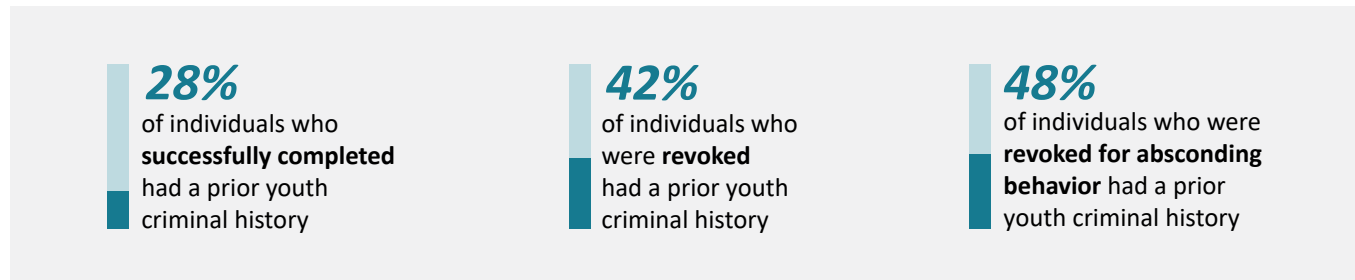
Across all termination types, Criminal Possession of Dangerous Drugs was the most common underlying offense, though it was least common for absconders (30 percent of the population compared to 32 percent of successful completions and 36 percent of revocations). The most common violent offense, Criminal Endangerment, was about equally common across all termination types, but the next two most common—Partner/Family Member Assault and Assault with a Weapon—were more common among absconders (8 percent and 6 percent); Sexual Intercourse Without Consent was also most common among absconders. Additionally, absconders were more likely to owe restitution as part of their sentence (34 percent of absconders compared to 19 percent of revocations and 15 percent of successful completions).

Knowing an individual's previous experience within the criminal justice and community supervision systems can inform better plans to ensure successful completion of their supervision period. Probation and parole departments use risk and need assessments, most of which consider criminal history and supervision terms, to set the level of supervision.³⁰ Additionally, case managers and treatment providers use risk and needs assessments that incorporate prior legal involvement to identify needs and link individuals to appropriate services as part of reentry and supervision plans. Discussions with Montana stakeholders support risk/needs theory research indicating that prior justice involvement and performance on previous supervision terms correlates with current supervision outcomes. When looking at criminal history, it was largely the case that individuals who were revoked for reasons other than absconding were more likely to have had longer criminal histories than those who absconded or those who successfully completed. Individuals revoked for other reasons were most likely to have had at least one prior prison term, at least one prior supervision term, and at least one prior revocation from supervision, as well as a higher median number of adult arrests and felony and misdemeanor charges. Individuals who absconded from supervision were more likely to have had prior criminal history and a higher number of arrests and felony and misdemeanor charges than those who successfully completed, but consistently less so than those revoked for other reasons.

The one exception is prior youth criminal history, which **Figure 4** shows was most common among absconders (47

percent had some youth criminal history, compared to 42 percent of other revocations and 28 percent of successful completions).

Figure 4. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Youth Criminal History



Absconders Had Higher Risk Levels

CJI looked at individuals’ risk levels prior to termination and found that men who absconded from supervision had the highest risk levels. **Figure 5** shows that a higher proportion of men who absconded from supervision scored high or very high on their final risk assessments prior to termination than those who were revoked for other reasons (52 percent compared to 42 percent) and those who successfully completed (12 percent). Additionally, male absconders had the lowest proportion of individuals whose risk level was assessed as low.

In FY2022, Montana DOC used separate risk and needs assessments for men and women, thus requiring separate analyses of risk level by gender; **Figure 6** shows risk level for women broken down by termination type. Similar to men, women who absconded from supervision had a higher proportion of risk assessment scores at the two highest levels, medium and high, than those revoked for other reasons (71 percent compared to 61 percent) and those who successfully completed (26 percent). Female absconders also had the lowest proportion of individuals assessed as low risk.

Figure 5. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Risk Level - Men

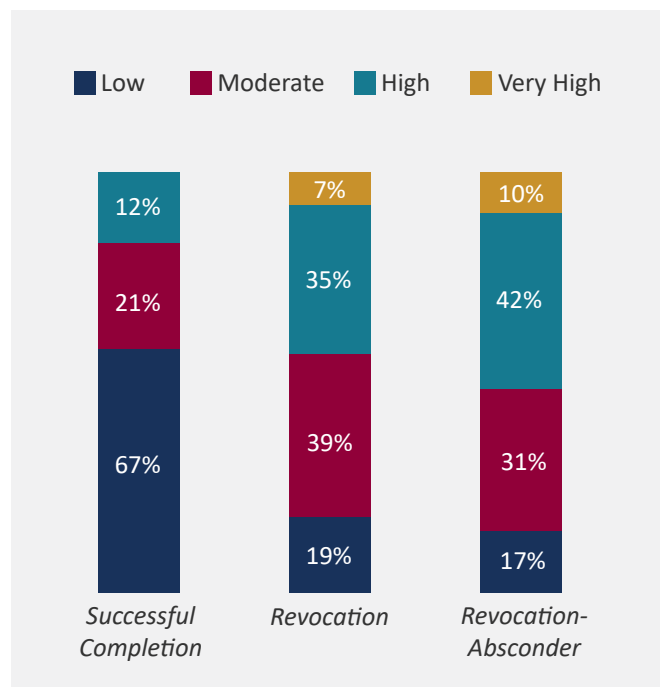
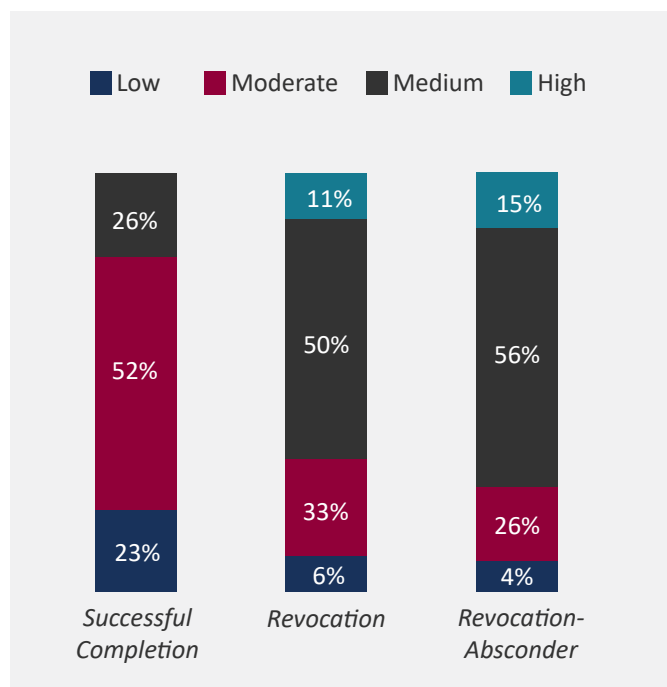


Figure 6. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Risk Level - Women



About half of men had their risk level reassessed between the start and the end of their time on supervision; of those, 29 percent saw an increase in risk level and 16 percent saw a decrease. Increases in risk level were more likely for men who were revoked from supervision than those who successfully completed, but they were about twice as common for those revoked for reasons other than absconding and five times as common for those who absconded. (Similar trends held true for women, but the numbers were considerably smaller, making meaningful conclusions about trends more difficult to draw.)

Absconders Are More Likely To Be Unemployed, Unhoused, and Lack A Driver’s License

Addressing challenges related to individuals’ risk, needs, and responsivity factors earlier in a supervision period can help decrease likelihood of absconding and increase chances of successful completion.³¹ This information was largely drawn from individuals’ most recent PSI forms, which are collected upon the start of an individual’s sentence. As such, the information is the most recent available, but may potentially be several years out of date at the time of an individual’s termination.

Figure 7 shows some of the most impactful criminogenic needs (dynamic or alterable risk factors) and responsivity factors: unemployment, housing instability, and substance use needs. Individuals who absconded from supervision had all three factors flagged more often than those who successfully completed or those who were revoked for other reasons, with the most prominent difference for housing instability (related closely to residence violations being a key component of absconding). The substance use needs flag especially indicates a high presence of these needs among the entirety of the community supervision population in Montana.



Individuals who absconded from supervision had **higher rates** of **unemployment, housing instability, and substance use needs.**

Figure 7. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Risk/Needs/Responsivity Factors

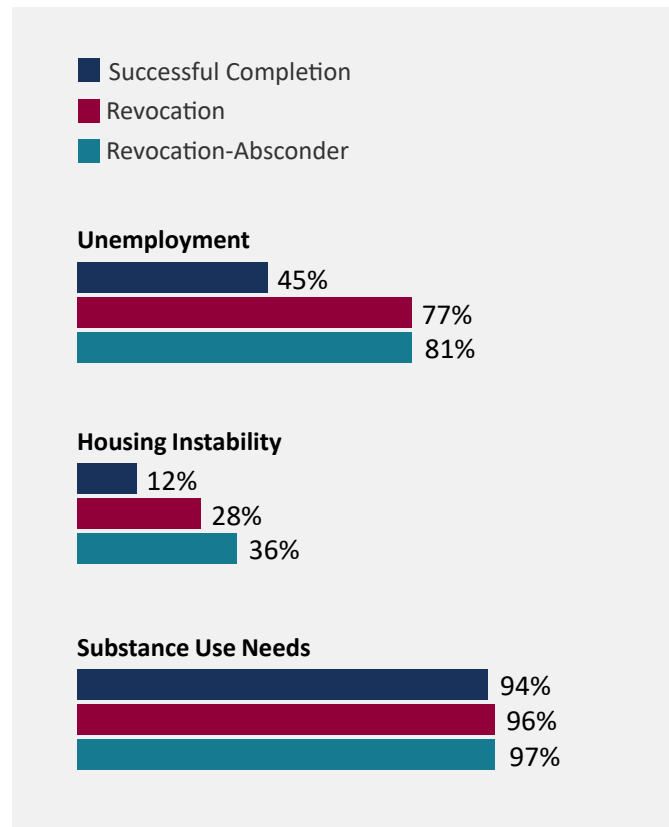
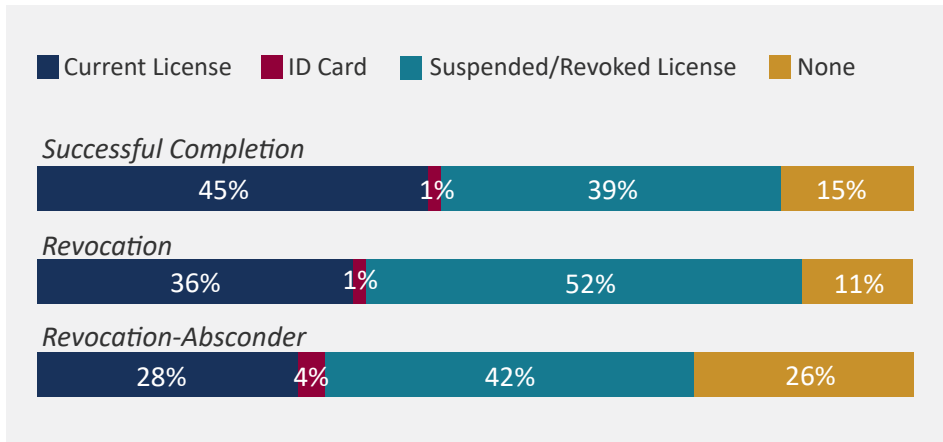


Figure 8 shows individuals’ driver’s license/ID status by termination type. Individuals who absconded from supervision were least likely to have a current license, most likely to have an ID card (indicating presence of a legal ID, but inability to legally drive), and most likely to have no identification document at all—more than twice as likely as those revoked for others reasons (who are more likely to have a suspended or revoked driver’s license). This indicates that nearly three-quarters of individuals who were terminated from supervision in Montana in FY2022 due to absconding were not legally able to drive.

While physical health was not meaningfully correlated with community supervision terminations, mental health needs were prevalent among all termination types – higher than 60 percent – but were highest for absconders (69 percent compared to 65 percent of revocations and 62 percent of successful completions).

Figure 8. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Driver's License/ID

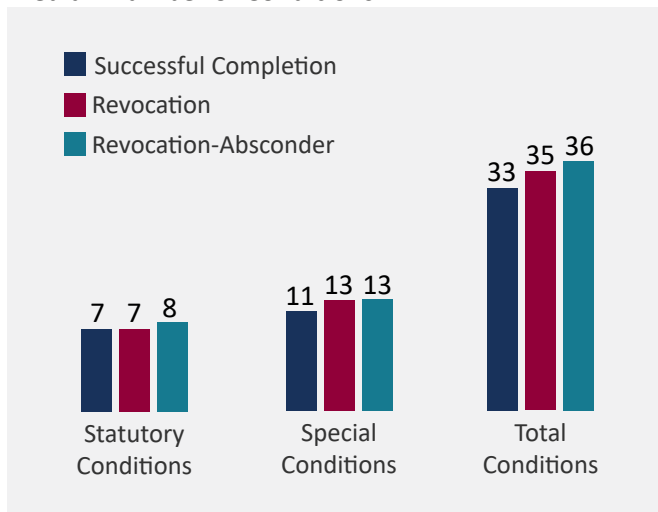



Nearly three-quarters of individuals revoked for absconding were **not legally able to drive.**

Absconders Had More Conditions of Supervision and More Documented Contacts with Supervising Officer

Individuals on supervision in Montana are often subject to a high number of conditions, a median of over 30 regardless of termination type. As a point of comparison, the national average of supervision conditions was around 17 conditions.³² **Figure 9** elaborates further, indicating that when broken down by termination type, individuals who absconded from supervision had the highest median number of overall conditions, as well as the highest median number of statutory conditions and a higher median number of special conditions than those who successfully completed.

Figure 9. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Median Number of Conditions



Among those revoked, absconders were more likely to receive statutory conditions mandating DNA testing, paying a fee for a PSI, and paying court-directed fines.^{33,34,35} Individuals who absconded were more likely than any other termination type to receive the special conditions of Chemical Dependency Evaluation, No Casinos, No Bars, No Association, and Mental Health Evaluation.³⁶⁻⁴⁰

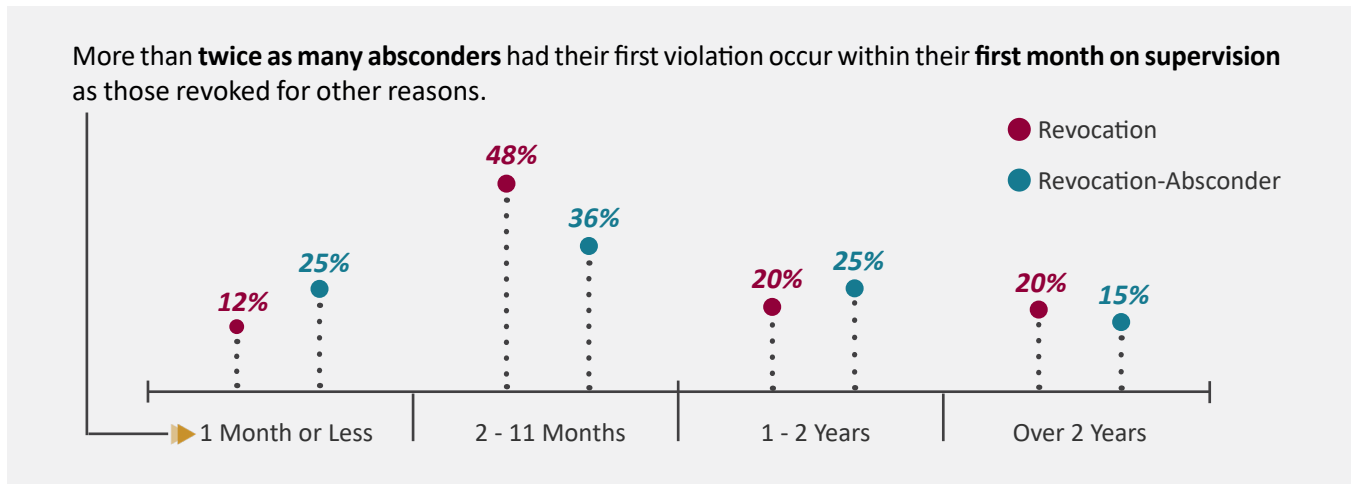
In addition to having a higher number of conditions, individuals who absconded had a higher number of documented notes about contact, attempted contact, or interventions between officer and the individual being supervised. Officers in Montana are expected to document any interaction with supervisees or attempted engagement, even if contact isn't successfully made. Individuals who absconded had a higher number of chronological notes entered by their supervising officers, an average of 114 (compared to 108 for revocations and 104 for successful completions). When looking at the types of chronological notes, absconders had the highest proportion of email, court, and collateral contacts, as well as a higher proportion of telephone contacts and offender file notes than those revoked for other reasons. As expected, absconders had the highest proportion of "no show" notes, as well as a slightly higher proportion of verbal reprimands and violation notes than those revoked for other reasons (40 percent and 95 percent compared to 38 percent and 91 percent, respectively). Absconders also had a slightly lower proportion of verbal recognition than those revoked for other reasons, 33 percent compared to 37 percent.

Absconders Had More Violations, Violated Earlier in Supervision Term, and Received More Sanctions

CJI compared ROVs of individuals who were revoked for absconding behavior and individuals revoked for other reasons, examining the timing and type of violations leading to revocation for both groups. Montana DOC distinguishes between technical violations of conditions, referred to as compliance violations, and new criminal behavior, referred to as noncompliance violations.ⁱⁱⁱ Absconders had a higher number of median violations, as well as a higher number of both compliance and non-compliance violations. Only 14 percent of absconders, compared to 23 percent of those revoked for other reasons, had only one violation leading to revocation; by comparison, 44 percent of absconders and 23 percent of revocations had four or more violations, and seven percent of absconders and four percent of revocations had ten or more violations.

As stated earlier, the literature indicates that absconding behavior tends to occur earlier in a supervision period.⁴¹ **Figure 10**, which compares time between start of supervision and date of the earliest violation cited on the ROV as leading to revocation, shows support for those findings. More than twice as many absconders had their first violation occur within their first month on supervision as those revoked for other reasons. These violations, too, are often immediately absconding-related; over a quarter of absconders had a reporting-related violation as their first violation, while close to another quarter had residence-related violations or violations simply labeled as absconding/“whereabouts unknown” (compared to revocations for other reasons, where half had a new offense and 42 percent had drug-related violations). **These findings emphasize how early problems that lead to absconding behavior can begin and underscore the necessity of early interventions and supports to prevent this behavior.**

Figure 10. File Review Sample by Termination Type and Time Until Earliest Violation



When looking at violations listed on an ROV as a whole, other than absconding-related violations, programming and employment violations are also more common among absconders than among those revoked for other reasons (30 and 22 percent of absconders compared to 24 and 10 percent of revocations, respectively). Drug-related violations are common among all revocations, but

more common among those revoked for other reasons; nearly two-thirds of this group had at least one drug-related violation, compared to 40 percent of absconders. The drugs involved in those violations also differed by population. Of revoked individuals who had a drug use violation, 62 percent involved methamphetamine and 52 percent involved alcohol, while the next most common

ⁱⁱⁱ. The full list of non-compliance violations encompasses new criminal charges; possessing a firearm in violation of supervision conditions; stalking, harassing, or threatening the victim, their family, or a member of their support network; failing to enroll in or complete a sex offender or violent treatment program; and absconding. Absconding as a specific violation was implemented in 2022 (as defined in §46-23-1001(1), MCA); previously, supervising officers would use a combination of reporting, residence, and employment violations to indicate absconding behavior. As a result, absconding behavior is captured in the ROVs through a sometimes inconsistent combination of compliance and non-compliance violations.

drug, marijuana, was only used by seven percent of revocations with a drug use violation. By comparison, while methamphetamine and alcohol were still the most commonly used drugs for absconders with drug use violations (69 percent and 37 percent, respectively), three times as many absconders had marijuana-related violations, twice as many had heroin-related violations, and nearly twice as many had opioid-related violations.

While new offenses were by far the most common violation for individuals revoked for reasons other than absconding (70 percent of those individuals had at least one), they were still the second most common violation cited for absconders (41 percent). Individuals' new offenses differed between the two groups, with absconders more likely to have new felonies (62 percent of offenses compared to 51 percent among other revocations). Criminal Possession of Dangerous Drugs was the most common new offense for both groups, but was more than twice as common among those revoked for other reasons. Meanwhile, theft was nearly three times more common among absconders, as were violent offenses (16 percent of absconders with a new offense were charged with Partner/Family Member Assault, 10 percent with Assault, and 10 percent with Assault on a Minor), similar to the findings regarding underlying offenses.

In addition to violations, ROVs report the escalating sanctions supervising officers have used prior to requesting revocation, in accordance with the Montana Incentives and Intervention Grid (MIIG). Of those sanctions—including verbal reprimand, chemical dependency treatment, increased reporting/contacts, jail, intervention hearing, and enhanced supervision programs—individuals who absconded received each one more frequently than those who were revoked for other reasons, indicating increasing attempts to address violations prior to absconding used more frequently for this group.

Montana Focus Groups

Methodology

In addition to the quantitative data provided by Montana DOC, CJI sought to conduct focus groups with individuals currently or formerly on supervision currently residing

in or receiving services from nonprofit treatment centers and other facilities affiliated with Montana DOC. CJI connected with individuals in four facilities: three treatment centers, which either offer alternatives to incarceration or a specific focus on substance use treatment, and one pre-release center, a community corrections facility designed to help individuals transition from incarceration to community settings. CJI conducted five focus groups over four months, two of them at the same facility, with between four and nine participants in each group, nearly all of whom were currently on community supervision. Two focus groups were conducted in person, while three were conducted remotely; all but one group was recorded with the verbal consent of all participants.

Findings

Individuals Reported Their Overall Experiences with Supervision Are Negative

Most individuals spoke negatively of their time on supervision, using words such as “terrifying,” “vulnerable,” “depressing,” or “difficult”; several individuals who had been on supervision or in and out of prison for many years used the words “failure” to describe themselves, or spoke specifically to feeling as if they were in a repeating cycle and trying to repeatedly complete the same requirements. Some people stated that if one followed all the rules of supervision and did everything they need to, there wouldn't be any issues; others stated that things had been going well for them prior to a substance use relapse, at which point things got much harder. Several individuals spoke of either negative or positive relationships with their supervising officer having an impact: for example, distrust discouraging the individual or good communication enabling early intervention and resources towards successful completion. Multiple individuals expressed gratitude for the pre-release or treatment centers that they were in and that it would have been easy to “slip under the radar” without the accountability that these centers provided. Several individuals stated that the pre-release and treatment centers supported them in changing their perspective, building their skills, and regaining the ability to believe in themselves.

Multiple, Sometimes Overlapping Factors Contribute to Absconding Behavior

At least one person in every focus group had absconded or faced difficulty regularly reporting to supervision. When they relayed the circumstances under which this had occurred, several common themes emerged, many similar to what probation and parole officers reported witnessing in their anecdotal experiences with absconding violations.

Common Factors Contributing to Absconding



Substance Use/Mental Health Challenges



Housing Needs



Social Isolation/Travel Restrictions



Excess Conditions of Supervision



Relationship with Supervising Officer

Substance use is common and impacts absconding behavior both directly and indirectly. Substance use disorder (SUD) and relapse were common among the individuals in the focus groups and often led to absconding, both as a direct cause and by impacting other circumstances that ultimately led to absconding. Several individuals stated that they “ran” due to an inability to commit to sobriety; these participants expressed they wanted to keep living their life the way they wanted to rather than committing to the rules being imposed upon

them, and the mindset of their SUD led them to believe that they could simply choose to avoid compliance and they wouldn’t be caught. This was sometimes exacerbated by relationships with other individuals on supervision also battling SUD, and the potential for both individuals to enable one another. Many individuals spoke about doing well on supervision up until they relapsed, at which point things would get worse; individuals reported that “giving up” as a result of their SUD was common. Accountability and taking responsibility for following the rules was also a common theme, especially among those individuals in treatment centers, but this was universally acknowledged to be very difficult when in active addiction. Individuals often felt they would be harshly punished during their supervision check-ins for having a positive drug test, so they absconded instead, the calculation being that if they were going to go back to jail or prison regardless, there would be no point in reporting.

Substance use could also be one factor of many contributing to difficulties individuals faced that would lead to absconding. Difficult life events, such as deaths in the family, could lead to relapses and “checking out” or no longer caring about supervision. Social isolation linked to drug use was common; there was often a deep sense of shame when interacting with sober friends or family, but restrictions on associating with individuals on supervision, with whom the participants were often in treatment or groups and thus were the people who understood them best, could sometimes impede connections to support networks. Loss of housing was also often a trigger for relapse, leading to difficulty, struggle, and feeling as if no help was available. “When you lose everything,” one individual stated, “it’s easy to fall back into old comfortable habits,” such as substance use.

Residence-related violations are common, as approved housing can be challenging to obtain. Residence-related violations are often linked to absconding, so issues of housing often came up as triggers for absconding revocations. Many of the individuals in the focus groups had experienced homelessness and spoke about how difficult this experience was and how much harder it made every other aspect of their lives. Participants reported that homelessness involved extreme daily stress about safety and cruel treatment from others. As stated earlier, losing shelter could trigger relapses

of substance use, either as a coping mechanism, an old comfortable habit, or as a means of survival by selling (and subsequently using) drugs.

Individuals expressed that homelessness was common due to the difficulty of finding stable housing that met supervision requirements (e.g., living with individuals with no justice involvement, in environments deemed appropriate for individuals in recovery). While some individuals were revoked for not having a residence, others were revoked for not having the right kind of residence, such as living with other individuals on supervision or living in housing without being on the lease. Some individuals spoke to high rent prices and difficulty finding places that would rent to those with felony convictions, especially those with violent offenses; some jurisdictions only had a couple of approved housing options that would accept individuals convicted of violent offenses. Some individuals had family members that would offer support, but who found it difficult to comply with supervision regulations (for example, having to get rid of legally owned weapons, security cameras, or large dogs). Others would abscond specifically to be back home with their family or back to a reservation simply because they had nowhere else to go. Sober living was sometimes a requirement of supervision, but a lack of available beds would leave them with no other options for housing and an inability to comply with the terms of their supervision. Others would be forced back into sober living or treatment programs as an attempt to help them find housing, even if the programming there wasn't helpful for them; however, they would still be required to complete it, even if they had previously done so, because they had nowhere else to live. In general, inadequate rental assistance and a lack of help finding housing was often reported as a barrier. Individuals emphasized the importance of housing stability as a vital part of successful transition back into the community, as well as how difficult and demoralizing it was to not receive assistance, only to be revoked and have to address the same issues upon subsequent release.

Travel without permission can be linked to a desire to maintain relationships and community. Several individuals reported receiving absconding violations specifically for traveling without permission or not being where they were supposed to be, and the circumstances

of that travel largely involved wanting to be with their family. One individual reported being revoked after leaving their required programming to visit a hospitalized family member without permission. Another reported receiving verbal permission to visit family, but not a written travel permit, and was therefore threatened with jail upon their return, leading them to abscond as a result. One individual reported being denied permission to return to their family, but did so anyway; another traveled back home to their reservation due to being unable to find housing anywhere else. One individual reported having a mental health crisis and wanting to be with their partner, who they described as their "safe person." They perceived their options as staying in compliance and going into psychosis or violating their conditions by receiving help for their mental health. One individual was revoked for traveling without permission when they were not aware they needed permission to travel; another lacked a good rapport with their supervising officer, so did not try to ask for a travel permit before traveling due to not believing their officer would help them get one.

Relationships with friends and family mean a great deal to those on supervision; many of them spoke to how important having familial support was and how difficult and isolating the experience of being of supervision could be without it. Many individuals reported feeling most supported by the peers they participated in treatment or programming with, since they could understand one another's experiences. However, due to the restrictions on associating with others on supervision, many individuals prioritized their existing ties to the community and were willing to risk non-compliance in an attempt to maintain those relationships.

Excess conditions of supervision present barriers to compliance. Individuals repeatedly spoke of how impossible it felt to meet all of the conditions and requirements they had to complete while under supervision. They often felt as if one small slip-up would set them back to the start; in many cases, individuals reported that missing a single appointment would feel so demoralizing they would stop reporting altogether. Feeling as if they would be revoked for something as small as a positive drug test would make the process of reporting overwhelmingly stressful for individuals. One individual reported that even when doing well, they hated

to check in, stating they felt “like I was going to get into trouble.” Individuals expressed frustration that not only did they feel that there were far too many requirements, but not all of them were useful or targeted towards what individuals actually needed, making compliance feel all the more futile. Some individuals were frustrated that they had to repeat the same type of programming multiple times, especially the programs they had to pay for. Others had believed their requirements to be complete, only to be told they had more to do. Individuals were often told that there were “no excuses” and were expected to get everything done no matter what, but many reported feeling as if complying with all requirements was not possible, especially in the face of unexpected life events (such as sick family members). Certain circumstances, such as having to miss work for a drug test (a violation) or missing a drug test due to a work shift (also a violation) were described as “no-win.” Alternately, even individuals who had supervising officers who wanted to provide help felt as if they couldn’t, because they weren’t aware of the resources available or the documentation necessary for individuals to complete their requirements.

These requirements are exacerbated by revocation; individuals often had to restart sentences after being revoked, even when the reason for revocation was new charges that had since been dropped. Revocation interrupts the process of complying with the already insurmountable-seeming requirements, meaning that when individuals return to the community, not only is there a lengthy sentence ahead of them, but they’ve lost the progress they had previously made on their conditions and had to start over. Several individuals reported violating or absconding because they knew there was no way they could abide by the conditions of their supervision for the length of their full sentence, and believed there was no point in trying.

Individuals’ relationship with their supervising officer are central to success on supervision, and distrust and lack of communication can exacerbate circumstances leading to absconding. One of the most common themes across the focus groups, both specific to absconding violations and to the wider experiences on supervision, was an individual’s relationship with their supervising officer. Many individuals reported feeling a lack of trust and rapport and believed their supervising officer was

consistently expecting the worst of them or waiting for them to make a mistake. Individuals often reported frustration with supervising officers not acknowledging their efforts or their accomplishments, but only focusing on their prior negative behavior or violations. One individual reported scheduling their required programming, but being violated due to their officer believing they should have scheduled everything sooner. Another was revoked for missing one appointment and felt as if their supervising officer didn’t understand their struggles. Often there was a sense that “one mistake” would send an individual back to prison.

Individuals often felt like supervising officers didn’t understand them or required a particular type of behavior from them – needing to be subservient or take on a particular tone in order to get the help they needed. Some individuals did not believe their supervising officers cared to address the underlying reasons for their violations and were simply looking for a reason to revoke them. There was an impression that being honest about struggles, such as wanting to use drugs, would result in punishment rather than help. Individuals also reported experiencing a lack of fairness and consistency from their supervising officer, expressing that some individuals would receive particularly harsh punishments for violations while others received multiple chances to do better — or, alternately, that individuals were punished in the same way despite one individual working harder and having more progress. Participants felt as if responses to violations were arbitrary based on their specific supervising officer. Some individuals stated that they were promised help if they reported to a supervision office, but were instead arrested and revoked, furthering a lack of trust. Several individuals mentioned never having seen the graduated responses laid out in the MIIG actually put into practice, instead receiving a harsh response to a first or minor violation.

This lack of trust often resulted in absconding. As stated earlier, individuals who knew they would provide a positive drug test sometimes chose to abscond instead and a poor relationship with their supervising officer could contribute to this decision. A lack of rapport also precluded individuals from being honest about the problems or struggles they were facing and, should those problems become insurmountable, lead them to abscond

rather than reaching out for help they don't feel would be provided. "Each of the times I absconded," one individual said, "were minor situations that could have been helped if my PO had just listened to me." "Why report," said another, "if all [they're] going to do is put me down?"

A general lack of relationship with a supervising officer could also be problematic; several individuals reported "floating" between officers at the start of supervision before being officially assigned, which meant that they were never sure what they needed to be doing to stay in compliance or who to talk to when they needed help, guidance, or answers to questions. Others reported frequently changing supervising officers, meaning that there wasn't an opportunity to develop a rapport—or worse, losing a supervising officer with whom they had developed one, only to have a new officer assigned with whom their relationship was more contentious and building trust was much harder. Some individuals reported a lack of communication between supervising officers, resulting in uncertainty about what they would be required to do or a change in stipulations between officers. One of the individuals who was still on supervision due to remaining financial obligations stated that switching officers so often had caused them to lose track of what was left to be paid. Others had a single supervising officer who didn't require them to report often or was so busy that they didn't pay much attention to them. There was acknowledgment and even sympathy expressed for the heavy workloads of most supervision officers, even knowing that it negatively affected many individuals on their caseload. One individual described his officer as "putting out so many fires, [they] didn't have time for the person who wasn't on fire." This could lead to lengthy delays in getting approvals such as travel permits, causing individuals to either give up or simply abscond (traveling without permission). Another individual reported that not being required to report for long stretches of time made them nervous, because it felt like they were doing something wrong, while another reported the reason for their absconding was the result of having too much free time between supervision requirements.

By contrast, it was clear that having a positive relationship with a supervising officer could be immensely beneficial. One individual reported having a regular texting

relationship with their supervising officer, which enabled them to text with a warning that they were going to miss a report, thus avoiding a violation. Another individual spoke about how much it helped build a rapport to have supervising officers who had also battled SUD, because they were able to empathize and offer help, making it easier for the individual to be honest about their struggles without fear that they would be judged or treated harshly. Individuals expressed how valuable it was to be asked how they were doing or what they needed rather than simply being told what they had to do to remain in compliance.

Other Obstacles to Success on Supervision Include Population-Specific Barriers, Mental Health, Financial Obligations, and Transportation

In addition to the circumstances specifically linked to absconding, individuals cited other barriers that made success on supervision more difficult. Race, several claimed, played a part in the treatment options individuals received, as well as the ways in which they interacted with the justice system. One individual explicitly stated that they went back to their reservation due to a lack of trust in their supervising officer or the system. Native Americans may also view reservations as "safe spaces", with differing laws that make access to housing and employment easier due to a lack of restriction around eligibility for those with felony convictions. Women also faced specific barriers, including additional burdens such as childcare that limit their time and make reporting more difficult and limited programming opportunities. "Men get pushed through the system more quickly," one individual reported, "and women aren't helped as much." Shelters or homelessness were also reported to be more dangerous for women due to the extra risk for sexual assault or danger from current or former abusive partners.

Much like substance use, mental health posed both a direct and indirect burden by affecting individuals in and of itself directly as well as making other circumstances of supervision more difficult. Several individuals expressed having a number of mental health challenges that impacted their ability to hold down a job or access

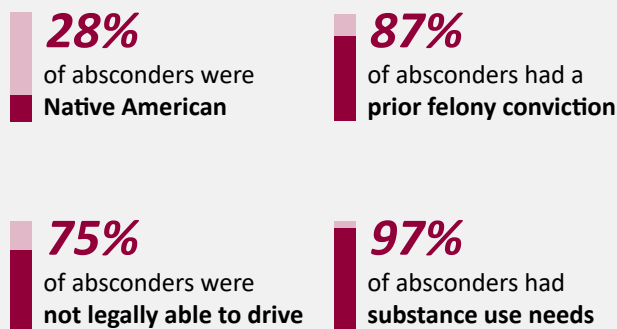
specific treatment services tailored to their needs. Others spoke of how their mental health was exacerbated by their SUD, or vice versa, and how much the strain of complying with supervision obligations took a toll on their mental health over time. Several individuals expressed a need for supervision officers to be better trained in dealing with mental health so that they could offer the resources and treatment needed for individuals in crisis.

Financial obligations were also a significant burden for individuals, several of whom were only still on supervision due to outstanding fines. Needing permission for major purchases felt like a burden to many, especially for essentials such as cars. Several individuals expressed frustration with receiving sanctions they then had to pay for, such as electronic monitoring or GPS; others stated how hard it was to make choices about paying rent, vital bills, or supervision fees, and how being homeless exacerbated the challenges posed by financial obligations.

Finally, transportation was often mentioned as a barrier, largely linked to the burden of excess conditions and requirements of supervision. Having a car or reliable form of transportation was deemed essential to the process and meeting supervision requirements was deemed impossible without them. Additionally, the threat of homelessness without having a car made the experience far worse, because individuals would have no place to store their belonging or take shelter. Several individuals spoke about the difficulty of obtaining the documentation necessary to get their driver’s license reinstated, or even knowing which documentation was needed. Many described the process as confusing and difficult. Several individuals suggested that it would be helpful for supervising officers to coordinate their transportation to and from appointments or drug tests, because without this support they did not feel that the failure to report was their fault. Public transportation options in Montana are limited and especially in the winter, a lack of timely public transit could result in serious consequences for individuals without regular access to a car.

Montana Key Takeaways

Quantitative Findings



Qualitative Findings

- Most individuals that participated in focus groups report their overall experiences with supervision are negative.
- Multiple overlapping factors contribute to absconding behavior (e.g. substance use disorder, homelessness, travel restrictions, excess conditions, relationship with supervising officer).
- Population-specific barriers, mental health challenges, financial obligations, and transportation issues also reduce chances of success.

Florida Focus Groups

Methodology

CJI reached out to community-based organizations to connect with individuals currently or formerly on community supervision who were receiving their services. Three organizations connected CJI with their clients: an organization providing supportive housing and diversionary programs to individuals recovering from health or life crises; an organization seeking to connect formerly incarcerated individuals to skills trainings and job opportunities; and an organization supporting formerly incarcerated women with their transition back into society. CJI conducted three focus groups over six weeks with between three and eleven participants in each group, about three-quarters of whom were currently on probation, Florida's predominant form of community supervision.^{iv} Each focus group was conducted remotely and recorded with the verbal consent of all participants.

Findings

Individuals' Overall Experiences with Supervision Are Mixed

Few of the individuals in the focus groups spoke about supervision as being overly difficult or onerous; several described the experience as "difficult" or "degrading," but others explicitly stated that they didn't find it problematic at all and faced no issues as long as they abided by the conditions and rules. The general attitude was one of resignation – that while the process had its challenges, they knew what to expect and just wanted to ensure they were able to get through it. Those who did face problems often attributed them to one single specific barrier, such as the experience of being on community control^v and the restrictions that came with it, difficulty

^{iv} In 2019, there were 35,938 individuals released from felony probation in Florida, which comprised the largest overall supervision type and made up 61 percent of releases that year. In that same year, there were 3,912 individuals released from community control in Florida, comprising 7 percent of all releases that year. Robustelli, "Improving Outcomes and Safely Reducing Revocations from Community Supervision in Florida," pg 5, (2022). https://www.cjinstitute.org/assets/sites/2/2022/07/Florida-Revocation-Analysis-Report-FINAL_7.13.22.pdf.

^v In Florida, community control is defined as "a supervision program created as a diversion to incarceration; it is an intensive supervision program where the individual is confined to the person's home unless working, attending school, performing public service hours, participating in treatment or another special activity that has been approved in advance by the supervising officer. Florida Department of Corrections (n.d.). Probation Services. (<https://www.fdc.myflorida.com/probation-services>).

finding employment, or the high burden of assorted costs associated with supervision. Multiple participants also spoke of how much more beneficial they found the resources they received through the community providers that were serving them than any resources or programming received through the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC). Those who had previously finished terms of probation, though, universally spoke about a sense of relief and freedom once their sentence was over.

Absconding and Other Violation Behavior Consistently Linked to Substance Use, Relationship with Supervising Officer Determines Response

Only three individuals across all three focus groups reported absconding from supervision, and all three reported SUD either overlapping with or directly leading to the absconding behavior. One individual spoke of making "dumb choices" by not wanting to report as well as providing positive drug tests. One spoke of going to jail after a violation, then getting back out on probation and continuing not to report due to SUD, and subsequently repeating the cycle. Both of these individuals were ultimately revoked. The third individual was in a program where they broke the rules, used drugs, and left program housing before coming back and admitting to their supervising officer what they had done. As a result, the officer was able to advocate for this individual in court and contributed to this individual not being revoked or receiving sanctions for this violation, but instead being given another chance on probation.

When other individuals who had not absconded spoke of their violation behavior, two consistent themes emerged: SUD (similar to those who had absconded) or a new offense. However, in the latter case, nearly everyone spoke about receiving misleading information from their supervising officer regarding consequences for the offense. They reported that they were led to believe by their officer that things would be fine or that things had been resolved, but were later unexpectedly arrested, with a violation and subsequent revocation to follow.

Individuals' Relationship with Their Supervising Officer Is Central to Success on Supervision

The above experiences, as well as other information from individuals in the focus groups, made it clear that individuals' relationships with their supervising officer set the tone for their entire experience on supervision. The scenario mentioned above, where the individual self-reported their absconding and was not revoked, is an example of how a positive relationship between an individual and their supervising officer can make it easier for the client to be honest about their problems, ask for help, and continue to succeed on supervision. This individual also stated that their officer had familiarity with the program they were completing, which helped as the officer was able to offer advice about getting through the program and could work around the schedule set by the program for check-ins and other obligations. Another individual who described their relationship with their supervising officer as good stated that the officer "doesn't look for every little thing to violate you," implying that when officers assume best intentions, they are less likely to violate individuals over minor infractions and can more easily build trust. Another individual stated that their officer always asked how they were doing and wanted to discuss any problems they were facing; this, too, encourages honesty and helps alleviate any fears of harsh repercussions to violation behavior.

By contrast, individuals who had more challenging relationships with their supervising officers overwhelmingly cited issues with a lack of transparency. They felt as if they were being honest with their supervising officers but not receiving open communication in return, which made it hard to continue sharing their struggles. One individual said that certain paperwork they needed to complete for travel permits or identification documents got delayed because their supervising officer wouldn't help with completing them. Another expressed multiple experiences where supervising officers would simply decide they didn't like someone and so would do "everything in their power" to find reasons for violations. Individuals spoke about a lack of empathy and knowledge about the people officers are supervising. Multiple people felt as if their supervising officer not knowing them very well meant that they wouldn't receive the benefit of the

doubt and would be violated without a second chance. Several other individuals expressed they had no real relationship with their supervising officers at all. These individuals spoke of quick check-in meetings where they would just report or hand over paperwork (often doing drug tests as well), describing their experience as simply checking a box rather than having any kind of meaningful interaction. This frustrated some participants, as they reported spending more time in the waiting room than with their supervising officer and would feel as if they took hours out of their day for what was simply a five-minute meeting. This frustration led individuals to feel as if there wasn't an opportunity to develop a meaningful rapport and that their supervising officer didn't really know them. As a result, many individuals felt an inability to engage in honest conversations about barriers or difficulties because the underlying relationship of trust and understanding was not present.

Other Barriers to Success on Supervision Include Financial Obligations, Employment, and Transportation

Several additional barriers to success on supervision were highlighted by multiple focus group participants. One was financial struggles; several individuals mentioned they would not have been able to afford living expenses or access housing if they hadn't had familial support. (Most individuals who reported having some form of social support stated that the support was financial in nature.) Excessive costs related to supervision were also a frequently reported barrier; several individuals stated that it was their primary difficulty while on supervision and that minimizing fines and fees (or even receiving more help with or resources for paying them) was the one thing they would change about their experience on supervision. The subject was also reported as one of the most frequently discussed among people on supervision in their programs or groups, further underscoring its impact on the supervised population.

Employment was another frequently cited barrier; multiple individuals expressed difficulties finding and maintaining employment. Several mentioned that this was due to their felony convictions, while others cited an excess of scams, which made it difficult to tell which opportunities were legitimate. Multiple individuals

emphasized how much time they spent submitting job applications and expressed a desire for better, more targeted resources from FDOC about job opportunities. Participants expressed the need for more clarity around which organizations and agencies would be willing to hire individuals with felony convictions or places they could apply when they faced physical limitations on the kind of work they were able to do. Individuals also found it difficult to make time for job interviews, either because of supervision-related restrictions on their movement (community control offers a limited number of free hours every day) or because of other obligations taking up large amounts of time like reporting or program participation.

Transportation was also cited not as a barrier that individuals faced themselves, but one that they were grateful not to have to face. Several individuals mentioned

how lucky they were to have a car or reliable transportation options and stated that it would be impossible for them to complete their supervision obligations without that access. One individual mentioned that getting from obligation to obligation was difficult and time-consuming, especially for those who had unusual work schedules or evening shifts, and that having a car was the only way to make compliance possible. Another reported that the high volume of obligations (such as regular reporting, required programming, and employment and education requirements) was “like a part time job” and that it would have been impossible to meet all of those scheduling requirements without regular access to transit. Like in Montana, public transit options are limited in much of Florida, and multiple individuals mentioned how difficult it would be if someone on supervision to rely on public transit exclusively.

Florida Key Takeaways



Absconding and other violation behavior are consistently linked to substance use.



Financial obligations, employment challenges, and transportation access act as additional barriers.



The relationship between an individual and their supervising officer is central to success.

Key Themes and Areas of Opportunity

Across both quantitative and qualitative findings from both states involved in this study, as well as from prior work on absconding, five key thematic elements emerged which speak, broadly, to the barriers individuals face that increase their likelihood of absconding behavior. These themes lend themselves to areas of opportunity for state leaders to create policies and promote practices that can make absconding behavior less likely and can increase successful outcomes for individuals on community supervision as a whole.

This section is organized into the following key themes contributing to absconding behavior:



1. Absconding is often linked to underlying substance use.

The Montana file review findings indicated that the vast majority of individuals on supervision have needs related to substance use, but even with this high frequency among the full sample, it was most common for individuals who absconded from supervision. Reflecting this trend, nearly every individual in the focus groups who had absconded from supervision or stopped reporting to their supervising officer expressed that they were battling SUD or relapse at the time. This could subsequently result in concerns that reporting as scheduled and revealing their substance use would lead to incarceration, no longer caring about the importance of reporting regularly or abiding by supervision conditions, or other issues that compounded absconding behavior (such as unauthorized travel to family or other “safe” places or people). This link is also reflected in absconding literature, which finds that individuals with underlying drug offenses, drug-related violations of supervision, and histories of substance use are more likely to abscond.⁴²

Opportunity: Provide additional resources for substance use treatment, including increasing the continuity of care throughout an individual’s time in the criminal justice system.

Given the problems that arise when individuals on community supervision relapse into substance use, it is critical for supervision agencies to provide treatment opportunities to help individuals prevent relapse and to provide assistance if they do. A potential avenue to increase treatment opportunities for individuals on post-incarceration supervision is beginning the process of substance use treatment in prisons and ensuring that individuals can continue to access this treatment after reentering the community. For example, Massachusetts has a specialized service known as the Community Support Program for Individuals with Justice Involvement (CSP-JI) to help justice-involved individuals address their

health-related social needs while under the supervision of the Massachusetts Probation Service, Massachusetts Parole Board, or both.⁴³ Delaware also has the Treatment Access Center, which acts as liaison between the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health and the criminal justice system to ensure continuous treatment and recovery throughout an individual’s time within the criminal justice system.⁴⁴ In Colorado, the Division of Adult Parole’s Treatment Coordination Case Managers are tasked specifically with supporting individuals with psychological, substance use, or offense specific treatment needs in transitioning from facility to community by making referrals to treatment providers within 14 days of release. The staff coordinate with facility case managers, parole officers, community release case managers, and treatment providers, as well as addressing benefits eligibility.⁴⁵

Opportunity: *Improve best practices around drug testing, including the frequency of urinalysis and response to positive drug tests.*

A positive drug test is often treated as a violation of supervision, which subsequently leads to a sanction; this disincentivizes individuals to honestly report relapses into substance use and may encourage absconding when individuals fear serious consequences as a result. Additionally, requiring drug testing as a standard condition of supervision, even for individuals whose offenses were not substance-related, creates a

burden upon individuals to report more frequently and may encourage an antagonistic relationship with their supervising officer (perceived as indicating a lack of trust or a desire to “catch” them making a mistake). Treating positive drug tests as opportunities for intervention and identification of individuals who need additional treatment or resources rather than violations requiring punishment, as well as only requiring regular drug testing for individuals with substance-related offenses, can produce better outcomes and build more trust among individuals on supervision, encouraging honesty and increasing likelihood of successful outcomes.⁴⁶

2. Population-specific barriers, such as demographic factors and behavioral health, can make absconding more likely and exacerbate other conditions that may lead to absconding.

The Montana file review findings indicate a higher proportion of Native American individuals among those who absconded from supervision. Additionally, some individuals in the focus groups spoke about race impacting treatment on supervision, as well as access to programming and other resources, and how differing laws on reservations could make access to housing or employment easier, but felony convictions prevented individuals from accessing them. The file review also indicated higher proportions of individuals with mental health needs and lower education levels among absconders, both of which serve as barriers in and of themselves, but may also lead to difficulty obtaining employment or housing (both often requirements of supervision compliance, as well as two other needs more likely to be lacking among individuals who abscond from supervision – indicated in both the file review and among the focus groups). The literature also reflects links between race, lower education levels, and mental health needs and higher likelihood of absconding.⁴⁷ These documented trends in the literature were also reflected in the anecdotal feedback from officers across Montana, who observed the connection between co-occurring mental health and substance use challenges posing barriers to remembering appointments, the ability to navigate the logistics around physically getting to supervision offices (e.g., transportation, childcare, time management), and properly communicating with officers where relapse or other setbacks occurred, all of which often led to failure to report. Officers in Montana also reported a link between lower education levels impacting the ability to secure stable jobs and perceived inability to pursue further education while needing to work to pay bills and legal financial obligations. All of these correlates were tied to absconding, especially in instances where there was a negative change in circumstances for the individual and they were fearful of reporting the obstacle, which exacerbated the risk of absconding.

Gender is another barrier impacting success on supervision; multiple women in the focus groups spoke of the difficulties faced specifically by women (such as sexual assault at homeless shelters or when living on the street, sole care of children and perception of them as poor mothers being used against them when violations occurred), and fewer resources as compared to those available to men.

Opportunity: *Provide additional resources for women on supervision, including more access to targeted treatment and programming opportunities, housing, and childcare.*

There is a nationwide need to provide interventions that address the risk, needs, and responsivity factors

specific to women on supervision.⁴⁸ This was reflected in the feedback of several of the women in the focus groups, who spoke about how much longer it can take them to access resources such as treatment compared to men on supervision. Given that lack of compliance with requirements for residences may lead to absconding violations, there is also a need

for resources that cater specifically to needs, such as childcare or additional opportunities for housing that recognize women’s increased risk of sexual assault as a result of homelessness. The Hawaii Paroling Authority, for example, has a High Needs Supervision Unit that provides direct casework services to women identified as having high needs who have been diagnosed as having a mental illness or disability according to various DSM categories.⁴⁹ In Oregon, The Collaborative is a partnership between Jackson County Community Justice Parole and Probation, Oregon Department of Human Service (ODHS) Child Welfare, ODHS Self Sufficiency Program, and The Pathfinder Network that provides individualized resources specifically to women and gender diverse individuals.⁵⁰

Opportunity: Increase education and training around culturally responsive and trauma-informed supervision practices.

In addition to the presence of additional resources, there should also be an increased understanding among supervision officers that individuals marginalized by gender and/or race are facing specific, unique barriers to success on supervision, especially given higher rates of absconding among people of color. Increased education among officers about these barriers and training opportunities that help officers effectively respond to them will contribute to success on supervision for these groups, as well as building trust and rapport that may increase honesty about challenges these individuals are facing. Additionally, offering options for training that accounts for differences in individuals’ experiences with supervision will enable deeper understanding and greater responsiveness to challenges. For example, many Native American and Alaska Native cultures view individuals’ struggles with sobriety or mental health as problems afflicting that individual’s broader community, which should be addressed by both individual and community healing as opposed to just the individual.⁵¹ Culturally responsive interventions for Native people therefore tend to involve family members and community members in the individual’s healing process, and seek to address the afflicted person’s emotional and spiritual needs in addition to their mental and physical needs.^{52,53} Incorporating cultural practices of specific groups, such as honoring the sacred, forgiveness, and responsibility

within the collective while constructing positive identity and cultural pride, can be deeply valuable to their reentry experience and should be acknowledged and facilitated by supervising officers.⁵⁴

Opportunity: Provide additional resources addressing behavioral health, including recognition of ways in which these issues exacerbate other barriers.

Substance use and mental health needs are prevalent among supervision populations, so additional resources to help both address their direct impact and lessen the ways that these needs may exacerbate other barriers are essential for this population. One mechanism, utilized within Baker County, Oregon, was the positioning of their county Parole and Probation office in the same building as the New Directions Northwest Behavioral Health and Wellness, allowing their supervised population one convenient location to both manage their recovery and behavioral health appointments and complete their court-ordered obligations.⁵⁵ This partnership also provides an opportunity for stronger collaboration among treatment providers and parole and probation deputies to create effective case plans. In Alaska, the Institutional Discharge Project Plus (IDP+) program employs two full-time clinicians and two full-time Mental Health Probation Officers to provide legal and clinical supervision for 90 individuals with felony charges and mental health needs released in Anchorage.⁵⁶

3. Individuals who abscond are more likely to have criminal histories, especially past supervision periods that speak to getting trapped in a “revolving door” of supervision and revocation.

The Montana file review found that individuals who absconded from supervision were more likely to have youth criminal history and previous post-incarceration supervision periods, a finding supported in the literature.⁵⁷ This reflects trends in the focus groups, where some individuals who were revoked would subsequently have to serve the entirety of a suspended sentence, resulting in up to or over a decade of time on supervision (several individuals had been on supervision for over 20 years). Individuals chronicled experiences on supervision where they stayed compliant for the majority of the supervision term, but had a noncompliant setback months or years into supervision; they perceived that their track record of overall compliance was often minimized compared to the current violation, such that there was no “credit” given to long periods of compliance or benefit of the doubt. Some expressed feelings of despair when putting energy into complying with conditions for the majority of their supervision term and then committing a violation had similar outcomes as violating earlier in the supervision term without showing good faith attempts at compliance. The sense was that any small mistake, regardless of prior compliance, would lead to a return to prison and a restart of the cycle that would further lengthen their criminal history, leading to a sense of “giving up” on attempting compliance to begin with or absconding rather than facing more prison or jail sanctions.

The file review also indicated that individuals who absconded were more likely to have violations earlier in their sentence, potentially for those reasons. Problems are further compounded for those with violent offenses, as they have more difficulty obtaining residences (especially those which meet DOC requirements) and stable employment; the file review indicated that violent offenses are more common among those who absconded from supervision.

Opportunity: *Align duration of supervision terms with best practices.*

Multiple individuals in the focus groups spoke to the difficulty of facing restrictive conditions across many years of supervision. While no national standard exists for how long probation should be for any given case, instituting limits for how long these sentences can be would make the process of compliance less daunting and encourage individuals to successfully complete rather than feeling as though violations are inevitable. Kentucky, for example, implemented five-year felony probation caps and two-year caps for misdemeanor probation or until restitution is completed, whichever is longer.⁵⁸ Iowa also has probation caps of two years for misdemeanors and five years for felonies, but these may be extended for up to one year beyond the maximum if there is a probation violation.⁵⁹ Jurisdictions should work to align supervision terms with research around efficacy of supervision term lengths necessary or supportive of behavior change. Research indicates that people are at the highest risk of re-offending early in their supervision terms; for example, among people on felony probation in Oregon who were re-arrested within three years of entering probation, 69% were arrested in the first year.⁶⁰

Further, studies show that after the first year, many supervision provisions, such as reporting requirements and community-based services, have little effect on the likelihood of re-arrest, so keeping probation terms short and prioritizing resources for the early stages of supervision can help improve success rates among people on probation, reduce officer caseloads, and protect public safety.

Opportunity: *Implement graduated response frameworks or trainings to enhance fidelity to existing frameworks developed to prevent individuals from returning to jail or prison after minor violations.*

Fear of repercussions from violations of supervision often motivates absconding behavior. The presence of a graduated response matrix that clearly outlines escalating responses to violations, as well as transparency about what the response to specific violations will be, could make it easier for individuals to be honest about their violation behavior and less likely to abscond or stop reporting instead. Jurisdictions that already have a graduated response framework (such as the MIIG in Montana) may benefit from more consistent trainings

to increase fidelity to the framework and ensure that responses to violations are consistent across officers. For example, most graduated response matrices would not recommend a severe sanction for one missed office visit; conversations about the increase in penalties where absconding behavior becomes a trend with multiple missed contacts puts the supervisee on notice and creates assurance that the solution to a failure to appear is making contact with one's officer. Michigan's graduated response system caps the length of time individuals

may be incarcerated for a technical violation. For those on misdemeanor probation, jail time is capped at five days for first-time technical violations (up to 15 days for felony probation), 10 days for a second violation (up to 30 for felony probation), and 15 days for a third violation (45 days for felony probation).⁶¹ Iowa also implements a corrections continuum of specific sanctions from levels 1 through 5 that promotes the use of incremental, community-based sanctions.⁶²

4. Excess conditions of supervision – including multiple programs, housing requirements and financial obligations – are a significant burden to individuals on supervision and can lead to absconding.

Some individuals in the focus groups stated that they received absconding violations due to having residences that didn't meet DOC requirements; others spoke of the isolation of being unable to associate with individuals who had criminal records, who are often strong sources of support due to shared experiences, backgrounds, and understanding. Financial obligations as a significant burden were a theme across nearly every focus group, reflected as well in the file review findings that individuals who absconded in Montana owed restitution more frequently than those who successfully completed or were revoked. Others focused on the high amount of programming required in addition to regular reporting, employment and education requirements, and other obligations, stating that it was difficult to balance and make time for everything. This, too, was reflected in the file review, which found that absconders had a higher number of conditions of supervision set.

Additionally, some individuals spoke of the difficulties inherent in completing the documentation required for certain conditions of supervision or benchmarks such as obtaining a driver's license, or even knowing what type of documentation or which steps they were required to undertake. This links to a lack of transportation as an often-discussed barrier, one that sometimes resulted in absconding due to a physical inability to report in a timely manner; the file review reflects that individuals who abscond are less likely to have an active driver's license.

Opportunity: *Ensure that individuals are only required to follow the conditions of supervision essential to maintaining public safety and that these conditions are specifically targeted to their risk, needs, and responsiveness factors.*

Not all standard conditions of supervision are necessary for or relevant to all individuals on supervision, and the more regulations an individual is required to follow, the higher the chances are of a violation (and potentially of absconding behavior, to avoid sanctions for those violations). Streamlining the number of standard conditions for individuals on supervision and ensuring that only essential conditions are added—and ensuring that those conditions are necessary for public safety

as well as tailored specifically to each individual—may decrease the burden on individuals and increase likelihood of compliance. In South Carolina and Alabama, vaguely worded conditions, such as “avoid injurious or vicious habits” or “avoid persons or places of disreputable or harmful character”, are examples of non-targeted conditions that are not tailored to the specific needs of the individual.⁶³ While these conditions are targeted towards public safety, they are left to the discretion of the supervising officer and lack specificity needed to help the individual adhere to their conditions in good faith. Certain jurisdictions where resources or staff capacity are limited, risk and needs assessments are only completed for the most serious offenses (i.e., felonies) and do not routinely screen individuals with lower-level offenses.⁶⁴ In cases where this individualized information is not available,

jurisdictions should either impose no conditions or only routinely impose a minimal set of standard conditions, unless there are clear indications of a criminogenic need such as substance abuse. Because most individuals are ultimately being sentenced to probation or released onto parole undergo an assessment at some point before the beginning of their supervision term, jurisdictions could institute a process for allowing supervision officers to petition the court or parole board to add an additional condition if a documented criminogenic need is later identified and would benefit from a targeting condition. An example of this opportunity for more streamlined adjustment to conditions is found in recent initiatives by the Montana DOC. To respond to the high number of conditions and the routine practice of imposing blanket conditions regardless of individual risk and needs, CJ recommended the Montana DOC and other court practitioners revise practices for setting conditions of supervision, with the goals of tailoring conditions to the individual's current circumstances and removing barriers to supervision success. Montana DOC recognized the numerous conditions across Administrative Rules of Montana standard conditions, statutory conditions, and specialized conditions, as well as the duplicative and compounding impact on supervisees. In response, Montana DOC formed a multidisciplinary workgroup including judges, defense attorneys, county attorney, presentence investigation writers, and probation staff to streamline the number and types of conditions that are necessary to enhance public safety and individual rehabilitation. This workgroup addressed upwards of 60 different conditions and identified those that enforced sustainable behavior change and those that functioned more as obstacles to successful completion of supervision. The workgroup also reviewed statutes that outlined the process for modifying conditions of supervision. It was reported that the statutory mechanism for adjusting conditions was primarily being used to add conditions instead of adjusting or deleting conditions that became less relevant or valuable over the course of a long supervision term. Therefore, the workgroup collaborated with Montana's Criminal Justice Oversight Council to draft updated legislative language to ease the process by which officers could petition to streamline conditions for those who delineated sustained compliance. These statutory changes align with risk, need, responsivity theory and community supervision's goal of reducing one's risk by addressing needs over the supervision term.

Opportunity: Streamline requirements for essential documentation (such as driver's licenses) and ensure the relevant steps are clear and easily accessible.

Transportation is a considerable barrier to success on supervision, especially in areas where public transit is limited. Additionally, documentation such as identification of some kind is vital for obtaining employment and housing, two universal requirements for individuals on supervision. The easier that supervision agencies can make the process of obtaining documents that allow individuals to secure identification or legally drive, the more likely individuals are to remain in compliance and avoid absconding-related violations related to residence requirements. The Department of Corrections can assist with the difficult task of obtaining vital documents. For example, Nevada DOC works with individuals to obtain vital documents at intake into their facilities. Their reentry staff assist individuals with applying for vital documents and the department stores the received documents until the individual releases.⁶⁵ The Colorado DOC has collaborated with the Department of Motor Vehicles to establish two dedicated DMV offices within two of their facilities. Individuals can meet with a DMV staff member upon intake into the facility or can be transported to a corrections-located DMV office to obtain a replacement ID or driver's' license.⁶⁶

Opportunity: Identify barriers impacting compliance to specific conditions (such as housing) and provide targeted resources to address those barriers.

The focus groups revealed that often individuals are not aware of what they need to do to remain in compliance with their conditions of supervision. For example, some individuals were not aware of limitations on their ability to travel or conditions for what constituted an approved residence; both are absconding-related violations. If supervising agencies can make those requirements clear and provide targeted, tailored resources to make it easier for individuals to meet them, noncompliance and absconding-related violations will be less likely. Individuals on Florida's Drug Offender probation, for example, face several conditions that can exacerbate some barriers, such as loss of driver's license and color-

coded random drug tests.⁶⁷ Loss of a driver's license can restrict an individual's means of transportation, while color-coded random drug tests require an individual to report the day they are requested for a test, regardless of other obligations such as employment. These conditions produce more barriers than resources for these specific

individuals and are not tailored to their specific needs. In Georgia and Mississippi, however, individuals on supervision who fail to pay their fines and fees will not have their driver's licenses suspended, maintaining stability in employment and in managing their basic needs.⁶⁸

5. The relationship an individual has with their supervising officer is foundational to their experience on supervision, including the consequences of violations.

A theme that emerged across almost every focus group was how much an individual's relationship with their supervising officer will impact their experience on supervision. Trust and confidence will make an individual feel more comfortable being honest about challenges they are facing, while a lack of trust and perception of hostility will make individuals less likely to share their struggles and may lead to a lack of consistent reporting, especially if individuals feel they will be met with similar consequences regardless of whether they are abiding by their conditions. Supporting this link, the file review indicated a higher number of violations and a higher proportion of sanctions among individuals who absconded than among those who were revoked for other reasons. Chronological notes also reflected a higher number of verbal reprimands and fewer instances of verbal recognition for those who absconded, reflecting frustrations among individuals in the focus groups who expressed that their supervising officers consistently focused on what they were doing wrong rather than recognizing their achievements and forward progress.

Additionally, a foundation of trust and open communication can be the difference between facing more serious consequences for violations of supervision conditions; individuals with stronger relationships with their POs may only receive a warning or be given additional chances to successfully complete supervision rather than facing revocation after violations or other problems. Individuals expressed frustration that success on supervision could be so dependent on a PO's knowledge of resources or willingness to create trust and that individuals' experiences were so inconsistent based on who was supervising them. Lack of communication can also impact an individual's awareness of what resources are available or what requirements need to be fulfilled to maintain compliance, further exacerbating potential problems.

Opportunity: *Provide officers core correctional practice training on needs-based supervision that focuses on skill development, sustainable behavior change, and open communication, all of which build rapport between individuals and their supervising officers.*

Supervision agencies are moving away from focusing mainly on compliance monitoring, enforcing mandated conditions, and reacting to violations; instead, agencies are adopting a more proactive approach to supervision that balances individual accountability and behavior change with the application of the risk-need-responsivity framework, which research shows effectively reduces recidivism.⁶⁹

This shift in the mindset and established practices of supervision agencies and officers who have done supervision work over several decades, with evolving visions for the role of community supervision, is critical to safely improving supervision outcomes. Resources such as core correctional practice training include effective use of incentives to promote positive behavior and interventions to respond to negative behavior, problem-solving, cognitive restructuring focused on how thoughts, feelings, and actions are related, and relationship skills. These skills, when consistently practiced with supervisees, can lay the foundation for sustainable prosocial behavior change and improve communication, rapport, and trust with officers, as supervisees gain tools to work through relapses and obstacles that inevitably occur during supervision terms.

Opportunity: Increase the use of incentives and recognition relative to sanctions and reprimands.

Individuals in the focus groups felt that their supervising officers rarely acknowledged their successes or recognized the positive steps they were taking in their lives. An increased use of incentives and recognition could go a long way towards improving the relationships between individuals on supervision and their supervising officers, allowing for more open communication about barriers with the understanding that consequences for compliance and lack of compliance will look very different. One incentive, utilized in almost a dozen states (including Arizona and Wyoming), makes certain individuals eligible for a twenty-day earned compliance credit for every thirty days on probation without a violation.⁷⁰ In addition, Texas, Illinois, and Kentucky all offer credits for completion of education, treatment, or other programs.⁷¹ Other supervision agencies have regular review mechanisms after a certain duration of compliance on supervision. Missouri's earned discharge policy allows the individual to file for earned discharge after 24 months of probation if individuals comply with supervision, pay restitution, and are not supervised for Class A/B felonies or subject to lifetime supervision.⁷² In Georgia, courts are also a critical decision-maker in creating incentives as early as the time of sentencing. As updated in 2023, Georgia statute provides guidance for setting behavioral incentive dates (BID) to be included in the sentencing order, but in a case where a BID is not set, the behavioral incentive date shall be three years from the date such sentence was imposed.⁷³

Opportunity: Create performance metrics for ways in which officers can build trusting and collaborative relationships with individuals on supervision and offer them incentives to do so.

In addition to increasing use of incentives to recognize positive behavior among individuals on supervision, supervising agencies should incentivize evidence of behavior change among their staff as well. Since building a positive, respectful relationship is such a vital part of success on supervision, agencies should have an objective means by which to track officers' progress in

doing so and recognize successful steps towards this goal. In Maryland, supervising officers use a Quality Contact Standards Form to assess their techniques and skills when engaging with their individuals.⁷⁴ One California study also noted that probation and parole agents who adopted a supportive relationship style helped their women clients feel less anxious of their freedom being threatened after supervision interactions and higher self-efficacy to avoid a criminal lifestyle.⁷⁵ Additionally, "supportive staff relationship style" was most related to positive outcomes for the highest risk women, further indicating the value of rapport-building as a skill officers should be trained and assessed on to improve outcomes.

Opportunity: Increase access to evidence-based training opportunities for officers and streamline information-sharing practices to ensure a consistent understanding of supervision practices and resource availability.

The more consistent the experience a supervising agency can offer the individuals that they supervise, the better it is for supervision outcomes. Individuals should not face additional difficulties in completing the requirements of supervision simply because different officers have different levels of knowledge about resources or different methods of responding to violations. Individuals will often have multiple supervising officers across their time on supervision (especially those with longer supervision terms). Knowing that they can expect a similar experience, level of knowledge, and baseline respectful relationship across officers helps promote honesty regarding challenges and barriers they are facing rather than engaging in violation or absconding behavior.

Conclusion

Absconding is often framed as a willful or deliberate act to avoid compliance with the requirements of community supervision. However, the findings from this study indicate that many individuals on supervision genuinely wish to remain in compliance; the reasons they abscond are linked to a number of systemic and personal barriers that often work in concert to limit their ability to successfully complete supervision. The more support supervising agencies can offer to overcome those barriers, the more likely individuals will be to reintegrate into their communities after their time on supervision rather than consistently returning to jail or prison. The areas of opportunity CJI has shared are intended as initial steps that state leaders can undertake to decrease absconding and increase success on community supervision; the examples provided offer guidance as to how these steps can be enacted. Undertaking a deeper understanding of the correlates of and the reasons behind absconding behavior reveals a population with unmet needs and opportunities for state leaders to address those needs for the benefit of the entire community that they serve.

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35. "I will pay a fine(s) over and above any amount credited for pre-conviction incarceration as ordered and directed by the court. (§46-18-231, MCA) Recommended net fine to be paid to the Clerk of District Court: \$1,000."
36. "I will obtain a chemical dependency evaluation by a state-approved evaluator. I will pay for the evaluation and follow all of the evaluator's treatment recommendations."
37. "I will not enter any casinos."
38. "I will not enter any bars."
39. "I will not knowingly associate with probationers, parolees, prison inmates, or persons in the custody of any law enforcement agency without prior approval from the Probation & Parole Officer outside a work, treatment, or self-help group setting. I will not associate with persons as ordered by the court or BOPP."
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