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Batterer Intervention Programs

State Guidance and Oversight Are Needed to Effectively Reduce Domestic Violence

Background

As a condition of probation for a conviction of domestic violence, state law requires the offender to complete a 52-week batterer intervention program that examines issues such as the nature of violence and the effects of abuse on children. Program providers, together with courts and probation departments, comprise the batterer intervention system. Our audit of these systems in Alameda, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Los Angeles, and San Joaquin counties found that they have not adequately held offenders accountable to the conditions of their probation, including that they complete a required batterer intervention program.

Key Findings

- Inadequate offender supervision has undermined the programs' effectiveness in addressing domestic violence.
 - » Nearly half of the domestic violence offenders whose records we reviewed did not complete a program.
 - » Probation departments and program providers often did not report probation violations to the court.
 - » Courts did not impose escalating consequences for a significant majority of probation violations.
- Probation departments did not fully perform their program oversight responsibilities.
 - » They have not established sufficient program standards.
 - » They each approved or renewed program providers that may not have been qualified to rehabilitate offenders effectively.
 - » They could not demonstrate that they conducted appropriate program site visits.
- State oversight and guidance could improve the batterer intervention system.
 - » Legislative changes could ensure better oversight, improve effectiveness, and rectify longstanding problems.

Key Recommendations

The Legislature should do the following to improve the batterer intervention system:

- Strengthen certain program requirements and include additional safeguards in state law.
- Require immediate reporting of all program and probation violations.
- Designate the California Department of Justice as responsible for the oversight of the batterer intervention system.

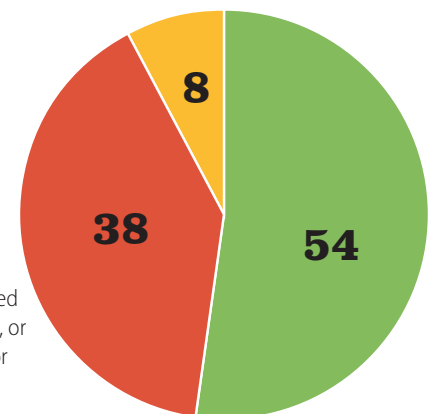
The five county probation departments should do the following:

- Implement comprehensive policies and procedures for domestic violence case management that clearly describe the departments' expectations for probation staff's compliance with state law.
- Formalize comprehensive standards for program providers that make clear the department's expectations and the documentation it will review to verify compliance with state law.
- Develop and follow policies and procedures for approving, renewing, and conducting comprehensive ongoing program provider monitoring.

The California Judicial Council should establish guidance and provide training to judges regarding the application of the batterer intervention law.

Only 54% of Offenders Completed the Full Court-Ordered Batterer Intervention Program

- Did not complete a full 52-week program
- The court eliminated the requirement
- Completed a full 52-week program



Of the 38 that did not complete a full 52-week program:

- 10 Failed to enroll
- 7 Terminated by programs for unallowed absences, unpaid fees, or unacceptable behavior
- 21 Other

Source: Review of a selection of 100 offenders (20 from each of the five counties).