



## Testimony of Jeffrey D. Padden May 6, 2008

The central purpose of the MPRI is to improve public safety. Recent data from the Michigan Department of Corrections suggest that the return-to-prison rate has been declining, which is very positive news. Even though this result is precisely what was hoped for when the MPRI was launched, the extent of the MPRI contribution to the result is not clear.

For that reason, Public Policy Associates, Inc., with the support of the JEHT Foundation, convened a national MPRI Evaluation Advisory Council—comprised of leading researchers, policy people, and practitioners—to conduct a Peer Review of the Department’s methods and results. This session took place on April 29, 2008 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel adjacent to Detroit Metropolitan Airport. While we are still analyzing the results of the full-day session, here are my initial impressions of the key points made by the group.

Public Policy Research,  
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and Evaluation

- Michigan’s peer review of its evaluation process was open, transparent, important, and unique.
- The MPRI was developed based on evidence of programmatic interventions that work. It will also yield new evidence of the effectiveness of a broad system transformation that attempts to integrate the discrete programs, but gathering that evidence is challenging. The researchers, who are leaders in their field, appeared to have had little experience conducting evaluations of such initiatives.
- While it would be preferable to have built the MPRI as a random assignment experiment, it is possible to craft some small-scale quasi-experimental studies that will—within a year or two—increase our ability to determine the degree to which the MPRI causes changes in the return-to-prison rate. There are also some improvements that could be made in the preliminary tracking of outcomes by MDOC. There were differing opinions of the difficulty and cost of these studies and improvements.
- After hearing reports on the MPRI process evaluation, preliminary results of outcome tracking, and feedback from MPRI stakeholders, the panel was clear that all three are important for gaining a clear, complete picture of progress.

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- As the MPRI Model approaches full implementation this year and moves up-to-scale over the next few years, the time is about right for reviewing and strengthening Michigan's approach to measurement and evaluation. Gaining certainty about MPRI results will, however, take several more years, due to the time necessary to reach full implementation and the complexity of the initiative. It is critical to align expectations for evaluation with the reality of the time the MPRI will take to unfold.
- It is essential to clearly define what the MPRI does and does not include, so that decisions can be made about how best to determine whether the results observed can be properly characterized as being driven by MPRI or not. The MPRI Model, which consists of 38 policy statements and over 100 recommendations on how to achieve those policies, is quite complex and simply put, enormous. Accurate determination of cause and effect require that much more data be collected and analyzed, especially with regard to MPRI activities and intermediate outcomes.
- Since reducing crime is the principal goal of the MPRI, measurement of the effect of the initiative should come as close as possible to assessing reoffending. Arrest data is a closer proxy than is return-to-prison rate. While there are difficulties in acquiring arrest data and using it for this purpose, this appears to be worth exploring.
- Reporting the percent decline of returns to prison rather than the number of percentage points of the decline may be confusing to some stakeholders. (For example, a decline from 50% to 25% can either be reported as a 50% decline or a decline of 25 percentage points.)
- Practitioners want very simple, usable reports.
- Michigan's approach to prisoner reentry is ambitious and broad. Clearly, Michigan is among the leaders in the reentry movement.

The participants in this peer review session, who comprise the MPRI Evaluation Advisory Council, will be asked to assess MPRI evaluation plans, make recommendations for improvement, review performance measures and methodology, scrutinize the implementation of the evaluation, and critique its findings. All of us—policy makers and practitioners—will benefit from their ongoing assistance as we learn more about the results of MPRI and how to improve its design and operation.