

Court & Community

An information series about U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services

Benefits of Supervision

In the federal courts, supervision is a way to monitor the actions and behavior of defendants and offenders released to the community. These persons are either awaiting trial, on probation, or on parole or supervised release after serving time in prison. U.S. probation and pretrial services officers provide supervision by carrying out duties to help ensure that persons under supervision obey the law and comply with the conditions set for their release. These duties include visiting defendants and offenders at home and at work, checking on their attendance at court-ordered drug or mental health treatment, and much more.

Supervision yields benefits for the community, for the courts, and for the defendants and offenders who come before the courts. A significant benefit is that supervision provides a cost-saving alternative to jail or prison. Supervision also potentially makes the community safer and the lives of defendants and offenders better. The actual cases presented here illustrate some of the many benefits of supervision.

Supervision protects the public by reducing the risk that persons under supervision will commit future crimes.

Mental health counseling, which included a polygraph examination to gauge the danger the offender posed to the community, revealed that an offender on supervised release in the Eastern District of Tennessee for transmitting pornography on the Internet was stalking an eight-year-old girl. The child's family was notified, the offender received treatment to address the problem, and a potential sexual assault was averted.

In the Southern District of Ohio, the probation office helped ensure community safety by dedicating considerable resources to the intensive supervision of one offender, a confirmed anti-abortionist convicted in two federal courts of damaging or conspiring to damage abortion clinics. A team of officers worked together to supervise the offender, who lived in a remote area, restricting the man's travel, monitoring his associates, and mobilizing to verify his whereabouts every time abortion clinics or their staffs were targets of violence. The offender completed his supervision without incident.

Supervision gives officers the means to enforce conditions ordered by the court, such as those requiring persons to perform community service or pay fines and restitution.

Twenty-one offenders in the Middle District of Florida, each ordered by the court to perform community service, participated in a week-long project in Ocala National Forest, which was coordinated by the probation office. The offenders' efforts resulted in numerous improvements to the park and saved thousands of taxpayer dollars.

The group cleared and dug trails, laid sod, installed tile in restrooms, and hung lighting. These were improvements that probably would not have been made otherwise because of lack of funds.

In the Eastern District of Wisconsin, a probation officer's rigorous enforcement of the conditions of supervision compelled one offender—a businessman who had embezzled from his employees' pension funds—to give back to his victims what he had taken.

Despite the offender's protests that he did not have money to pay restitution, the officer's scrutiny of the offender's affluent lifestyle and his questionable commingling of business and personal finances revealed otherwise. As a result of the officer's efforts, the offender paid \$40,000, the balance of restitution owed.

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Supervision may provide substance abuse treatment to enable defendants and offenders to cope without relying on drugs or alcohol.

Desperate to hide her drug use and beat the drug testing that the court required her to undergo, a defendant on pretrial supervision in the Eastern District of North Carolina ingested a homemade drug-masking agent that contained bleach. She was lucky to survive.

The woman's pretrial services officer, working with contract counselors, arranged to place her in an inpatient drug treatment

program, where she responded well to treatment.

To support her and her boyfriend's cocaine habits, a teller embezzled bank funds. The woman, who was from a stable, middle-class family and who had not used drugs until she met her boyfriend, was placed in a diversion program, rather than jail, in the Northern District of Ohio.

Pretrial services enrolled the woman in a drug treatment program—which she successfully completed—and put her in touch with a support group for women in abusive relationships. She was able to leave her boyfriend, who had threatened her constantly.

Supervision may provide educational or vocational training that boosts defendants' and offenders' capacity to earn a living.

A woman came to the probation and pretrial services office in the Eastern District of Texas with multiple problems: depression, a history of drug use, and illiteracy. The court ordered mental health treatment and participation in a literacy program as conditions of the woman's supervision.

Working with a contract treatment provider, the pretrial services officer had the woman evaluated for both depression and dyslexia, helped her find an appropriate educational program, and arranged for individual counseling.

Supervision . . . potentially makes the community safer and the lives of defendants and offenders better.

A defendant who was arrested in the Northern District of Ohio for distribution of heroin and possessing a firearm during the commission of a crime had a 13-year heroin addiction and spoke no English. He withdrew from heroin while in detention and then was placed in residential treatment.

The probation office located a community group that serviced the area's small Hispanic population, and the group was willing to translate for the man and give him English lessons. His English improved immensely. He transferred to an independent living program, received individual counseling, and attended weekly Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. He also got a job for the first time in his life.

As an alternative to incarceration, supervision allows individuals to live with their families, hold jobs, and be productive members of society.

In spite of a strong recommendation for detention from the assistant U.S. attorney, a defendant who was from the Eastern District of North Carolina but arrested in New York City was placed in a halfway house at the pretrial services officer's recommendation. That way, he could work to support his wife and children.

During supervision, he got a job, sent money home to his family, and contributed toward his subsistence cost at the halfway house. He complied with all conditions of release and did so well on supervision that eventually he was allowed weekend visits with his family at the home of relatives nearby.

While awaiting sentencing for trying to rob a bank by calling in a bomb threat, a single mother of three in the Northern District of Ohio was able to hold a job, remain sober, and continue caring for her children with the help of an intensive outpatient substance abuse program and psychological counseling arranged for by the pretrial services office.

Supervision may provide mental health treatment to enable defendants and offenders to function better in the community.

Intensive supervision by the probation officer has kept an offender in the District of Delaware stable for nine months now, the most time the individual has been stable without hospitalization since age 13.

Released after serving a sentence for mailing threatening communications, the offender—a schizophrenic with a history of substance abuse and violence—had no job, no home, and no relatives. The officer found him temporary shelter and arranged for the probation office to pay for the medication that allowed the man to function.

Quick action to arrange for emergency psychological counseling and halfway house placement most likely prevented the suicide of an offender who was on supervised release in the Middle District of Florida. His wife had left him, he was living in a hotel, and he had been robbed of his savings when he got drunk, got a gun, and called his probation officer to apologize for disappointing her. The officer kept him talking, tracked him down, and provided immediate assistance.

