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# SOCIAL WORK PILOT PROJECT REPORT

## Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy

*January 2008 Evaluation Conducted by Kent School of Social Work,  
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### SUMMARY

The Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy (DPA) conducted a Social Work Pilot Program between October 2006-October 2007 in three regions to **measure the impact of social workers in a public defender office. Among other services, the social workers assisted clients to secure treatment, identify alternative sentencing plans and helped them to obtain and abide by the terms of supervised probation.** 229 defendants were served by three social workers and 181 were tracked for statistical purposes (141 adults and 40 juveniles). Prior to the introduction of social workers, 86% of adults and 52% of juveniles reported factors that indicated substance abuse and a similarly disturbing percentage reported signs of mental distress: 73% of both adults and juveniles. An **encouraging 82% (79 of 96) adult defendants** who received social worker services that were released from incarceration were still in the community -- an extremely low **18% recidivism rate compared to DOC's recidivism rate of approximately 34%**). The Social Worker Pilot Program thus determined that **each social worker saved 10,000 days of incarceration annually or 27 years each.** Additionally, 93% of the **defendants abstained from prohibited substances.** The number of defendants **that participated in AA, NA or other self-help groups tripled in six months.** The program's saved \$100,000 per social worker annual after taking out the cost for treatment and operating costs. Another way to view the program is that **the state saved \$3.25 of incarceration costs for every \$1 invested in social workers' salaries.** If this program were funded for **statewide implementation, the estimated taxpayer savings would be between \$3.1 and \$4 million per year.**

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### INTRODUCTION

#### *The Rationale*

The 2006 Kentucky General Assembly funded the Social Work Pilot Program to determine whether the placement of social workers in a public defender office would lessen the taxpayer burden of overcrowded prisons and jails. The Program also sought to find out whether social workers' intervention would increase the percentage of defendants that access services to help address substance and mental health issues (the primary reasons for recidivism).

At the time it was funded, the population of Kentucky jails and prisons was at an all time high leading to policymakers' grave concerns regarding the associated costs. The number of persons incarcerated since this Pilot was funded has grown from 20,000 to 22,000. This trend of 10% annual growth is expected to continue through 2014. Currently, the Department of Corrections budget is \$417 million and they are asking for an additional \$75 million for additional beds.

#### *The Program*

During 2006-07, DPA (Justice and Public Safety Cabinet) contracted with the Kent School of Social Work to evaluate a Social Work Pilot Project. Social workers were placed in Covington, Morehead and Owensboro Trial Offices in October 2006. A fourth social worker was placed in the Bowling Green Trial Office in July 2007. (Bowling Green was excluded from this analysis.)

#### *Methodology*

The first step of the Pilot was that social workers conducted a *baseline interview* for 229 defendants. After six months, social workers surveyed the defendants to measure services, condition, and criminal status. By October 2007, 181 defendants completed a six month follow-up interview to measure the same factors.

### DEFENDANTS SERVED

#### *229 Defendants Served*

229 defendants were served between October 2006 through October 2007. Three social workers served an average of 68 indigent defendants. Roughly 8% of the services that clients received were less intensive "quick action" items, such as referrals. The remaining 92% or 181 were assigned to social workers by court appointment that continued until re-entry. In the majority of cases, courts asked social workers to conduct in-depth assessments and develop alternative sentencing recommendations. If the charges were dismissed or the client was granted parole, the social workers entered into intensive engagement to connect local services with the defendants to help them become fully integrated into their community.

#### *What Were Defendants Charged With?*

Two types of charges emerge that are common to the vast majority of adult defendants who received services in the Pilot. The most prevalent charges were substance-related, including controlled substances (32%), driving while intoxicated (14%), and public intoxication (12%). The second most common charges were theft-related, including burglary (12%) and forgery (16%). One third of adult defendants were charged with parole/probation violations. The most common charges for juveniles were beyond control (15%), public intoxication (15%), assault (13%) and burglary (11%).

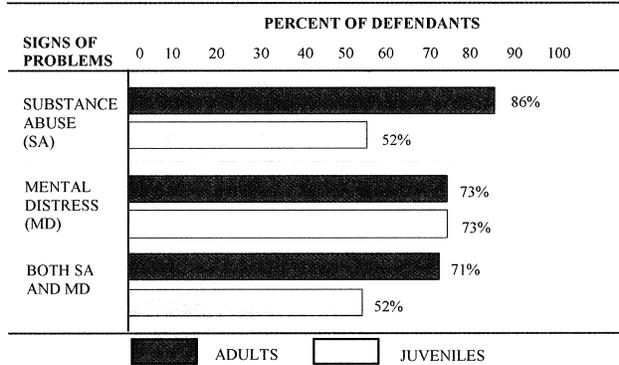
#### *Special Emphasis on Substance Abuse and Mental Distress*

**Figure 1** illustrates the troublingly high percentage of defendants (both adult and juvenile) who showed signs of substance abuse and mental distress. The social workers used a diagnostic tool called the Kennedy Axis V

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when considering clients' symptoms. In addition, substance abuse signs included prior use or charges of drug or alcohol abuse, past attendance at AA or NA support groups, or self-reporting defendants who felt that substance abuse treatment would prevent re-arrest. Mental distress indicators included prior hospitalization, use of medications for nerves, depression or other psychologi-

**Figure 1: DEFENDANTS WITH SIGNS OF MENTAL DISTRESS OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE**



cal problems, or those who self-reported that mental health treatment would prevent re-arrest.

It is interesting that 147 adults of the 181 or (81%) showed signs of both substance abuse and mental distress. Unfortunately, the mental illness issues would disqualify this high number of defendants from participating in drug court.

Results shown in **Figure 1** are consistent with disability information reported by defendants. 45 adults (25%) and 19 (37%) of juveniles reported a disability. Mental health was the most frequently mentioned impairment for adults (78%) and juveniles (90%). 10% of adults and juvenile defendants reported medical disabilities. A small number of adults and juvenile defendants reported to be enrolled on SSI for these conditions.

**Table 1: WHAT SOCIAL WORKERS DID**

TASK	# ADULTS (N=177)	# JUVENILES (N=52)
MADE REFERRAL FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES	150	46
CONDUCTED NEEDS ASSESSMENT	124	36
PROVIDED SUPPORT TO FAMILY	49	37
CONDUCTED SOCIAL HISTORY	125	37
WROTE REPORT FOR REDUCED SENTENCE	28	9
WROTE ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING RECOM.	130	17

### *What Social Workers Did?*

**Table 1** illustrates the services that social workers provided. They created social histories that largely consist of time-consuming interviews of defendants. Further, the

**Table 2: PERCENT OF SELECTED REFERRALS BY SOCIAL WORKERS**

SPECIFIC REASONS FOR REFERRALS	% ADULTS (N=177)	% JUVENILES (N=52)
SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT	79%	38%
COUNSELING FOR PERSONAL PROBLEMS	61%	63%
MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT	44%	60%
JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS	25%	2%
MEDICAL CARE	25%	8%
HOUSING ASSISTANCE	18%	8%
GED CLASSES	15%	6%
FAMILY NEEDS	15%	31%
FAMILY COUNSELING	13%	37%
CHILD CARE	13%	4%

process of needs assessments, including obtaining records to gain an in-depth knowledge of their condition and the evaluation of what assistance that is likely to be effective requires many hours. Social workers reported that they had to obtain 394 records (family services 5; crime records 128, medical 42, mental health 98, social history 109, other 12) for the 177 adult defendants and 153 records (family services 10, crime 32, medical 19, mental health 36, school 38, social history 18) for the 52 juveniles. It is very unlikely given the enormous workload of judges and attorneys, that they could invest the time it would take to conduct such extensive assessments and evaluate possible alternative sentencing.

**Table 2** shows social workers referred defendants for a wide variety of reasons. It also illustrates the extensive knowledge that they must have about community resources and how to access them.

## COMMUNITY SERVICE OUTCOMES

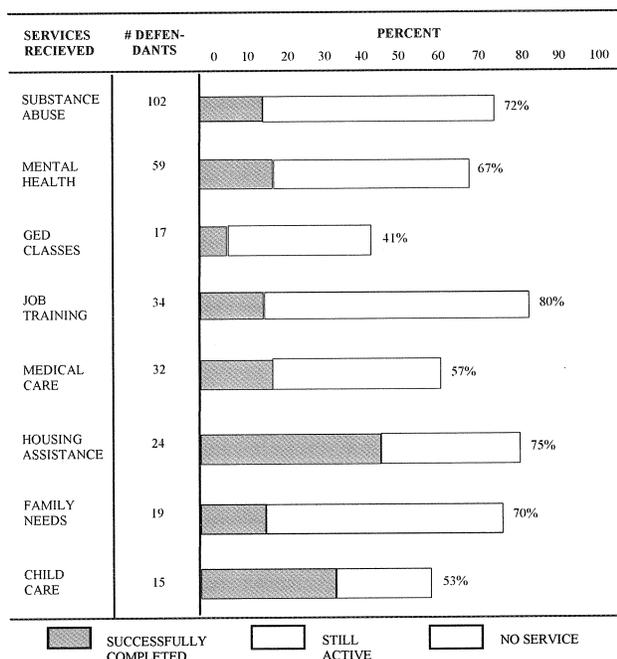
This section focuses on defendants who spent six months or more in the Social Work Pilot Program. The information is based on the 181 defendants who completed both baseline and six month follow-up interviews. There were 141 adults and 40 juveniles who completed both interviews. **Figures 2 and 3** show the status of client referrals for adults and juveniles.

### *Good Service Outcomes in Major Focus Areas*

The most frequently used services for adults were substance abuse and mental health treatment. 72% of adult defendants who received substance abuse treatment were either still active in the program or had successfully

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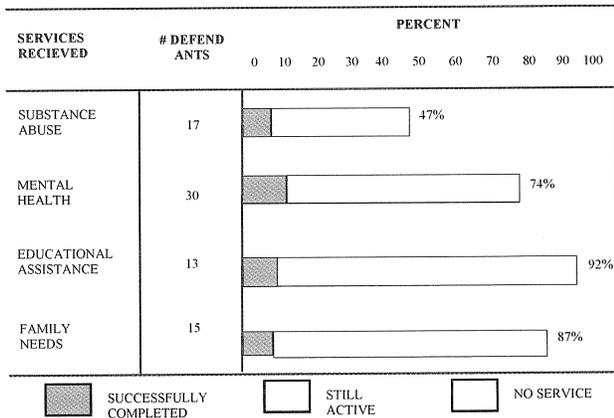
**Figure 2: SELECT ADULT SERVICE OUTCOMES**



completed it. 67% of adult defendants who received mental health treatment were either still active in the program or had successfully completed it. 80% of adult defendants referred to job training were still active in programs or had successfully completed them. Three quarters of defendants referred for housing assistance were either still actively seeking housing or had actually received it.

Enrollment in GED classes, medical care, and child care was lower than other services. Male defendants struggled to obtain child care services relative to female defendants. Seven of the eight women seeking child care reported that they had either arranged it or were expecting it soon. Only one of the seven males successfully

**Figure 3: SELECT JUVENILE SERVICE OUTCOMES**



obtained child care.

### *Juvenile Services Outcomes*

The most frequent referral for juveniles was for mental health treatment. At the time of this report, 74% of juveniles were either still active in treatment or had successfully completed it. Substance abuse referrals were less successful as a little over half the juveniles were referred but many did not get services. Education assistance and meeting family needs was much more successful. About 80% of clients were still getting help in these areas and almost 10% had successfully completed the service.

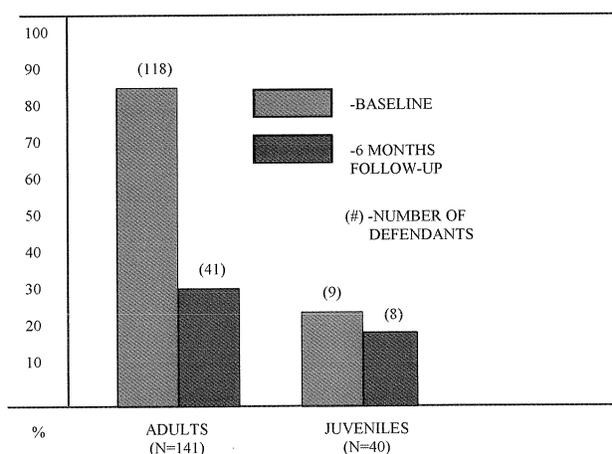
## DEFENDANT OUTCOMES

This section continues reporting on the 141 adults and 40 juveniles, but the focus shifts to client outcomes or changes in their status, behavior, or attitudes.

### *Social Workers Helped Reduce Incarceration:*

**Figure 4** shows the number of defendants incarcerated at baseline and then at the six month follow-up. Initially, 118 adult defendants (84%) were incarcerated. The incarceration rate decreased substantially in six months to

**Figure 4: NUMBER OF DEFENDANTS INCARCERATED**

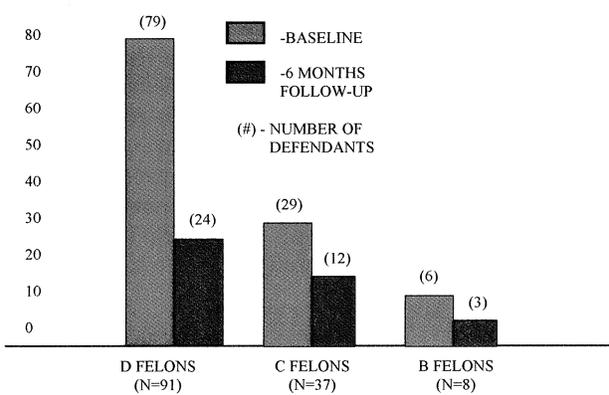


only 41 adult defendants (29%). This is a decrease of 77 defendants or 55% of the adult defendants. The percentage change for juveniles is less meaningful because only 9 defendants (23%) were incarcerated at the baseline period. At the six month follow-up the 9 incarcerated cases dropped to 3. However, 5 of the 31 juvenile defendants who were not incarcerated at the time of the baseline interview were incarcerated at the six month follow-up. Thus, the number of incarcerated juveniles dropped to 8 from 9 at the six month follow-up although that 8 included newly incarcerated individuals from the baseline.

**Figure 5** shows that most reduction in adult incarceration was among class C and D felons. Class D adult felons decreased from 79 defendants at baseline to 24 defendants at the six month follow-up (a 70% reduction).

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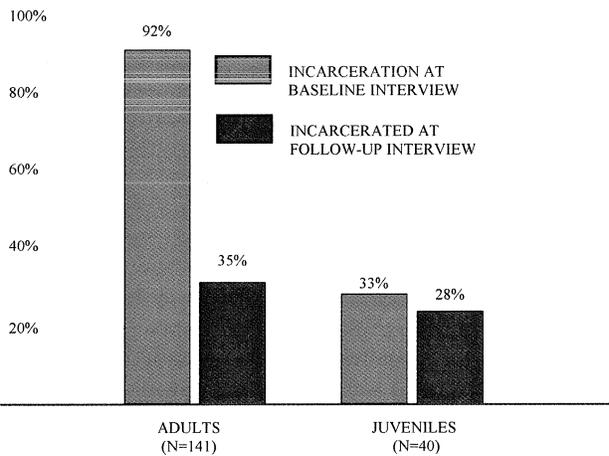
Figure 5: NUMBER OF FELONS INCARCERATED BY CLASS LEVEL



Class C adult felons decreased from 29 to 12 (59%) during the same period. There were only 8 adult class B felons and they decreased from 6 to 3 incarcerated defendants. There were 5 adult cases for which there was no baseline or follow-up incarceration information.

Figure 6 shows that the 30 day adult incarceration rate dropped from 92% to 35%. The amount of time defendants spent in jail or prison also declined. 30 days after social worker intervention. 92% of adults spent an average 22.7 days incarcerated at baseline. At the six month follow-up only 35% of adults were incarcerated. They spent 9.1 days on average in jail or prison 30 days

Figure 6: PERCENT INCARCERATED 1-30 DAYS



before the follow-up interview. This is a statistically significant change as it saved the taxpayer the cost of incarceration (not to mention the positive impact on the defendant and his/her families' lives). Only 33% of juveniles were incarcerated before the baseline interview. Thus, there was little reduction in the percentage from baseline to follow-up: average days of incarceration went from 8.2 days to 6.8 days.

Social workers played a direct role in the reduction

of our clients' sentences. The overburdened actors in the criminal justice system rarely have sufficient time to fully explore community treatment alternatives to incarceration (leading to increased sentences and precious little treatment). Unlike those judges and attorneys, social workers' primary function in the process is to seek cost-effective treatment solutions. Their involvement in the process demonstrated a dramatic difference between potential incarceration time before baseline and actual time given at sentencing. Social workers' efforts to obtain alternative community-based treatment led to a reduction of total time given by 10,000 days (27 years) per social worker. The Pilot achieved a total incarceration reduction of 82 years.

The adult six month recidivism rate was 18%. 118 adult defendants were incarcerated at the baseline interview and 22 of these defendants never left jail or prison. The remaining 96 adult defendants were released from jail or prison, 79 adults (82%) never returned to jail or prison during the six month period, but 17 (18%) of the 96 defendants did.

The recidivism rate for juveniles is less illuminating because only 9 were incarcerated at baseline. A brief look at this more anecdotal data might nonetheless be helpful. 3 of those 9 youths were incarcerated during the entire six-month period. 25 juveniles were released on bond/terms or dismissed. Only 2 of those re-offended and 1 was re-incarcerated. 6 juveniles were released directly to the community without bond or terms applied or charges dismissed. 2 of these juveniles re-offended and four were re-incarcerated. While these numbers are small, it is a pattern that should be identified for further study.

*Substance Abuse Decreased and AA/NA Participation Increased*

Table 3 shows a very significant decrease in substance abuse. The biggest decrease in drug use was with marijuana; 72 adults and 14 juveniles used marijuana at baseline and this decreased to 2 adults and 1 juvenile at the six month follow-up, or (97%) and (83%) respectively. Even for those who continued to use marijuana, the amount they used after 6 months was less; it went from 20.2 days in a 30 day period to 12.7 days. The next most commonly used drugs were tranquilizers, pain killers and crack/cocaine. The number of adults using these drugs was about 60-66 of adults at the baseline interview but went down to about 3-4 adults at the six month follow-up interview (a 95% reduction rate).

Alcohol use also decreased significantly; 82 (58%) of adult defendants reported using "alcohol to intoxication" 30 days before the baseline interview, but this was reduced to 6 adults 30 days before the six month follow-up interview; or a decrease of 93%. Juveniles also reported a significant drop in alcohol consumption. Eleven juveniles (28%) reported drinking "alcohol to intoxication" within

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**Table 3: REDUCTION IN SELECT SUBSTANCES (N=181)**

SUBSTANCE USED	NUMBER DEFENDANTS USING		MEAN DAYS USING	
	BASE	6 MTHS	BASE	6 MTHS
MARIJUANA	86	3	20.2	12.7
TRANQUILIZERS/ NERVE PILLS	66	4	18.5	11.3
PAIN KILLERS ( OXYCONTIN, etc.)	61	0	21.8	0
COCAINE/CRACK	61	3	13.5	11
METHAPHET/ AMPHETAMINE	16	1	16.8	3
ALCOHOL TO IN- TOXICATION	82	6	14.5	6.8

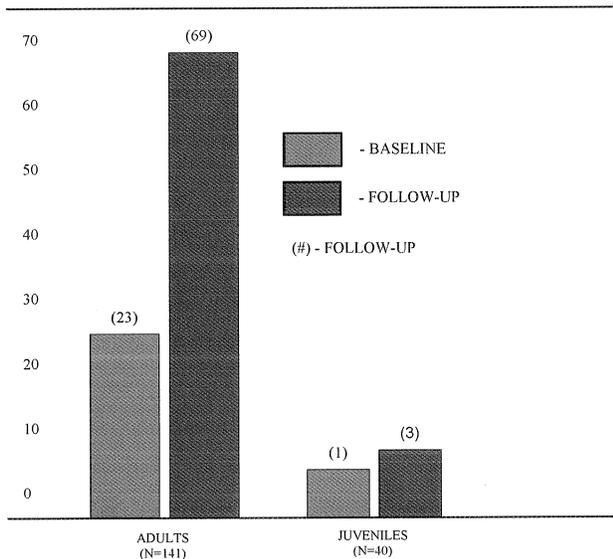
30 days of the baseline interview. This went down to only one case 30 days before the six month follow-up interview or a decrease of (91%).

Figure 7 shows that the number of adults who used AA, NA or other self-help groups tripled after social service involvement. There is a scholarly consensus that participation in these groups dramatically improves the chances that individuals can maintain sobriety. This 300% participation increase (from 23 to 69 defendants) is likely the main reason for their ability to resist substances during the six-month period.

*Employment Unchanged Due To Most Defendants Still in Training or Treatment*

Results indicate that there was little change in employment status. Only four of the defendants gained employment during the six month period. The responses indicated a change from two unemployed selections to the "other" category. The social workers explained this change as a result of the defendants' participation in

**Figure 7: PERCENT AND NUMBER ATTENDING AA, NA, GROUP IN PAST 30 DAYS**



treatment or employment training programs and thus were not seeking employment at the time.

**ANNUAL COST SAVINGS ESTIMATE**

*Reduced Incarceration Saved \$1,371,894*

65 adults and 24 juveniles were released on bond or had their charges dismissed and thus were not incarcerated at the follow-up interview. Consequently, they did not serve any jail or prison time after sentencing. Savings for other cases (76 adults and 16 juveniles) were considered (felony, misdemeanor, and juvenile) and level (B, C and D felony, A and B misdemeanor, and juvenile status). The social worker recorded the midrange of the potential sentence the person was facing at baseline minus the actual sentence received at the follow-up. The number of days reduced was multiplied by the cost of a day in jail, prison, or juvenile detention. The annualized amount was considered only (365 days of incarceration or less saved). Savings in the subsequent years were not counted.

Kentucky saved a total of approximately 10,000 days of incarceration per social worker (27 years) per social worker) or 30,087 days for three social workers (82 years).

In the period of October 2006 to October 2007, the Social Work Pilot Program saved the Commonwealth \$1,371,894 in reduced incarceration costs (adults \$830,746, juveniles \$541,148).

*Estimated Cost of Program and Community Services \$1,081,386*

The cost of the Social Work Pilot Program included both costs for the social workers and alternative community services. The cost of social workers was \$43,000 for each social worker (includes salary and fringe benefits) for a total of \$129,000. Costs for alternative community services were obtained from defendants reported use of community services. Social workers asked each defendant how many times they used each service or program. The research staff obtained service unit costs from similar agencies in Jefferson County. For example, mental health case management and counseling visit costs were obtained from Seven Counties Services, Inc. The unit costs and reported service units are shown in Table 4.

The total cost of alternative community services is estimated at \$952,386. Thus, the total program and community service cost was \$1,081,386.

*The Social Worker Pilot Program was Very Cost Effective*

The Social Worker Pilot paid for itself and returned approximately **\$100,000 per social worker** to the Kentucky coffers. This is an annualized estimate thought to be extremely conservative. The reason this is conservative is it does not include incarceration days saved in the second and third years when B, C, or D felons were diverted

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Table 4: COST ESTIMATE FOR ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY SERVICES

Service (Unit Costs)	# of Defendants	# Service Units	Total Costs
Mental Health Case Management (287)	60	1685	483,863
Substance Abuse/Alcohol Treatment (58)	91	5681	328,646
Domestic Violence/Sexual Abuse Counseling (58)	15	1311	75,191
Employment Support/Job Training (50)	29	832	41,600
Child Care (24)	4	480	11,520
Medical Care (100)	22	67	6,700
Dental Care (75)	6	24	1,800
Family Needs (58)	23	53	3,066
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>181</b>		<b>\$952,386</b>

to treatment, nor does it include the savings in social programs such as foster care and aid to families.

Kentucky saved \$3.25 of incarceration costs for every \$1 invested in social workers' salaries. Thus, the Social Work Pilot Program was cost-effective and illustrates a new savings pathway for the taxpayer in the our grim fiscal environment.

*State-wide Implementation*

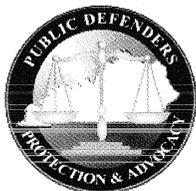
Statewide implementation would generate an estimated savings of at least \$3.1 million. This is calculated by multiplying the net savings per social worker of \$100,000 by 32 new social workers, the number required for DPA's 30 trial offices. An additional \$1 million is the estimated amount saved when considering the second and third years, when B, C, and D felons are diverted to community treatment. The cost of incarcerating a felon for one year in prison costs \$18,611 or in jail costs \$12,431.

This also includes the savings when children of persons formerly incarcerated are no longer in the foster care system. Foster care per child age birth to eleven is \$19.70 per day or \$7,190 a year. Foster care per child age twelve and over is \$21.70 per day or \$7,920 per child per year.

It is fair to estimate that an additional \$1 million can be added to the \$3.1 million in total net savings per year or \$4 million per year by using social workers in public defender offices state-wide.

*Consistent with other States*

This savings is conservative compared to other states using social workers, including Rhode Island, Colorado, New York, Minnesota. Minnesota uses social workers in their public defender system but call them dispositional advisors. Colorado saved \$4.5 million, and Rhode Island saved \$15 million by using social workers to divert defendants from incarceration to community-based treatment.



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