

Washington Institute for Public Policy

AN OVERVIEW

By Senator Karen Fraser
State of Washington
Board Member and Former Co-chair



Washington Institute for Public Policy

- **A highly skilled, nonpartisan, independent**, widely appreciated public policy research organization.
- **Created by the Washington State Legislature** in 1983, it has continuously been funded by the Legislature, which also assigns its research projects through legislation.
- **Legislators wanted:**
 - Sustained capacity to do quality cost-benefit analysis for some of the toughest problems
 - To use this analysis in formulating major public policy
- **Governed by a board of 2 legislators from each of the four partisan caucuses** (generally budget committee members), nonpartisan legislative staff, high level executive branch appointees, and representatives from higher education institutions.

Institute's goal

Identify evidence-based policy options that improve outcomes and save money

Institute's methods

IDENTIFY which programs or state policies work well, by:

- a) **Direct program evaluation** and/or
- b) **Meta analysis** (Analyzing others' rigorously and objectively conducted research to determine the "average" effect on outcomes.)

Then ...

CONSTRUCT a cost-benefit model specific to Washington that takes effects into account, and calculate the state's "Return on Investment". (Models use a variety of inputs specific to Washington such as: costs of charging and prosecuting a crime, therapy, incarceration, etc.)

Notes to other states:

- *These models can be adapted to other states, inputting their own data.*
- *The Pew Center on the States and the McArthur Foundation provided funds to support these efforts, with an eye toward future usage by other interested states.*

Washington State's six major successes in the criminal justice field

Using options identified through the
Institute's evidence-based process

1) Enacted and funded several evidence-based juvenile justice crime prevention, and juvenile programs in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Effectiveness results:

- Programs targeted toward youth with the highest potential to recidivate.
- Reduced juvenile crime.

Cost savings results:

- Closure of some state juvenile rehabilitation institutions due to reduced need.
- Reduced state capital and operating costs.



2) **Increased funding for services to improve offenders' lives, including:**

- a) Drug courts
- b) Programs during and after incarceration such as, education, vocational training, chemical dependency therapy and others.

Effectiveness results:

- Reduced crime and recidivism
- Reduced incarceration

Cost savings results:

- Reduced criminal justice costs by an amount greater than increased program costs.
- Delayed for 10 years the construction of a new 2000 bed, \$250 million prison. This saved annual \$18 million debt service and \$45 million operating costs for each of the next 25 years. This totals: \$63 million savings per year, for a total of \$630 million in 10 years.

3) Closed the last, very old, “island” prison in the US, (a gift from the federal government long ago) and relocated hundreds of inmates to more cost-effective, newer prisons.

Cost savings results:

- Significant cost reductions in operations, maintenance, ferry transportation, subsidized staff living costs, and more.



4) Reduced prison sentences for low risk drug offenders, with transfer of fiscal savings to drug courts and to other state government funding obligations.

Effectiveness results:

- Less crime

Cost savings results:

- Reduced criminal justice system costs.



5) *Review of potential savings from reduced incarceration*

We are evaluating early release options for targeted moderate and low risk offenders, and using cost savings from reduced incarceration for:

- a) Increased treatment programs for high risk offenders to reduce their risk of recidivism; and
- b) Other state budget needs.

6) *“Early Childhood Education” is now included as part of the State’s K-12 “Basic Education Program” funded by the State.*

Effectiveness results:

- Improves future educational success for kids.
- Reduces crime.

Cost savings results:

- Reduces criminal justice system costs.
- Increases effectiveness of education expenditures.
- Net cost-benefit ratio is positive: benefits exceed costs.

Other areas of Institute work

K-12 Education
Early Childhood Education
Child Abuse and Neglect
Substance Abuse
Mental Health
Developmental Disabilities

Teen Births
Employment
Public Assistance
Public Health
Housing

Publications available at: www.wsipp.wa.gov

How did we achieve such success
in the criminal justice field?

We relied on the Institute's
3-PART APPROACH TO RESEARCH

The Institute's 3-part approach

- 1) Rigorous evaluations of REAL WORLD efforts.**
Careful study of other studies that have been conducted rigorously and fairly. Identify what really works and what doesn't from quality comparative studies.
- 2) Rigorous analysis of the economics of alternatives.**
Computation of benefits, costs, and risk (return on investment) to Washington taxpayers for each policy option.
- 3) Identification of a "portfolio" of options that could affect statewide outcomes.** This includes evaluating the risk of failure of each option.

Thank you for your interest.

May I respond to questions?

For further information and consultation

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