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Executive Secretary



BOARD OF PAROLE COMMISSIONERS

February 14, 2003

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Dorla M. Salling, Chairman

Subject: Impact of Budgetary Constraints

The following is submitted to you at the request of Senator Mark E. Amodei, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Judiciary.

Impact of Budget Cuts

The board, like all other general fund agencies, was challenged to reduce expenditures due to the financial crisis that is occurring in Nevada. In an effort to comply with the reduction, the board implemented strategies to reduce costs including delaying the reappointment of vacant positions and reducing travel costs and contract services through the use of video conferencing.

The board also took a leadership role in Nevada's corrections community and implemented procedures and projects in an attempt to provide some economic relief to the Department of Corrections.

Vacancies

Currently, the board has three vacant clerical positions. This has resulted in the commissioners having to prepare their own orders, and in some cases, retrieve their own case files.

The vacant positions include:

- One administrative assistant in the Las Vegas office (there are two approved positions to support the Las Vegas office).
- One administrative aid (the only records clerk to maintain over 15,000 files).
- Executive secretary to the Parole and Pardons Board.

Considering that the board has only eight clerical positions to support the operations of both the Parole and Pardons Boards, these vacancies are creating a huge burden on the remaining employees of the board.

EXHIBIT K Senate Committee on Judiciary

Date: 2-14-03 Page 1 of 6

In FY 2002, the board's caseload was the largest in the history of the board. Although the board conducted more hearings than ever, all hearings were conducted and completed within the time frames and deadlines as specified in Nevada statutes. This accomplishment can be attributed largely in part to the board's efforts in using video conferencing technology to conduct parole hearings.

Changes in Operational Procedures

The board has worked extensively with administrators within the Department of Corrections and the Division of Parole and Probation to establish procedures that enhance our correctional systems. For the first time in parole board history, parole violation hearings are conducted weekly and bi-weekly instead of once per month. This effort on the part of the board has reduced the average number of close custody confinement days from an average of 45 to 21 days. This has a significant impact on the ability of the corrections staff to classify and relocate inmates into lower cost beds, and also reduces the number of days in prison that a reinstated parolee must wait before release.

Video conferencing

The board began using video conferencing equipment on a limited basis in September 2001. By March 2002, the benefits of this technology were fully realized and the practice was implemented statewide.

The board received the approval from the Community College System of Southern Nevada to use three of their video conferencing sites on a space available basis to conduct hearings. The board located in Northern Nevada was provided space available access to the video conferencing site at Nevada State Prison and the Central NDOC office. The Western Nevada Community College also provided space available access to their facilities.

During the past 18 months, the widespread use of this technology has begun to limit the board's access. Additional problems with using this equipment on a space available basis is the risk of being "bumped." The board has had to cancel or reschedule several hearings in as many months to the inconvenience of victims and inmates families that have traveled to attend parole hearings.

The board has requested funding to install video conferencing technology in both parole board offices in an effort to enhance the productivity of the board and create a stable hearing schedule that will benefit the board, the Department of Corrections, and interested members of the public. Without the use of video conferencing, the board believes an additional commissioner position would be necessary to conduct hearings with the level of thoughtful consideration needed to make effective decisions.

The greatest benefit realized by using video conferencing is the man-hours related to travel that are saved. The reduction in travel can translate to a savings of approximately 1,044 man hours based on the continued level of access to video conferencing. If all hearings capable of supporting video conferencing were conducted in this manner, an estimated 1,350 man-hours of travel time could be realized.

The following table depicts at a minimum, the expected costs the board would incur if the use of video conferencing was discontinued. The dollar figures relating to in-state travel and contract services are the actual savings the board incurred during FY 2002 through the use of this technology.

	Without Video Conferencing - Biennium Cost	With Video Conferencing - Biennium Cost
Addition to Instate Travel:	\$ 27,886.00	\$0.00
Addition to Contract Services:	\$ 19,444.00	\$0.00
Additional Commissioner (salary + benefits)	\$171,978.00	\$0.00
Cost of Video Conferencing	\$0.00	\$54,780.00
Projected Biennial Cost	\$219,308.00	\$54,780.00
Total savings against projected future costs:		\$164,528.00

Attached to this report are two charts depicting the reduction of miles driven by the Parole Board due to the use of video conferencing and the number of commissioner hours saved from traveling throughout the state to conduct hearings.

Other Cost-Saving Efforts

The board has submitted a bill draft request that would allow parolees to earn credits on parole similar to that of inmates who are assigned to minimum custody settings in NDOC conservation camps and restitution centers.

The board began to recognize during the last 24 months that certain inmates were refusing to comply or cooperate with the parole process because they could complete their sentence more rapidly in prison, than if they were released on parole.

While the board can force an inmate out on parole, the board must consider whether there is a reasonable probability that the prisoner will comply with the conditions of parole. In many cases, if an inmate has demonstrated an unwillingness to comply with the parole process, it is a sign that the release may be incompatible with the welfare of society.

The board looked at the reasons why many of these minimum custody inmates were refusing to cooperate, and discovered that many had realized that the projected time remaining on their sentence would be extended if they were released on parole.

In September 2002, the board re-reviewed approximately 600 minimum custody cases that had been denied in the prior 12 months to determine which of those cases would have been granted had there been no indication of un-cooperation.

The board granted approximately 80 of these cases and asked the Department of Corrections to facilitate and assist the inmate in developing a parole plan. Inmates who continued to be unwilling to comply with the terms of release were removed from the minimum custody setting and placed in medium security locations.

This action created an incentive for other inmates to cooperate as the reassignment would result in less credits earned and extend their time in prison.

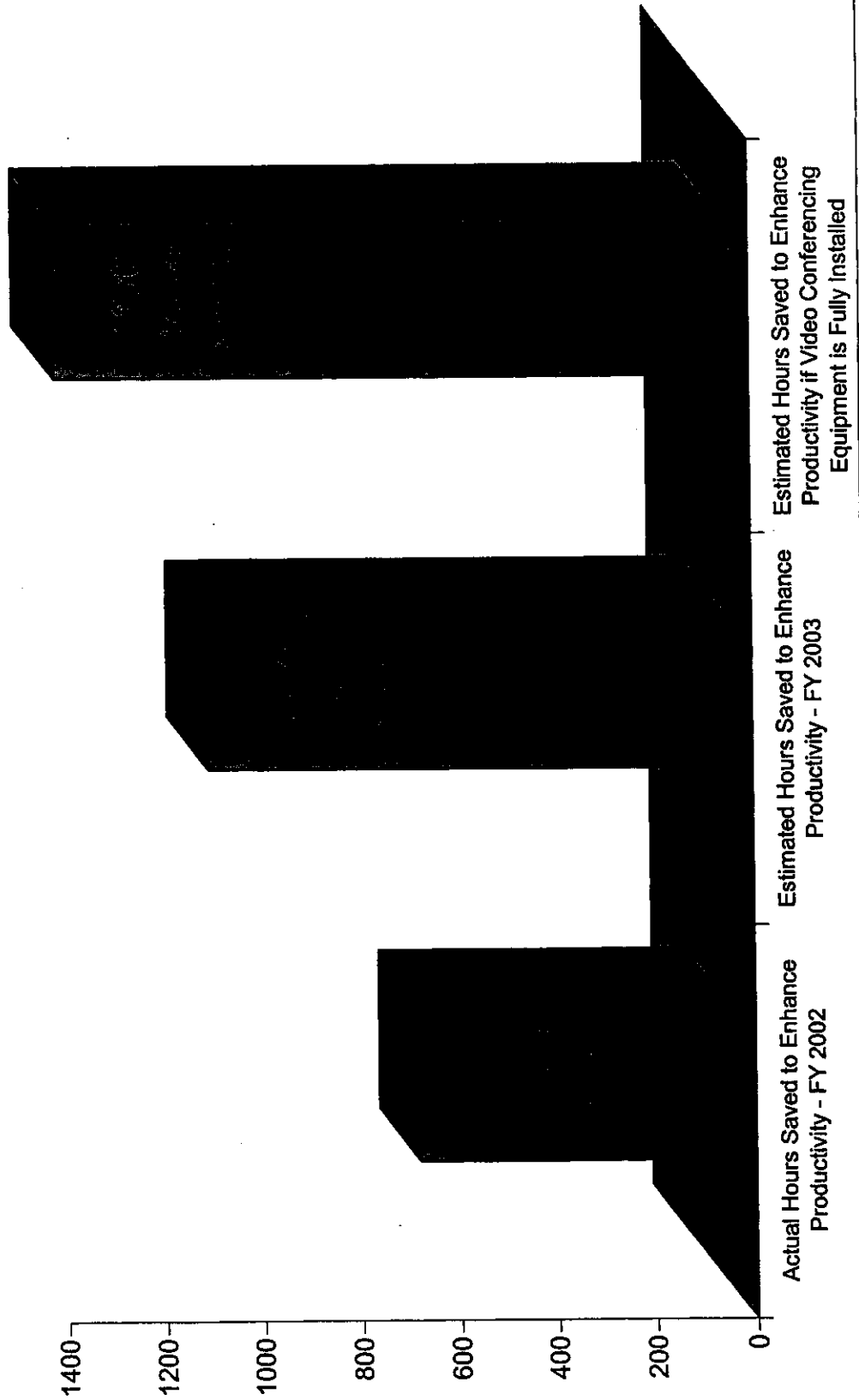
The bill drafted by the board would create incentives and equality with regard to credit earnings of prisoners and parolees and should help in reducing the prison and parolee population with incentives geared at rehabilitation.

Summary

While the current budgetary woes continue to impact the board, the board realizes that as gatekeepers of the criminal justice system, we must continue to act in a leadership role. We will continue to work to ensure that the systems and laws in place function adequately to balance to the best extent possible, the safety of the public and the cost of incarceration and rehabilitation of offenders.

Board of Parole Commissioners

Commissioner Work-Hours Saved Through Use of Video Conferencing



Nevada Board of Parole Commissioners Mileage Reduced Through use of Video Conferencing

