



South Dakota Legislative Research Council

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BOOT CAMPS: A NEW APPROACH TO JUVENILE JUSTICE

Prison boot camp programs, also known as shock incarceration programs, have become very popular in recent years. Prison boot camp programs (boot camps) were first developed in Georgia and Oklahoma in 1983 and emphasized a military atmosphere, physical training, and hard labor. Although these elements still play a significant role in boot camps, an increasing amount of time is being allotted to education and rehabilitation. Also, many boot camps are incorporating ways to ease the transition back to the community. What is the rationale for boot camps? What is an average day like at a boot camp? Who is eligible for boot camps? What are the goals of boot camps? Are boot camps succeeding? What does it cost? Which states have boot camps? What is planned for South Dakota? These questions are addressed in the comments that follow.

What is the rationale for boot camps?

Offenders are placed in boot camps to instill discipline, routine, and respect for authority. The rationale for placing these offenders in a quasi-military setting similar to military basic training was stated in a National Institute of Justice report entitled, *The Growing Use of Jail Boot Camps: The Current State of the Art*. First, a substantial number of first-time youthful offenders now incarcerated will respond to a short, but intensive period of confinement followed by a longer period of intensive community supervision. Secondly, these youthful

offenders will benefit from a military-like atmosphere that instills a sense of self-discipline and physical conditioning that may have been lacking in their lives. Thirdly, these youths need exposure to relevant educational, vocational training, drug treatment, and general counseling services to develop more positive and law-abiding values and become better prepared to secure legitimate future employment. Finally, the costs involved may be less than a traditional criminal justice sanction that imprisons the offender for a substantially longer time.

What is an average day like at a boot camp?

Since boot camps are modeled after military boot camp training, participation in quasi-military drill and ceremony, physical training, and manual labor is standard. Upon arrival at a boot camp, male inmates have their heads shaved and are informed of the program rules. Inmates begin their days before dawn with physical training and drill. Throughout the day they march to and from structured activities. After six to eight hours of work, perhaps with some time devoted to academic education, the evening is spent on counseling, life-skills training, academic education, or drug education and treatment. Approximately sixteen hours after starting the day, the day ends with "lights out."

As their performance and time in the program warrants, inmates earn certain privileges and responsibility. For those who

successfully complete the program, which would typically extend ninety or one hundred twenty days, there is an elaborate graduation ceremony with visitors and family invited to attend. Awards may be given and inmates perform the military drills they have learned throughout their stay at the boot camp.

Who is eligible for a boot camp?

The criteria for selecting eligible participants for boot camps varies, but some generalizations can be made. Most programs tend to reserve the boot camps for the young, male offender convicted of a nonviolent crime. Minimum and maximum ages are specified, with the minimum age being between sixteen and eighteen and the maximum about twenty-five; however, a few states have a higher maximum age such as thirty-nine or forty-five.

There are two primary methods for selection and admission to a boot camp. In some jurisdictions, the court has considerable power in determining who is admitted. The sentencing court recommends certain offenders for consideration by the program staff. The staff screens the offender to determine if the offender meets the admission criteria and makes a recommendation to the court. In some cases, the judge can sentence an offender to a boot camp without the consent of the program staff. In other jurisdictions, the department of corrections has the authority to admit an offender to the program independent of a court's recommendation and conducts a screening of potential candidates on its own.

What are the goals of boot camps?

Reducing prison overcrowding and

recidivism are the two broad program goals of boot camps. Boot camp are expected to provide an alternative to incarceration that would reduce prison overcrowding. Boot camp programs are also expected to reduce recidivism, whether that is achieved by deterrence or rehabilitation. Other goals of boot camps may include providing a general education, drug education, drug treatment, work skills, vocational education, and employment referrals.

Are boot camps succeeding?

The use of boot camps as a means of reducing prison crowding requires that offenders who complete the program serve less time in the boot camp than they would have otherwise served in a conventional prison. For example, an offender sentenced to six years in prison may be paroled after two years, taking into account eligibility for parole and time off for good behavior. The same offender sent to a boot camp may be eligible for parole after completing a three-month program. The difference is a savings of twenty-one months. There are other issues that affect the reduction in prison crowding. To successfully reduce crowding, programs must target prison-bound offenders rather than those who would receive only probation. Also, to influence overcrowding, a significant number of offenders must successfully graduate from the program, and in that respect selection is important.

It has also been suggested that prison crowding can be alleviated by reducing the recidivism rate since fewer offenders are being rearrested, convicted, and returned to prison. The reduction is said to result from deterrence or rehabilitation. Studies do not necessarily support this conclusion. The punitive elements of hard work, physical training, and military drill and ceremony

certainly produce positive by-products such as physical health, a drug-free environment, and a sense of accomplishment, but they are not as likely to deter crime. The boot camp experience is a stressful one, and people are more receptive to personal change during periods of high stress. However, as stress tapers off, so may the desire to change. Similarly, rehabilitation is a difficult objective to achieve in ninety or one hundred twenty days, but the rehabilitative process can be initiated by improving an offender's ability to read, developing work skills, making job referrals, and dealing with drug abuse. These do not necessarily translate into reduced crime rates, and great expectations about the program's ability to reduce recidivism rates should be avoided. The rehabilitative process is enhanced if the duration of the stay is at least ninety days and the offender has volunteered for participation.

For the positive effects of the program's rehabilitative services to be maintained, intense supervision and services should continue after release from the program. This may require a transitional half-way house, residential drug treatment, or intensive supervised probation for three to six months. Typically, the offender receives a sentence that includes additional time under probation or parole supervision after successful completion of the boot camp. Some programs allow graduates to return voluntarily to attend group counseling or support groups.

A research report published by the National Institute of Justice, *Multisite Evaluation of Shock Incarceration*, addressed recidivism and concluded that the impact of boot camps on offender recidivism is at best negligible. In Georgia, new crime and technical revocation rates of graduates of boot camps

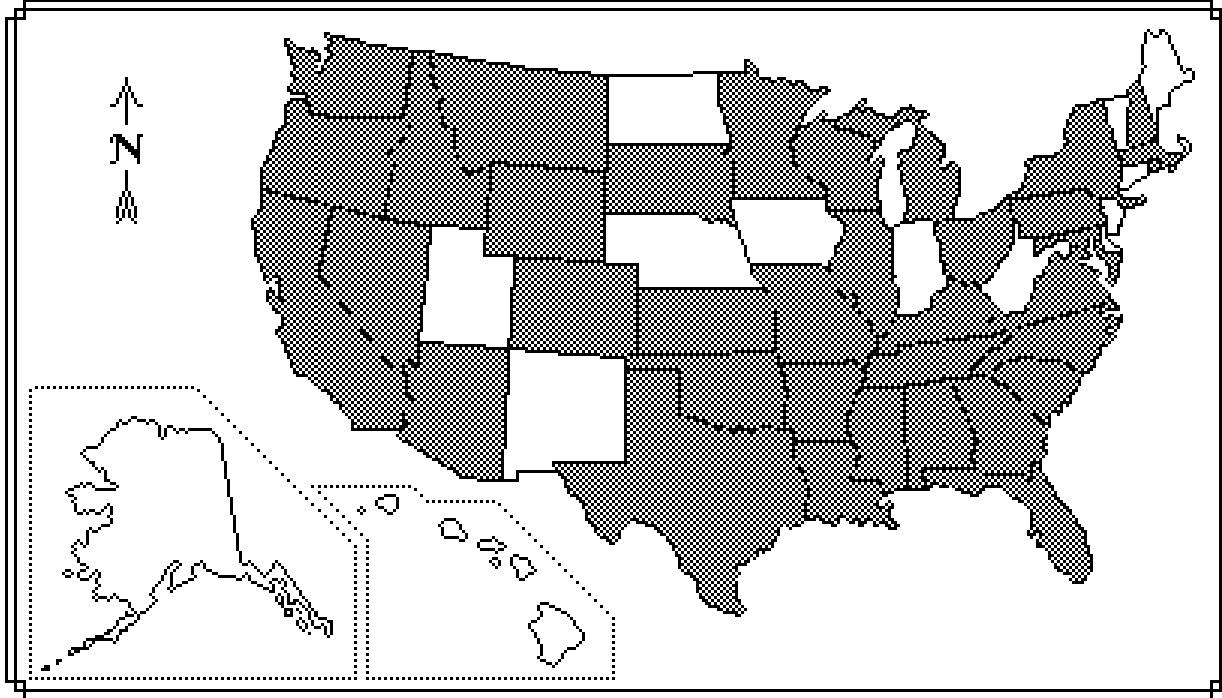
were compared to the rates of prison parolees and probationers. The recidivism of boot camp graduates and prison parolees did not differ to a statistically significant degree. However, boot camp graduates were more likely than probationers to have their community supervision status revoked as a result of a new crime. Boot camp inmates in Georgia receive very little rehabilitative or therapeutic treatment. The report suggested that this lack of treatment explained the boot camp graduates' increased rate of recidivism as compared to probationers.

In Louisiana, there is some evidence that boot camp graduates may have lower rates of recidivism by some measures of recidivism. Boot camp graduates had fewer new crime revocations than prison parolees but more technical revocations, which may have resulted from the fact that boot camp graduates are intensively supervised upon release. Louisiana was among the three states in the study of eight states that showed evidence that boot camps reduced recidivism. The common factor in the three states was that each had an intensive supervision phase in their boot camp program. The report suggested that the differences in recidivism rates were due to the type of community supervision the graduates received rather than the in-prison phase of the program.

What does it cost?

Boot camps cost more per inmate per day than a traditional prison because they offer more programming and have more staff, but boot camps save money because the length of stay is shortened. Even taking into account the amount of money necessary to support the intensive supervision for boot camp graduates, the cost is less for those in a boot camp than for those who serve a

traditional prison sentence.



Which states have boot camps?

The following map illustrates with shading those states that have some form of a boot camp.

What is planned for South Dakota?

The boot camp to be constructed in Custer State Park will have available room for forty-eight nonviolent offenders between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. The length of stay will be four months, with days starting at approximately 5:30 a.m. and continuing until approximately 9:30 p.m. The program will include physical training, manual labor, community service, education, and chemical dependency counseling.

In addition to the \$500,000 approved by the Legislature in the last session, the United States Department of Justice has awarded South Dakota \$1.35 million for the construction of the boot camp. Construction is scheduled to begin this fall, and the boot camp could open as early as next summer.

Conclusion

In times of rising crime rates, particularly among juveniles, the concept of prison boot camps has been embraced by politicians and

the public alike. Boot camps are viewed not only as a way to alleviate prison overcrowding and recidivism, but also as a way to be “tough” on crime. Although there is a lot of discussion about boot camps, it is important to understand the basics of what a boot camp is, who is sent to boot camps, and how successful boot camps are. Boot camps are not a magic cure for juvenile crime.

Much still needs to be learned about boot camps as an alternative sanction for the nonviolent offender. Programs vary greatly, with some enjoying more success than others. The program of a boot camp should be carefully developed with stated goals and evaluated to determine whether these goals are being achieved.

Appendix

For information on specific boot camp programs, see the following materials located in the LRC library.

1. Austin, J., Jones, M., and Bolyard, M. (1993). *The Growing Use of Jail Boot Camps: The Current State of the Art*, Washington, D.C.: NIJ Research in Brief, National Institute of Justice.
2. Clark, C. L., Aziz, D. W., and MacKenzie, D. L. (1994). *Shock Incarceration in New York*, Washington, D.C.: NIJ Program Focus, National Institute of Justice.
3. MacKenzie, D. L. (1993), “Boot Camp Prisons in 1993,” *National Institute of Justice Journal*, November: 21-28.
4. MacKenzie, D. L. and Souryal, C. (1994). *Multisite Evaluation of Shock Incarceration*, Washington, D.C.: NIJ Evaluation Report, National Institute of Justice.

This issue memorandum was written by Jacque Storm, Senior Legislative Attorney for the Legislative Research Council. It is designed to supply background information on the subject and is not a policy statement made by the Legislative Research Council.
