

AFSCME Position Paper on GPS Funding

Wisconsin needs to look back a few years and examine the BI experience in our state. BI was a Colorado-based private corporation that contracted with Wisconsin's Dept. of Corrections to provide "supervision" for our offenders via a call-in system. Offenders on BI were not supervised by staff on-the-ground in Wisconsin. Rather, they paid a monthly fee and reported their activities to the out-of-state entity.

Wisconsin dollars left on wings with no real service being provided in return. Any substantive issues involving the BI offenders landed back in the laps of Wisconsin agents or, were not dealt with at all. Offenders at times literally begged to have their Wisconsin agent back in the picture.

From an administrative standpoint, the BI system was cumbersome and delayed responses to offender activity. After several years the BI system was officially designated a failure and dropped in Wisconsin.

Any GPS system involving a private entity would still rely on actual state employees, to exercise the Dept. of Correction's lawful authority and discretion in responding to alleged offender violations. Wisconsin DOC staff are trained and knowledgeable in handling GPS related problems. Experience has proven that fine-tuning the process is necessary with virtually every offender. Problems are quickly dealt with, often without needing to resort to jailing people.

The only potential alternative would be to require law enforcement agencies to arrest and incarcerate every offender, anytime the GPS mechanism indicated that a violation might have occurred.

Labor costs are the most expensive aspect to GPS monitoring, particularly when an offender is first placed into this system. Wisconsin's experience in monitoring sex offenders has shown that approximately four hours of agent staff time per week are dedicated to each of those individuals, during their first three months on GPS. That figure declines to three hours weekly over the next three months. Following the initial six months, Wisconsin agents on average spend two hours weekly on each GPS offender. Addition labor costs involve Monitoring Center personnel and agent supervisory staff.

Wisconsin's experience with its DOC Monitoring Center merits close review when deciding how to maintain a viable GPS system. The Monitoring Center was created in 1995, in response to agent complaints about being "on call" 24x7, 365 days a year.

Contract language was agreed to in 1995, requiring that agents receive 30 minutes premium pay for every after hours call. An additional clause required establishment of a DOC Monitoring Center, designed to eventually eliminate the agent after hours calls altogether.

The Monitoring Center has proven to be a great success, in terms of providing quick responses to law enforcement inquiries concerning offender after hour activities, better rested and happier agents, and tremendously reduced overall labor costs, since agents now receive virtually no work-related calls at home.

We are aware of the recent comparison to Kansas, a non-union state for probation/parole agents. Kansas agents are required to carry beepers for free, with them receiving minute-for-minute "comp time" when they are called. Wisconsin agents now have language in their Labor Agreement, preventing them from being placed "on call" or carrying beepers, to respond to GPS or other offender issues.

Kansas has under 100 agents, compared to Wisconsin's 1200 agents and a well-developed Monitoring Center system to handle after hours issues. All after hour issues have been handled for years in Wisconsin by DOC Monitoring Center personnel, as they are contacted by law enforcement agencies. Instead of the previous hit-or-miss nature of reaching DOC personnel after hours, law enforcement is assured of prompt response by trained DOC staff.

The Governor's budget includes funding and positions to implement GPS effectively, without diverting law enforcement resources from other community protection activities. It provides for the expansion of the Monitoring Center, which has proven its value for more than a decade. This expansion will allow DOC to effectively integrate 21st century GPS technology into the overall supervision of sex offenders.

With its existing agent staff and Monitoring Center personnel, Wisconsin's DOC already has the experience and tools. It must be sufficiently funded to carry out the expanded mission of closely monitoring dangerous sex offenders long-term, via GPS.

Privateers can add nothing to this mix. AFSCME urges Wisconsin legislators to remember the BI experience and not repeat that costly blunder, at the expense of community safety and wasted taxpayer money.