

Executive Summary

Any report that seeks to examine the boot camp phenomenon must start by addressing what boot camps are and how effective they have proven. Unfortunately, there is no solid answer to either question. As an evolving form, boot camps have no uniform definition but may include any form of non-traditional incarceration that provides long hours of activity, intensive focus and relatively short sentences. In a field where there are no standardized criteria for outcome measurement, "success" is in the eye of the beholder.

With this as a foundation and spurred by the expected influx of up to \$1.3 billion in federal funding that is expected to fuel the boot camp development frenzy, the Little Hoover Commission explored the status of boot camps in California. The Commission's main findings and recommendations are as follows:

- Resources are in danger of being wasted because the State has no centralized plan to prioritize needs and coordinate programs. The new federal funding requires an overall criminal justice plan and the State will, no doubt, meet this requirement. However, if the plan is merely grant-driven, rather than based on an accurate assessment of local and regional needs, then the potential for missed opportunities

rather than based on an accurate assessment of local and regional needs, then the potential for missed opportunities and poorly used resources will be great. ***The Commission recommends the creation of a statewide plan that focuses on the cost-effective development of boot camps.*** (Finding 1, Recommendation 1)

- A lack of minimum standards, specialized training, information sharing and state oversight increases the risk that boot camps will fail to meet expectations. Local officials, however, correctly fear that heavy-handed state mandates in this arena will eliminate flexibility to develop programs that are most appropriately suited to local needs and populations. ***The Commission recommends clearly defined, quantifiable goals and standards set by the State, accompanied generally by local control.*** (Finding 1, Recommendations 2-4)
- Boot camp experiments to date have focused on low-risk, neophyte criminals. Targeting other populations as well may yield dividends in the form of lower incarceration costs, reduced recidivism and more availability of prison beds for serious offenders. ***The Commission recommends a series of pilot projects that will test boot camps with pre-delinquent juveniles, already-imprisoned low-risk inmates, and soon-to-be-released inmates.*** (Finding 2, Recommendations 6-9)
- The so-called aftercare portion of boot camps -- and in particular job placement success -- are widely acknowledged to be the key elements that make boot camps work. Yet, for the most part, these are the weakest links in today's boot camp process. ***The Commission recommends a standardized three-phase model for boot camps that heavily emphasizes job placement.*** (Finding 3, Recommendation 12)
- Private-sector operators have been all but stymied from developing California programs because of regulations that were designed to meet other needs and are inappropriate as criminal incarceration requirements. ***The Commission recommends the creation of a new category of regulations that will ensure adequate oversight while encouraging the development of private-sector sentencing alternatives.*** (Finding 4, Recommendation 17)