Alternatives to Incarceration in California

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Alternatives to incarceration may help address California’s public safety challenges

- Realignment is creating new pressures for the jail system
- California is still under pressure to reduce overcrowding in prisons
- A growing share of the state budget goes to prisons and jails
What are alternatives to incarceration?

- Punishment or treatment that does not involve long-term confinement in a jail or prison
- Can be used at sentencing or during community supervision
- Can be mandated by law and policy or result from discretionary decisionmaking or offender initiative
Most existing alternative custody programs are at the county level

- Home detention
- Work release
- Split sentencing
  - Period of incarceration followed by period of community supervision
- Flash incarceration
  - Short period of incarceration (10 days or less) for post-release community supervision (PRCS) and parole violations
Statewide use of alternatives for realigned offenders is still at a low level

NOTES: 1170h = newly convicted non-serious, non-violent, non-sexual felons who would have previously served their sentences in state prison. ACP = sheriff’s alternative custody program.
Counties’ use of split sentencing is increasing slowly

SOURCE: Chief Probation Officers of California Realignment Dashboard.
Key questions about incarceration and alternatives

- Does incarceration reduce crime?
  - Yes — depending on the rate of incarceration

- Would relying less on incarceration affect recidivism?
  - Little difference in outcomes
What makes for effective alternatives?

- Intensive supervision and swift responses
  - Swift, certain, and short
- Targeted services
  - Risk, need, responsivity
- Effective implementation is key
  - Combining intensive supervision and targeted services is the most promising approach
How can California assess effectiveness?

- Need to know more about counties’ experience with community-based strategies
- Need better understanding of characteristics of program participants and outcomes
- Intensive data collection is crucial
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These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.