DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COURT SERVICES AND OFFENDER SUPERVISION AGENCY &
PRETRIAL SERVICES AGENCY
RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION STATEMENT

DATE: April 14, 2008

I.   RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Principal Researcher: Spurgeon Kennedy, Director, Office of Research, Analysis and Development, District of Columbia Pretrial Services Agency

Title: Evaluating Defendant Factors and Pretrial Supervision and Treatment Interventions Related to Pretrial Misconduct

Institution: Pretrial Services Agency through Abt Associates (Abt), contractors selected to identify defendant and programmatic factors related to failure to appear and rearrest (Contract number: PSA-TO-07-000440).

Description:

Abt will analyze differences between *compliant* defendants (those who make all scheduled court appearances and have no rearrests while under supervision) and those that *fail* (miss court appearances or have new arrests while supervised). Abt also will estimate the effects of PSA's supervision conditions and interventions on compliance and failure.

This request applies only to PSA.

Type of Data and Analysis:

Abt will view pretrial service as a production process, with defendants as inputs into this process and FTA and rearrest as outputs or outcomes. The production process comprises activities to enhance supervision and to provide social services to address the varying factors (such as substance abuse and previous supervision failure) that contribute to misconduct.

The study of this production process requires causal analysis. Abt plans a non-experimental research design to account statistically for differences among defendants and their supervision requirements. The contractor will use a variety of quasi-experimental techniques, with efforts to correct for possible selection biases.

These will include (but not be limited to) instrumental variable designs, regression discontinuity designs, and propensity scores.
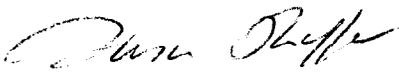
Abt staff will develop descriptions of supervision practices and defendant populations, using data from PRISM, staff interviews, manual documentation (for example, staff-generated supervision reports and assessments), and other RAD-approved miscellaneous sources. Staff will extract defendant-level data largely from PRISM and conduct statistical analysis of these data to estimate effects of defendant characteristics and supervision characteristics on pretrial failure.

Subjects: The study population will include all defendants whose cases were disposed during the September 30, 2006—October 1, 2008, period and also persons who failed at any point after that date, either by failing to appear or by being arrested again. This will include all persons initially detained as well as released, but will exclude traffic cases and no-paper cases (the latter being cases that prosecutors declined to charge). Persons residing out of the District will be included. The unit for this sample will be the PERSON/CASE, with the appropriate PSA internal identification number used for records identification.

II.   RECOMMENDATION

The RRC recommendation for this study:

■   **Support**   ☐ Support with Conditions   ☐   Do Not Support

I **ACCEPT** the RRC recommendation	I **DO NOT ACCEPT** the RRC recommendation
Susan Shaffer (signature)	
Susan W. Shaffer, Director, D.C. Pretrial Services Agency	
Comments:	

Request for Agency Research

Name, Agency and Agency component:

Spurgeon Kennedy
Office of Research, Analysis and Development
District of Columbia Pretrial Services Agency

Title of the study:

Evaluating Defendant Factors and Pretrial Supervision and Treatment Interventions Related to Pretrial Misconduct

Purpose of the project:

PSA has selected Abt Associates (Abt) to identify defendant and programmatic factors related to failure to appear and rearrest. (Contract number: PSA-TO-07-000440). Abt will analyze differences between *compliant* defendants (those who make all scheduled court appearances and have no rearrests while under supervision) and those that *fail* (miss court appearances or have new arrests while supervised). Abt also will estimate the effects of PSA's supervision conditions and interventions on compliance and failure.

Location of the project:

RAD staff will collect and validate project data at PSA's 633 Indiana Avenue offices. Abt staff will conduct research activities from the company's Cambridge, Massachusetts office. When necessary, Abt staff will collect data at 633 Indiana Avenue, under RAD staff supervision.

Methods to be employed:

Abt's will view pretrial service as a production process, with defendants as inputs into this process and FTA and rearrest as outputs or outcomes. The production process comprises activities to enhance supervision and to provide social services to address the varying factors (such as substance abuse and previous supervision failure) that contribute to misconduct. The study of this production process requires causal analysis. The key challenge in studies of causal relationships is estimating what would have happened if what we observe did not occur—the counterfactual condition. Here, Abt and RAD will seek to learn how criminal history, substance abuse history, employment and other attributes (demographic, criminogenic, health and social characteristics) affect pretrial misconduct outcomes. RAD and Abt interpret this question to mean: How would these factors affect pretrial misconduct *absent any actions by PSA to ameliorate the threats*? Causal analysis will require more than a logistic regression of outcomes on defendant attributes since PSA currently undertakes supervision activities to mitigate risks.

Analysis requires estimating what defendants' outcomes would have been in the absence of PSA's interventions (the counterfactual condition). Therefore, Abt plans a non-experimental research design to account statistically for differences among defendants and their supervision requirements. The contractor will use a variety of quasi-experimental techniques, with efforts to correct for possible selection biases. These will include (but not be limited to) instrumental variable designs, regression discontinuity designs, and propensity scores.

Abt staff will develop descriptions of supervision practices and defendant populations, using data from PRISM, staff interviews, manual documentation (for example, staff-generated supervision reports and assessments), and other RAD-approved miscellaneous sources. Staff will extract defendant-level data largely from PRISM and conduct statistical analysis of these data to estimate effects of defendant characteristics and supervision characteristics on pretrial failure.

Anticipated results:

The proposed research will focus on evaluating those elements of PSA's operations that can be modified to help the agency better achieve its strategic goals. The causal models will inform PSA about the relative effects of different supervision processes on FTA and rearrest among different classes of defendants. This, in turn, should identify supervision strategies worth continuing as well as those that may be revised or discontinued. Some findings may have direct implications for budget and costs. Abt also will present findings in a way that supports PSA managers' ability to integrate information about resources and costs with information about supervision effectiveness.

Duration of the study:

September 24, 2007 to March 24, 2009.

Sample size required and/or time frame for sample collection:

The study population will include all defendants whose cases were disposed during the September 30, 2006—October 1, 2008 period and also persons who failed at any point after that date, either by failing to appear or by being arrested again. This will include all persons initially detained as well as released, but will exclude traffic cases and no-paper cases (the latter being cases that prosecutors declined to charge). Persons residing out of the District will be included. The unit for this sample will be the PERSON/CASE, with the appropriate PSA internal identification number used for records identification.

Agency resources needed to support the study and description of the support needs:

The RAD Senior Program Analyst is project COTR and lead manager. About 20 percent of this staff person's time will be devoted to this project. RAD's two other program analysts will be used as needed (about 15 percent of their time) for data validation and on-site work with Abt evaluators. Finally, the Office of Information Technology's senior programmer overseeing PSA Data Warehouse will be used for the full-time work equivalent of eight weeks to develop, prepare and deliver two data sets to Abt for review.

Specific resources required from the Agency:

No additional resources besides those outlined in PSA-TO-07-000440 and mentioned above will be needed.

Description of any anticipated effects of the research project on Agency programs and operations:

The information so obtained may inform the PSA's decisions about its practices and policies of recommending different release conditions to the courts and perhaps decisions about how to enhance supervision's effectiveness with particular types of clients, especially high risk ones.

The information developed in this research project will provide the agency with an improved understanding of the relationships among defendant factors, agency practices and interventions, and pretrial failure. This information may be useful in informing the agency's policies and procedures regarding risk assessment and supervision strategies. The conduct of the research itself will not, however, impinge upon the current operation of PSA programs.

List of deliverables to the Agency:

A report to PSA detailing the methodology and the findings.