

Immediate Improvements Needed in NS Community Corrections System – Auditor General

For release May 17 -- Nova Scotia must make immediate and significant improvements to the monitoring of its community corrections system to ensure public safety and public confidence in the system isn't compromised, reveals a new audit from Nova Scotia's Auditor General.

"Proper monitoring of individuals serving community-based sentences is essential to hold them accountable for their offences while protecting public safety," says Auditor General Kim Adair.

The performance audit examined the oversight and management of individuals serving community-based sentences in Nova Scotia from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2020.

A community-based sentence allows those eligible to serve all or part of their sentence in the community, usually under the supervision of a probation officer.

The audit outlines that on March 1, 2020, there were 4,700 people serving community-based sentences in Nova Scotia, almost ten times the number serving their custodies in Nova Scotia's correctional facilities. The daily cost to the province is about \$7 per person in community corrections vs. approximately \$300 per person in correctional facilities.

"The number of individuals serving community-based sentences combined with the cost of incarcerating people highlights the need for a properly functioning community corrections system," Adair said.

People serving a community-based sentence are sometimes ordered to wear an electronic monitoring device which generates an alert through GPS monitoring if they violate a condition, like remaining in a specific geographic area.

The audit found that the company providing the province's electronic supervision service, which has been paid approximately \$250,000 in each of the last five years, is not fulfilling its responsibilities. The Department of Justice failed to monitor the company providing the service and was unaware that it was not properly responding to alerts for individuals under electronic supervision.

"Electronic supervision is the highest form of monitoring and if this is not properly managed, public safety could be at risk," said Adair.

The audit makes 10 recommendations, including the development and implementation of a process to determine if the electronic supervision service provider is fulfilling the terms of its contract. The department has agreed to all of the recommendations.

In addition, the audit found instances of probation officers failing to meet with people at the required frequency and in some cases, failing to hold them to account for the conditions of their sentence.

Despite clear policy guidance, there were numerous instances where probation officers were not complying with the policies, resulting in poor supervision and lack of accountability.

Training for probation officers, who staff the 22 adult community corrections offices across Nova Scotia from Sydney to Yarmouth, was often not completed or not completed on time.

The Auditor General recommends that the Department of Justice identify community corrections staff that have not fulfilled training requirements and develop and implement plans, so all required training is completed.

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