Falling Through the Cracks

Gaps in Identifying Veterans on Community Supervision

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Accurate identification of veterans involved in the criminal justice system is critical to connecting them with tailored services that can support successful reentry and reduce recidivism. This brief explores how community supervision agencies identify and verify the veteran status of people under pretrial supervision and on probation and parole, building on previous [research](#) into veteran identification practices in prisons.

The brief reports results of a 2024 survey of current and former community supervision agents about how they identify veterans and whether their offices make referrals to services tailored to the veteran population. While findings are not nationally representative, they offer preliminary insights into common practices and challenges across supervision systems.

Key Takeaways

- A lack of uniform definitions and methods for identifying veterans means **there is no accurate count of the number of veterans under community supervision** in the United States.

- Veteran identification practices in pretrial supervision, probation, and parole are often **informal, inconsistent, and poorly integrated** into supervision processes.

- Former service members whose veteran status is not identified while they are on community supervision likely **miss critical connections to services** that could

support successful reentry.

- Recently adopted national standards for community supervision recommend the **creation of specialized veteran caseloads** to improve identification and connection to services.

- States should **conduct system-level reviews** to evaluate current identification practices, pinpoint where gaps exist, and develop consistent protocols for verification and referral.

Methodology

In 2024, a brief survey was conducted to better understand how community supervision agencies identify veterans. The survey was distributed to our team's contacts in 30 agencies in 16 states overseeing probation, parole, and pretrial supervision. Of these, 11 agencies responded, representing a mix of state and county-level systems. Respondents were asked about their veteran identification practices and whether agencies connected veterans to services offered through the Department of Veterans Affairs or available in the community. The findings were analyzed qualitatively to identify common themes. While the sample was small and not nationally representative, the responses offer important insights into current supervision-level efforts and challenges to veteran identification.

Variation in Supervision Systems Complicates Veteran Identification

Community supervision includes various forms of correctional oversight within the community, such as pretrial supervision, probation, and parole.

- **Pretrial supervision** is the oversight of people awaiting adjudication.

- **Probation** is usually imposed instead of incarceration following a criminal conviction.

- **Parole** involves supervision following release from prison.

Supervision systems vary by state:

- Pretrial supervision is typically managed locally, though some states manage or fund pretrial services through the state.[1]

- In 29 states, probation and parole are administered by the state department of corrections (see Figure 1).

- In 10 states, probation is a function of the state judicial branch, and probation officers are state employees. In six states, the county, judicial district, or contracted agencies (private or non-profit) may provide supervision for misdemeanors or administer community corrections/diversion programs. Officers are not state employees but may have judicial branch oversight. In these 16 states, parole is administered by the state department of corrections.

- In three states, probation and parole are administered by state agencies other than the department of corrections.

- In Ohio, probation is administered by the county, Court of Common Pleas, or the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC); ODRC administers parole.

- In Oregon, probation and parole are administered by the county in collaboration with the Oregon Department of Corrections, except in two counties where the DOC oversees probation and parole.

This fragmented system hinders efforts to consistently identify and track veterans across different supervision types and jurisdictions.

Figure 1. Probation and Parole Supervision Structures by State

How Community Supervision Agencies Identify Veterans

Insights from survey respondents within community supervision agencies suggest that veteran identification practices in pretrial supervision, probation, and parole are often informal, inconsistent, and poorly integrated into supervision processes. While many agencies have access to a range of official sources of veteran identification, few use them systematically or in coordination with other entities. Survey responses highlight variation in verification practices, data sharing limitations, and structural barriers that contribute to missed opportunities to connect veterans with needed services. Key themes include:

- **Self-report remains the primary method:** Most pretrial supervision, probation, and parole agencies ask individuals directly if they have served in the military, typically during intake.

- **Verification practices vary widely across jurisdictions and agency types:** Some agencies supplement self-reporting by verifying veteran status through federal databases managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, such as the Veteran Re-Entry Search Service (VRSS) or the Status Query and Response Exchange System (SQUARES), or with assistance from Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists, employees of the VA who help justice-involved veterans access services. These tools are more frequently used in counties with veterans treatment courts, where verification is required to assess eligibility. Overall, however, these practices are not standardized, and in some cases, screening for offense type occurs before verification of veteran status, which raises the risk of misclassification or exclusion of eligible veterans.

- **Parole identification depends heavily on administrative structure:** In states where parole is managed by the department of corrections, officers may rely on veteran status determinations made during incarceration, typically based on self-report, VRSS, or both.[2] Where parole is overseen by a separate agency, officers may have limited or no access to prison-collected data, which can hinder verification and referral to services.

- **Pretrial supervision practices are inconsistent and often siloed:** In some counties, pretrial officers assess military service eligibility as part of release decisions or therapeutic court screening, using tools like VRSS or referrals to VJOs. However, in jurisdictions where pretrial, probation, and parole are managed separately, this information may not be transferred to the supervising agency, leading to gaps in identification.

- **Data fragmentation across supervision levels limits access to verification:** County-run agencies may have more direct access to local court and jail data, but their verification practices vary widely. State-run probation or parole systems often have less visibility into county-level screening processes, and information collected during jail intake or pretrial assessments, such as veteran status, may not be shared across agencies or integrated into supervision workflows.

- **Additional data sources exist but are not always used:** Some agencies access information from state departments of veterans affairs, county social and health services, or through the Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS). Others may review DD214 forms, also known as Certificates of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, to confirm military discharge status. These tools are not consistently integrated into supervision protocols.

- **Structural and staffing constraints hinder systematic identification:** High caseloads, limited verification tools, and restricted access to cross-agency data,

especially for parole agencies not embedded in departments of corrections, restrict officers' ability to verify veteran status or make referrals to appropriate services.

In general, agencies supervising people pretrial or on probation or parole have more potential access points for identifying veterans than prisons, often through state veterans affairs offices, public assistance systems, and other external databases. But these tools are rarely used systematically, and their application is not codified in policy. This contributes to inconsistent identification of veterans and missed opportunities to connect them to needed services.

Implications and Opportunities

Identifying veterans under community supervision is as crucial as identification in jails or prisons—if not more so—because it creates a critical opportunity for early intervention. As of the end of 2022, about 3.7 million adults were on probation or parole in the U.S., in addition to an unknown number under pretrial supervision.[3] At this scale, supervision settings offer a vital touchpoint to reach veterans who may be living with service-related conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or other mental health and substance use disorders that can fuel criminal behavior.[4] When veterans are accurately identified at the pretrial, probation, or parole stage, agencies can connect them to targeted services that seek to resolve the root causes of their justice involvement. These interventions not only support recovery and reentry but can also reduce the likelihood of future justice system contact, improving both public health and public safety.

Yet in practice, agencies miss many of these opportunities. While community supervision agencies often have more access points for identifying veterans than correctional facilities, including intake assessments, jail data, court screening tools, and verification systems like VRSS or SQUARES, the use of these tools is inconsistent, and they are often employed only after someone self-reports their veteran status. Veterans who are not identified at intake may be assigned to general caseloads and miss out on specialized services or referrals, despite having needs that require and can benefit greatly from tailored support.

National guidance has begun to address this gap. The American Probation and Parole Association's 2024 National Standards for Community Supervision recommend the creation of specialized veteran caseloads.[5] A small but growing number of jurisdictions, such as Multnomah County, Oregon, have begun veteran-focused roles within community supervision agencies to improve identification and connection to services.[6] These efforts may lead to

promising practice, but they remain the exception rather than the rule.

The national guidance aligns with a recommendation from the Council's Veterans Justice Commission, which called for [improvements in the identification of justice-involved veterans across systems](). The Commission has emphasized the importance of adopting a consistent definition of "military veteran" and increasing the use of federal verification tools such as VRSS to strengthen identification efforts. Enhancing these practices is a critical step toward broader reforms, such as expanding diversion, treatment, and reentry programs designed to meet the specific needs of veterans in the justice system.

Given the wide variation in community supervision systems across the country, producing a national estimate of veterans under supervision is challenging. A more actionable step would be for states to conduct system-level reviews to evaluate current identification practices, identify gaps, and establish standardized protocols for verification and referral. This effort should include both locally controlled and state-run agencies, with clear guidance on how veteran status is identified (e.g., self-report, VRSS, or SQUARES), which agencies collect the information, and how it is shared across supervision levels. Strengthening coordination among courts, counties, and state agencies will help ensure that veterans are recognized and supported, maximizing available resources and improving outcomes not only for those who served, but also for their families and communities.

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Endnotes

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[5] See Standard 5.4: "Agencies should review the composition of their total caseload to
determine whether the number of individuals on supervision with common profiles or offense
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