



# 2012 Judicial Survey Report

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## Purpose

The Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia (PSA) considers the judicial officers in both the Superior Court of the District of Columbia (DCSC) and the United States District Court for the District of Columbia (USDC) to be its most critical stakeholders in helping the Agency fulfill its mission and objectives. The Agency values judicial feedback and places great emphasis on the recommendations made by the judges when considering enhancements to its overall services. To gather this information, PSA has conducted a biennial survey with judges from the Superior Court of the District of Columbia (DCSC) and the United States District Court for the District of Columbia (USDC) for the past ten years. The purpose of the survey is to gauge judicial satisfaction with the overall quality and performance of PSA in providing services and support to the Courts, as well as to seek recommendations for improvement.

## Summary

This report presents findings from the 2012 Judicial Survey. Overall, DCSC and USDC judges reported that PSA provides quality, beneficial information that assists them in making sound decisions regarding defendant release conditions. In addition, judges indicated that PSA provides an array of services that support their decisions to address appropriate release conditions and defendant needs. Specific findings are detailed later in the report. Major highlights include:

### *Superior Court of the District of Columbia Findings*

- An overwhelming majority of judges are satisfied with PSA services. Specifically, they are satisfied with the array of PSA services, including supervision options, electronic surveillance, drug testing, and substance abuse treatment services.
- A large majority of judges reported that PSA is highly responsive in addressing their concerns and issues and are satisfied with their ability to contact Pretrial Services Officers (PSOs) and supervisors regarding concerns. In addition, the judges indicated that PSOs are resourceful and helpful in the courtrooms and present when needed.
- A large majority of the judges indicated that PSA's reports and information are helpful in decision-making. Judges did, however, request that PSA ensure that all reports are sent timely and checked for accuracy and quality.

## *United States District Court Findings*

- All judges reported that they are satisfied with PSA services.
- A majority of judges indicated that they are particularly impressed with the timeliness of Pretrial Services Reports (PSRs); supervision strategies; electronic surveillance; and drug testing.
- A high percentage of judges reported that they are satisfied with their ability to contact PSOs and supervisors to address and resolve concerns.
- While most judges reported that PSA's recommendations are helpful, some indicated that PSA should review its recommendations more carefully to ensure that they are clear and useful to the Court.

## Present Sample

Fifty-nine DCSC judges were identified to participate in this year's judicial survey. The judges were identified as a result of their current assignment to a criminal calendar or as a result of being assigned to a criminal calendar within the past two years. Twenty-four of the 59 judges completed the survey, for a response rate slightly over 40%. (Studies indicate the average response rate for electronic surveys is between 30 and 40 percent.<sup>1,2</sup>) To encourage candid feedback, judges were given the option of completing the survey anonymously, but were offered the opportunity to disclose their identity, if desired.

Sixteen USDC judges were identified to participate in the judicial survey. Five of the 16 USDC judges completed the survey for a response rate of approximately 30%, which is also average for similar surveys.

## Methods

PSA senior leadership, program managers, and supervisors worked closely with the Office of Research Analysis and Development (RAD) to develop and review questions for both the DCSC and USDC surveys. Both surveys included open-ended and closed-ended questions, and focused on topics such as the levels of satisfaction with PSA services in general; the array of PSA services; the quality of PSA services; the responsiveness of PSA in conducting evaluations for program placement; the ability of judges to contact PSA staff and managers to address concerns; the responsiveness of PSA in addressing concerns; and the helpfulness of available PSA information in the decision-making process. Questions were also asked about any additional services that PSA should consider providing and how PSA can improve its recommendations for release conditions and supervision to the Court.

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, M. B. (2003). *Online survey response rates and times: Background and guidance for industry*. Tercent, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Sheehan, K. (2001). E-mail survey response rates: a review. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 6 (2).

Because the Agency experienced success using a web-based platform for the 2010 survey, a similar approach was utilized for the 2012 survey. While the judges were encouraged to electronically complete the survey to support our mutual environmental initiatives, they were also given the option of completing the survey manually. The PSA Director sent an initial e-mail to the selected judges requesting their participation and sent a follow-up e-mail several weeks later to encourage additional responses. Seventeen of the 24 DCSC judges, or slightly over 70%, and all five of the USDC judges completed the survey electronically.

RAD's Senior Program Analyst led PSA's efforts related to the survey, analyzed and interpreted all data, and developed the final report.

## Survey Findings

### *Superior Court of the District of Columbia*

Overall, the results from the 2012 DCSC Judicial Survey indicate a high level of satisfaction with the quality and array of services that PSA provides to the Court. The DCSC judges expressed high levels of satisfaction with PSA services, especially in the areas of supervision, drug testing and electronic surveillance. The judges expressed lower levels of satisfaction with PSA's services in the area of pro-social interventions, including employment, housing, and education resources and referrals. The judges expressed high levels of satisfaction with the quality of PSA services, especially in the areas of court appearances, resourcefulness, and helpfulness in Court. In addition, there was a shared sense that PSA, especially through its PSOs, is responsive to the Court and helps judges resolve concerns and issues in appropriate and timely ways. There was also agreement among the judges that PSA provides useful information that enhances their decision-making ability.

### *Specific Findings:*

- More than 90% of the DCSC judges report they are either very satisfied (64%) or satisfied (27%) with PSA services.
- Sixty-eight percent of the DCSC judges rate the array of supervision options as excellent, and 27% rate these options as good; 61% rate electronic surveillance and drug testing as excellent and 30% as good, respectively; and 57% rate substance abuse treatment as excellent, and 30% as good. A little over half (52%) rate mental health services as excellent and 30% as good (see Table 1).
- Thirty percent of the judges rate PSRs and other reports as excellent, and 65% rate PSRs as good.
- A small number of judges rate "fail-to-appear" investigations and assistance with bench warrant surrenders as excellent (30%) or good (39%), and pro-social interventions as excellent (13%) or good (35%).

Table 1: Satisfaction with PSA services

DCSC Satisfaction with PSA Services						
	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	NA	Total
Supervision	68% 15	27% 6	-	-	4.5% 1	22
Electronic surveillance	61% 14	30% 7	-	-	9% 3	23
Drug Testing	61% 14	35% 8	-	-	4% 2	24
Substance Abuse Treatment	57% 13	30% 7	-	-	13% 4	24
Mental Health services	52% 12	30% 7	-	-	18% 5	24
FTA investigations/warrant surrenders	30% 7	39% 9	4.3% 1	-	26% 6	23
Pretrial services reports and other reports	30% 7	65% 15	-	-	5% 1	23
Pro-social interventions	13% 3	35% 8	9% 2	4% 1	39% 9	23

(Please note in the tables above and below that the response totals for each service vary because all respondents did not provide a response for each service.)

- The DCSC judges rate PSA highly in terms of being responsive to the Court in resolving concerns and issues. Seventy percent of judges indicate that they are very satisfied with their ability to contact PSOs to address concerns, and 54% indicate they are very satisfied with their ability to contact supervisors and managers. In addition, nearly 80% of judges rate PSA as excellent in being responsive and helpful in resolving concerns. Sixty-seven percent of the judges are very satisfied and 29% are satisfied with PSA’s responsiveness in conducting evaluations and/or screenings for placement into services.
- Service delivery is a critical area for PSA in ensuring a positive and strong relationship with the Court and judges. The survey results show that a little over 70% of the judges are very satisfied and 21% are satisfied with PSA’s appearances in court and 65% are very satisfied and 26% are satisfied with PSA’s resourcefulness and helpfulness. Over 60% of the judges also indicate satisfaction with PSA’s timeliness of reports and evaluations, while close to 30% indicate that they are very satisfied. In addition, over 40% of the judges are very satisfied with the comprehensiveness of PSA reports, and 54% express being satisfied (see Table 2).

Table 2: DCSC Satisfaction with PSA’s quality of services

DCSC Satisfaction with PSA’s quality of services						
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	NA	Total
Appearances in court when requested	71% 17	21% 5	-	-	8% 2	24
Resourcefulness and helpfulness in court	65% 15	26% 6	4.3% 1	-	4.3% 1	23
Comprehensiveness of reports/evaluations	42% 10	54% 13	-	-	4% 1	24
Timeliness of reports and evaluations	29% 7	63% 15	-	4% 1	4% 1	24

- As PSA continues to embrace and emphasize the importance of utilizing evidence and data to inform decision-making, the Agency is particularly concerned that the information it provides to the Court is helpful with decision-making. Nearly 70% of the DCSC judges indicate that the information that PSA provides is extremely helpful in assisting them with decision-making. More than half of the judges (54%) indicate that PSA's recommendations are very helpful, and 42% indicate that they are helpful. Judges also indicate that PSOs could send reports more consistently on all defendants, send more reports, file reports in a timelier manner, and ensure fewer typographical errors and other inaccuracies in reports to assist in their review of the reports and decision-making process.
- Judges indicated that PSA can enhance its recommendations for pretrial release or detention by assessing the needs of defendants much earlier; not involve the court in matters that can be handled administratively; be clearer about situations when PSA is unable to make recommendations; and ensure that all PSRs are available in a timely manner.
- Judges also recommend that PSA consider adding the following services: DWI and prostitution support services; halfway house placement; treatment support for defendants with opiate addiction; referrals and support for transportation (*e.g.*, transit tokens); GED programs; and employment referrals.
- Other recommendations and comments from judges include: 1) PSA should include an information sheet with the GCMS results from the forensic laboratory and an interpretative summary; and 2) PSOs, court representatives, managers and supervisors played a critical role in the positive changes to the operation of C-10. One particular judge stated: "Without their dedication, interest and ability to work cooperatively and collaboratively with all justice partners the changes would not have been possible."

#### *United States District Court*

The small USDC sample size makes generalizing results to the entire bench difficult. Despite this, the findings from USDC judges provide important perspectives and insight about PSA services. All USDC judges surveyed expressed a high level of satisfaction with PSA services. The judges also indicated a high level of satisfaction with the array of services that PSA offers, especially the updated PSRs, supervision services, electronic surveillance, and drug testing. There appeared to be less familiarity and utilization of PSA's substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and pro-social interventions. This may suggest a need for PSA to increase the awareness of USDC judges of the array and availability of Agency services.

The USDC judges also expressed satisfaction with their ability to contact PSOs, supervisors or managers to discuss and resolve concerns. Eighty percent of the judges rated PSA's response as either excellent or good in terms of addressing their concerns. Similar to DCSC judges, USDC judges rated the quality of PSO appearances in court and resourcefulness and helpfulness in court as

excellent. A higher percentage of USDC judges, however, indicate a high level of satisfaction with the timeliness and comprehensiveness of reports.

*Specific Findings:*

- All USDC judges report that they are very satisfied with PSA services.
- The USDC judges rate the quality of PSA services in the following way: 100% rate the timeliness of PSR reports as excellent, and 80% rate supervision, electronic surveillance and drug testing as excellent (see Table 3).

Table 3: USDC Satisfaction with PSA services

USDC Satisfaction with PSA services				
	Excellent	Good	NA	Total
Updated PSRs	100% 5	-	-	100% 5
Supervision	80% 4	20% 1	-	100% 5
Electronic surveillance	80% 4	20% 1	-	100% 5
Drug testing	80% 4	20% 1	-	100% 5
Substance abuse treatment	40% 2	20% 1	40% 2	100% 5
Mental health services	25% 1	25% 1	50% 3	100% 5
Pro-social interventions	20% 1	20% 1	60% 3	100% 5

- Eighty percent of judges indicate that they are very satisfied with their ability to contact PSOs, supervisors, and managers to resolve concerns.
- Sixty percent of judges rate PSA’s responsiveness in addressing their concerns as excellent, and 20% rate PSA’s responsiveness as good.
- Sixty percent of judges indicate that PSA’s information is very helpful, and 40% indicate that it is helpful in assisting them with decision-making.
- Sixty percent of USDC judges indicate they are very satisfied, and 40% are satisfied with PSA’s responsiveness in conducting screenings or evaluations.
- All judges surveyed indicate that they are very satisfied with the quality of PSA’s appearances in court and resourcefulness and helpfulness in court. A high percentage of judges also express that they are very satisfied with the timeliness (80%) and comprehensiveness (80%) of PSA reports (see Table 4).

Table 4: USDC Satisfaction with PSA's quality of services

USDC Satisfaction with PSA's quality of services				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Other	Total
Appearances in court when requested	100% 5	-	-	100% 5
Resourcefulness and helpfulness in court	100% 5	-	-	100% 5
Comprehensiveness of reports/evaluations	80% 4	20% 1	-	100% 5
Timeliness of reports and evaluations	80% 4	20% 1	-	100% 5

- Fifty percent of the USDC judges find PSA's recommendations very helpful, and 25% find them average in helpfulness. This may suggest a need for PSA to re-evaluate recommendations and the recommendation process within USDC to determine potential areas for improvement.

## Conclusion

Overall, findings from the 2012 DCSC and USDC judicial surveys are favorable and indicate that judges have a high degree of satisfaction with both the quality and variety of PSA services. Both DCSC and USDC judges appear to be satisfied with PSA's services, especially supervision, drug testing, and electronic surveillance. Both groups of judges also express a high level of satisfaction with PSA's court appearances, resourcefulness, and helpfulness in Court. PSA PSOs and supervisors appear to respond timely and appropriately to judges when issues and concerns arise and need to be resolved.

Areas for improvement include enhancing PSA's pro-social interventions; consistently improving the quality and timeliness of PSRs and other court reports, particularly in DCSC; reviewing PSA's recommendations and recommendation development process to ensure that it is more helpful to the Court in decision-making; assessing defendants earlier to ensure that they receive the most appropriate release conditions and services; and re-evaluating the issue of interviewing all defendants at lock-up.

## Next Steps

PSA will work with its Office of Operations to determine the feasibility of implementing the recommendations from DCSC and USDC judges. In addition, PSA will conduct a more comprehensive survey of DCSC and USDC judges during Fiscal Year 2013. PSA also plans to interview a select group of judges to elicit further insight and recommendations to continue to enhance its services.