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## **Washington's Offender Accountability Act: An Analysis of the Department of Corrections' Risk Assessment**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 1999, the Washington State Legislature passed the Offender Accountability Act (OAA), with full implementation starting in 2001. The OAA affects how the state provides community supervision to adults convicted of felony crimes. The OAA directs the Department of Corrections (DOC) to classify felony offenders according to the risk they pose to re-offending in the future and the amount of harm they have caused society in the past. The OAA then directs DOC to allocate more of its community-based resources to the higher-risk offenders. The primary goal is to reduce the subsequent criminal behavior of offenders when they are back in the community.

The Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to determine if the OAA achieves reduced re-offense rates (recidivism) and improvements in other outcomes. The Institute must report annually on the evaluation.

It is too early in the life of the OAA to determine if it has influenced recidivism rates. Because a sufficient follow-up period is needed to observe recidivism, our January 2005 report will offer the first opportunity to learn whether the OAA reduces crime cost-effectively.

In this report, we examine how well the risk assessment instrument adopted by DOC—the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R)—predicts recidivism in a sample of 22,533 Washington offenders. We also explore possible improvements to the instrument and how a revised classification approach might work within the OAA.

This report contains many detailed statistics, but the basic findings are just four:

1. The LSI-R predicts recidivism moderately well.
2. The predictive power of the LSI-R can be improved significantly by adding several readily available measures.
3. An enhanced prediction instrument would improve the classification of DOC offenders by specifically measuring the likelihood of the most serious form of recidivism—violent felonies.

There are no distinct changes in recidivism rates at specific risk scores, thus there are no obvious “cut-off scores” to create risk categories.