

# Monitoring of Justice Involved in the Community

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The [ACLU recently issued a scathing report](#) documenting the harm caused by electronic monitoring devices, most notably GPS ankle monitors, and their role in the expansion of mass incarceration. Specifically, the ACLU noted that not only do these devices fail to achieve their goals, but they cause harm to those under surveillance and impede rehabilitation, too often resulting in reincarceration for minor technical violations. Despite these challenges, most every correctional authority continues to rely on GPS ankle monitors. But there are viable alternatives, and some agencies are beginning to consider adopting this new technology.

Traditional GPS ankle monitors have numerous [technology limitations](#), but due to a universal lack of supervision officers, most agencies are unable to [effectively monitor the devices](#). Agencies often rely on contracted monitoring centers and minimal compliance restrictions to monitor those under supervision. This model is un-dependable and insufficient to provide effective accountability, case management, and does not address community safety concerns.

Most notably, the use of ankle monitors is stigmatizing to the individual forced to wear one, immediately identifying them as someone involved with the criminal justice system. Ankle monitors create conditions for people to be shunned or otherwise treated in a negative manner, making their successful reentry to society all the more difficult. Ankle monitors are utilized punitively with very minimal positive reinforcement or reduction of monitoring for compliance. While ankle monitors may appear to be preferable to the placement of offenders in prison or jail, they do not address systemic issues surrounding the reasons for the incarceration.

The Bureau of Prisons (BOP) undertook a pilot study using a novel way to monitor individuals in BOP custody but living in the community on home confinement or in halfway houses. This pilot utilized smartphone monitoring in place of traditional ankle monitors. The concept is simple, [most everyone today](#) carries a cell phone, so the mere fact of seeing someone with a cell phone that is also a monitoring device, does not trigger the usual raised eyebrows, finger pointing, or worse.

Bio-metrically secure smartphones provide an interactive means of communication, accountability, assessment, and program delivery. Technology provides security assurances using random bio-metric (Fingerprint, facial and voice recognition) check-in's that the monitored individual is in possession of the phone. Additionally, the issuance of a secure smartphone limits privacy issues associated with putting a monitoring app on a phone owned by the individual being monitored. Traditional GPS ankle monitors are limited to location monitoring whereas smartphone technology thrives on serving as a resource to the person being monitored, allows full communication, access to resources, and visible display of their compliance and/or noncompliance, while at the same time increasing tracking functionality. The use of smartphones for monitoring allows for positive reinforcement of compliant behavior and opens the door to providing access to resources in the community such as job search, housing assistance, educational and other supportive resources. Smartphones also allow for the individual to have immediate access to telemedicine, teletherapy, and cognitive behavioral programming. None of this is possible with traditional GPS ankle monitors.

The BOP pilot demonstrated that the use of smartphone technology is not only a viable alternative to traditional ankle monitors but in fact provides enhanced compliance and tracking of individuals under supervision. It simultaneously provides enhanced communication and interactions with the individuals being monitored.

The BOP undertook this pilot, in part as a response to the First Step Act which requires BOP to put more individuals in community-based programs, and to monitor them electronically. BOP has limited resources and increasing the availability of Residential Reentry Centers takes years of planning. BOP's pilot was a positive step forward in increasing the effectiveness of their home confinement programs. Further, the BOP recently announced revisions to their Statement of Work for the utilization of smart phones for accountability in their community based programs (Residential Reentry Centers and Home Confinement).

The use of technology to supplement sound correctional practice is an effective solution to downsized budgets and staffing concerns, while reducing risks of supervision of individuals in community-based programs. When compared to the costs of traditional in-person monitoring, the use of smartphones offers significant cost savings by using staff more effectively to focus attention on those individuals who require more intensive interactions, without jeopardizing public safety. The Bureau of Prisons continues to be a leader in corrections, and their leadership should be replicated in states and localities struggling to effectively monitor those individuals being supervised in our communities.

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