

Survey of U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services Agencies' Adaptations to COVID-19

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has created unparalleled challenges for the federal probation and pretrial services system. Federal officers, whether at the post-conviction or pretrial levels, often engage in work which involves extensive in-person interactions between themselves and their clients and judiciary personnel. Prior to the pandemic, much of this work occurred in venues where social distancing and other protocols to limit disease transmission were difficult to implement, such as courthouses, jails, probation and pretrial offices, and the homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods of persons on pretrial or post-conviction supervision. As part of their duties, federal officers engage in a myriad of activities that involve close contacts with various individuals, including interviewing persons charged with federal offenses, testifying in court at pretrial, sentencing, or revocations hearings, conducting home inspections for persons on pretrial or post-conviction

supervision, and requiring clients on supervision to meet with officers in the office or home for periodic check-ins on their status and compliance with supervision conditions (Latessa & Lovins, 2019; Petersilia, 1997). Moreover, officers often engage in monitoring activities that can necessitate the need to engage in close contacts with individuals on pretrial or post-conviction supervision. For example, they attach location monitoring devices, perform drug testing, and execute searches of homes or computer devices (Cohen, 2019; Latessa & Lovins, 2019). Last, many federal officers have integrated evidence-based practices into their supervision stratagems by using cognitive-behavioral strategies to reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Robinson et al., 2011). These cognitive-based approaches frequently entail extensive face-to-face contacts (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Persons on federal pretrial or post-conviction supervision are also often required by their conditions of supervision or by the officers that supervise them to engage in activities that could place them at risk of exposure to COVID-19. Some of these requirements include attending group therapy sessions to alleviate substance use or mental health issues or receive sex offender treatment (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Moreover, persons on supervision may be required to meet with officers, find and maintain employment, and submit to home inspections or drug testing. These activities could potentially place individuals

on supervision at greater risk than the general population, since many of these persons have pre-existing health conditions and limited access to healthcare (Clark et al., 2013; Vaughn et al., 2012; Viglione et al., 2020b).

The issuance of stay-at-home orders by states during the pandemic's initial stages and the need to ensure the safety of officers, support staff, and clients from disease exposure resulted in substantial changes to the traditional ways in which the federal system supervises its clients and conducts its normal business. It is important to acknowledge that many of these changes occurred rapidly, without a pre-existing roadmap of how to conduct supervision during a pandemic (Viglione et al., 2020b). While some research on community corrections responses to the pandemic has occurred at the state level (see Koetzle & Schwalbe, 2020; Martin & Zettler, 2020; Sawn et al., 2020; Viglione et al., 2020a), no efforts to explore the federal system's responses and reactions have occurred until now.

The current research surveyed 109 federal probation² and pretrial chiefs at the district level to gauge the responses of federal community corrections to the pandemic. Specifically, the survey attempted to examine:

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² The terms post-conviction supervision and probation are used interchangeably throughout this paper. They refer to persons being supervised (for a term of typically three years) after serving their federal prison sentence or persons sentenced to straight probation without any incarceration term.

- The types of actions federal probation and pretrial agencies initially undertook in response to the pandemic and changes in those responses over time;
 - The use of technologies as an alternative means for in-person supervision, the extent to which federal offices experienced COVID-19 outbreaks and responses to these outbreaks;
 - The perceptions of district chiefs about the major challenges faced by federal probation and pretrial services agencies and the most beneficial strategies used to address these challenges; and
 - The types of resources chiefs used when deploying policies aimed at mitigating the pandemic's effects.
- The initial and subsequent strategies employed to reduce risk of disease exposure among officers, support staff, and clients;
 - The use of various technological platforms in client supervision;
 - The extent to which officers, support staff, and clients were exposed to COVID-19 and district responses to these exposures;
 - The perceptions of chiefs about the challenges posed by the pandemic and the most beneficial responses to these challenges; and
 - The resources used to adapt and respond to the pandemic.

The report's subsequent sections explicate the methods and data used for the current research, the major findings generated from the survey, and the implications of these findings and directions for future research.

Methods

Survey Instrument Development

Data for the current study were obtained through self-report surveys of federal probation and pretrial chiefs located in all 94 federal judicial districts. The specific data collection instrument was based on a survey funded by the National Science Foundation in collaboration with the University of Central Florida (UCF) for a project titled "Adapting Community Corrections in Response to COVID-19" (University of Central Florida, n.d). UCF's research effort, led by Professor Jill Viglione, measures the pandemic's impact on the nation's community corrections systems (Viglione et al., 2020a). Of the 347 community corrections agencies that completed the UCF survey, nearly all (99 percent) hailed from county or state probation or parole entities. It should also be noted that some components of the UCF questionnaire were based upon recommendations and guidelines on conducting community supervision during the pandemic promulgated by Executives Transforming Probation and Parole (EXiT) and the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera, 2020). More information about UCF's COVID-19 research project can be found at <https://ccie.ucf.edu/adapt-cc/>.

We modified UCF's survey instrument for our current research effort before submitting it to federal probation and pretrial chiefs. The survey instrument measures several aspects of the federal supervision system's responses to the pandemic, including:

Data Collection

Once developed, an electronic version of the survey was distributed by email to all 110 federal probation and pretrial chiefs in the 94 federal judicial districts. In the federal supervision system, 76 chiefs are located in districts with combined probation and pretrial offices and 34 chiefs preside over districts in which the pretrial ($n = 17$) and probation ($n = 17$) offices are separate. An initial email providing information about the study and requesting that each chief complete the survey at the earliest convenience was sent out in early February 2021. The email message contained a link to the survey instrument, which was distributed using Microsoft Forms. After the initial email invitation, the chiefs were sent several reminders to complete the survey, with the final reminder submitted in early March 2021.

The outreach effort resulted in 109 of the 110 chiefs submitting complete surveys. The 99 percent response rate means that the survey's results are essentially representative of the entire federal probation and pretrial system. Of the 109 persons who completed the survey, 105 were either district chiefs or their deputies, while the remainder were a combination of administrative manager ($n = 1$), supervisory officer ($n = 2$), or line officer ($n = 1$).

Analytical Methods

The survey data were exported from Microsoft Forms and uploaded into Stata version 16.1 for subsequent analysis. The report uses descriptive statistics to provide a basic overview of the federal supervision system's adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the research is exploratory and provides a first-time examination of the federal system's reactions and responses to the pandemic, no inferential techniques were employed.

Findings

Initial and Subsequent Responses to the Pandemic

First, we examined the initial actions undertaken by federal supervision agencies in response to the pandemic, within the time frame of March through May 2020. All 109 chiefs reported that they engaged in some combination of preventative, containment, or response measures at the pandemic's onset (see Table 1, next page). Nearly every agency (95 percent or more) reported that they provided free face masks to officers, shared information and guidance about COVID-19 with officers and support staff, or allowed officers to work remotely (e.g., telework). Additionally, 90 percent of respondents allowed their officers and staff to use rotating work schedules or skeleton crews. The requirement that officers or individuals on supervision wear face masks was mandated by over four-fifths of offices; moreover, nearly three-fourths of respondents provided face masks to individuals on supervision. Screening tools meant to identify officers or clients with possible exposure to COVID-19 were employed by 61 percent of respondents, while 34 percent used screening tools as a means of detecting people at higher risk of infection. Approximately half the agencies provided training that could assist officers in responding to COVID-19. In comparison, 9 percent of respondents reported that they created medical care plans for individuals on supervision.

The responses of federal probation and pretrial agencies to the pandemic from June 2020 through October 2020 and from November 2020 through January 2021 are provided in Table 2. Generally, results show that most federal probation and pretrial agencies continued using a mix of preventative, containment, and response measures. In fact, over a fifth of respondents reported employing some responses more frequently between June through October 2020, including sharing information and guidance with officers, staff, and supervisees, using screening tools to identify persons with possible exposure or higher risk of infection, and providing officer and staff training on COVID-19 disease response protocols. From November 2020 through January 2021, some measures such as sharing information, officer/staff training, and the provision of medical care plans were used less frequently; however, most of the preventative measures or the response and containment actions involving the use of screening tools or the provision of remote work witnessed minimal reductions in their use.

Application of Technologies in Response to the Pandemic

This section provides an overview of the technological applications federal probation and pretrial agencies employed in response to the pandemic. An examination of federal probation and pretrial case processing data shows that the pandemic coincided with substantial declines of in-person contacts between officers and their clients and corresponding increases in telephone and other electronic contacts during the same period; these patterns were manifested at both the post-conviction and pretrial levels and occurred irrespective of risk levels (see other articles in this issue of *Federal Probation*, including Hicks, Valdez Hoffer, & Cohen, 2021; and Hronick, Vernier-Gelven, & Starr, 2021). In this section, we explore the types of technologies used by officers to supervise clients, the novelty of these technological applications, the challenges involved in their application and deployment, and the subsequent plans for using these technologies once the pandemic has subsided.

The frequency with which various technologies are employed as a substitute to supervise clients on federal probation or pretrial supervision are provided in Table 3. The technological platforms witnessing the greatest use included telephone calls and text messaging; over 70 percent of respondents

reported using these applications a great deal. Other technological applications manifesting extensive usage included telehealth for substance use and mental health counseling and video-conferencing; over 60 percent of

respondents reported using these applications a great deal during the pandemic. About half of respondents indicated that their officers used email a great deal. The technological applications manifesting relatively little or

TABLE 1
Initial responses of federal probation or pretrial agencies to the COVID-19 pandemic

Response type	Number	Percent
Prevention		
Provided face masks to officers	107	98.2%
Required officers wear a face mask	96	88.1
Required individuals on supervision wear a face mask	90	82.6
Provided face masks for individuals on supervision	79	72.5
Containment		
Shared information and guidance with staff	105	96.3%
Shared information and guidance with supervisees	72	66.1
Used screening tool to identify possible exposure	66	60.6
Used screening tool to identify people at higher risk of infection	37	33.9
Response		
Allowed officers to work remotely (e.g., telework)	107	98.2%
Allowed for rotating work schedules/skeleton crews	98	89.9
Provided training for staff for responding to COVID-19	58	53.2
Created medical care plans for individuals on supervision	10	9.2

Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts. Measures initial responses to the pandemic from March through May 2020.

TABLE 2
Subsequent responses of federal probation or pretrial agencies to the COVID-19 pandemic for various time periods

Response type	June 2020 through October 2020			November 2020 through January 2021		
	Less frequently	No change	More frequently	Less frequently	No change	More frequently
Prevention						
Provided face masks to officers	1.9%	84.1%	14.0%	0.9%	97.2%	1.9%
Required officers wear a face mask	0.9	80.4	18.7	0.0	97.2	2.8
Required individuals on supervision wear a face mask	0.0	87.2	12.8	0.0	96.8	3.2
Provided face masks for individuals on supervision	2.4	91.5	6.1	4.8	94.0	1.2
Containment						
Shared information and guidance with staff	0.9%	72.0%	27.1%	11.3%	77.4%	11.3%
Shared information and guidance with supervisees	9.2	69.7	21.1	13.5	77.0	9.5
Used screening tool to identify possible exposure	2.7	70.7	26.7	2.6	90.9	6.5
Used screening tool to identify people at higher risk of infection	4.1	75.5	20.4	3.9	90.4	5.8
Response						
Allowed officers to work remotely (e.g., telework)	4.6%	83.3%	12.0%	3.7%	87.0%	9.3%
Allowed for rotating work schedules/skeleton crews	1.9	78.6	19.4	3.9	88.2	7.8
Provided training for staff for responding to COVID-19	10.3	66.2	23.5	27.4	64.4	8.2
Created medical care plans for individuals on supervision	5.9	82.4	11.8	21.1	63.2	15.8

Note: Measures responses to the pandemic which occurred during time frame of June 2020 through October 2020 and November 2020 through January 2021.

no use included kiosks and postcards. The newness of some of these technologies are explored in the next section.

Several technologies currently being used to supervise clients on federal probation or pretrial supervision were relatively new or were not being extensively used before the pandemic. Specifically, over 90 percent of respondents reported that the use of telehealth

for substance use or mental health counseling represented new ways of treating persons on post-conviction or pretrial supervision; furthermore, telehealth focused on criminal behavior issues constituted novel supervision techniques for 71 percent of respondents (see Figure 1). In addition, video-conferencing technologies (such as FaceTime and Zoom) saw extensive first-time use among

three-fourths of federal supervision agencies. Of the various video-conferencing technologies, Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, and Zoom were employed by over four-fifths of agencies making use of these platforms (data not shown). Other technologies, including texting, email, and telephone calls, witnessed extensive use prior to the pandemic.

While many federal districts adapted to the pandemic through the integration of new technological applications, several challenges involving their implementation should be noted. Nearly half of respondents reported that unreliable internet access was a barrier to using new technologies; about a third indicated that increased cybersecurity risks constituted a barrier to their use or to allowing officers to work remotely (see Figure 2, next page). Interestingly, 36 percent of respondents reported that they encountered no challenges in the application of new technologies or remote work. We also asked district chiefs to specify any particular challenges their officers faced in using video-conferencing technologies to supervise individuals. About half the respondents noted that many clients cannot use certain technologies; a third mentioned that internet connections are problematic, especially in rural areas; and a tenth raised the issue of supervising sex offenders as representing serious impediments to the effective use of video-conferencing technologies in supervision (data not shown).

A final aspect of video-conferencing technologies involves plans for their continued use. Most respondents (71 percent) specified that they will continue using video-conferencing technologies even after the pandemic ends (see Figure 3, next page). Another 17 percent reported that they will regularly use video-conferencing applications until either effective treatments are available, the risk to vulnerable populations has decreased, or widespread distribution of vaccines has occurred. The remaining 12 percent stated that they have either stopped using video-conferencing devices, will allow their use in only limited or special circumstances, or will cease using them once the state has fully re-opened.

Presence of COVID-19 Outbreaks Among Federal Probation and Pretrial Agencies

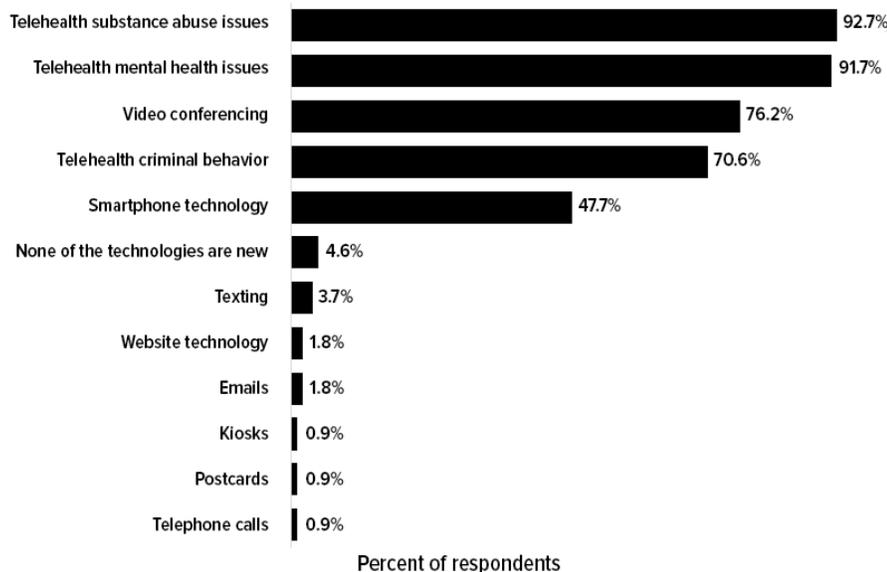
This section explores the prevalence of COVID-19 outbreaks among officers, support staff, and clients in the federal supervision system and the system’s responses to these outbreaks. Of the 109 chiefs responding to

TABLE 3
Use of technology to supervise clients on federal probation or pretrial supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic

Type of technology	Technology use frequency				
	A great deal	A moderate amount	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Telephone calls	85.3%	11.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Texting	71.6	20.2	8.3	0.0	0.0
Telehealth substance use services	68.8	21.1	7.3	2.8	0.0
Telehealth mental health services	64.2	25.7	8.3	0.9	0.9
Video conferencing	62.4	33.0	3.7	0.9	0.0
Emails	51.4	30.3	14.7	3.7	0.0
Smartphone technology	33.0	32.1	12.8	10.1	11.9
Telehealth criminal behavior	33.0	19.3	20.2	9.2	18.4
Website technology	23.9	11.0	10.1	8.3	46.8
Kiosks	1.8	2.8	0.0	11.9	83.5
Postcards	1.8	0.0	0.9	11.0	86.2

Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts.

FIGURE 1
Technologies newly used to supervise persons on federal probation or pretrial supervision that were not used prior to the COVID-19 pandemic



Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts. Percentages will not sum to 100% as districts can report multiple new technologies.

the survey, 101 (93 percent) confirmed that at least one or more of their officers or support staff had tested positive for COVID-19 (see Table 4). Moreover, 94 of 109 respondents (86 percent) observed that their officers supervised persons on post-conviction or pretrial supervision who were COVID-19 positive. District chiefs also estimated the number of their officers or support staff with COVID-19; on average, each district had seven officers and five support staff persons testing positive for the virus (data not shown). The 109 chiefs, however, reported anywhere from 1 to 40 support staff persons or officers infected by COVID-19.

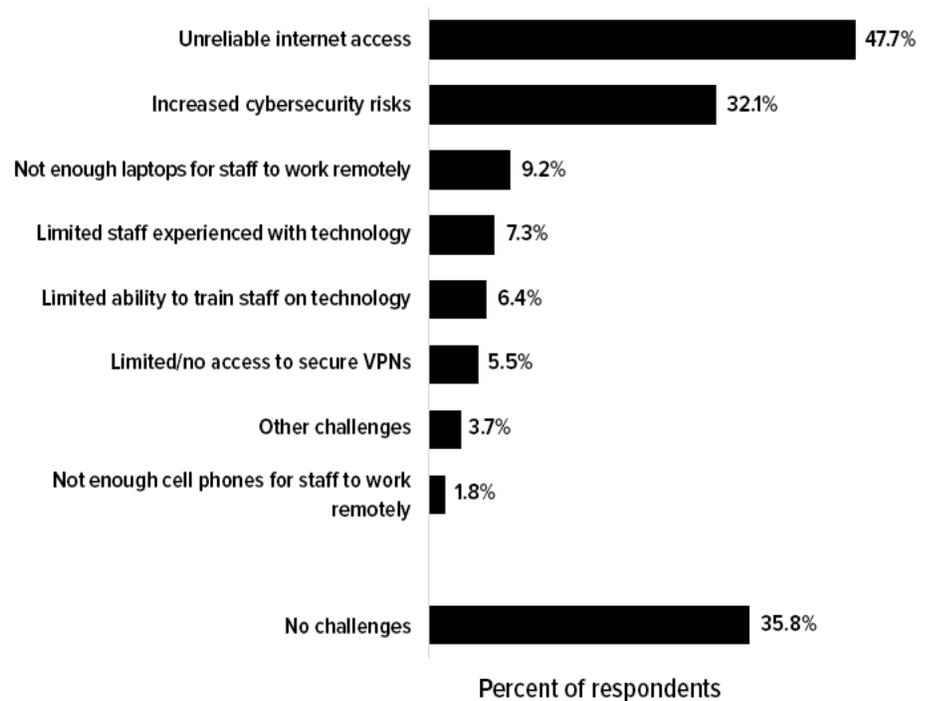
The districts used a combination of policies and measures in response to officers or support staff testing positive for COVID-19. Nearly 90 percent of respondents required officers or support staff testing positive for the virus to quarantine until negative, while over 75 percent used contact tracing, allowing officers to work remotely, employing cleaning services or increasing cleaning, and encouraging officers or support staff infected by COVID-19 to seek medical attention (see Table 5). Similar strategies were implemented when clients tested positive for the virus. Over four-fifths (83 percent) of respondents required the use of remote supervision until an individual client infected with the virus was cleared; moreover, over three-fifths responded to a positive COVID-19 test among clients by mandating remote work (63

percent) or encouraging the seeking of medical care (62 percent).

Perceptions of the Challenges Posed by the Pandemic

We now examine each district chief's perceptions of the most significant challenges posed

FIGURE 2
Challenges federal probation and pretrial agencies face in implementing new technology and remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic



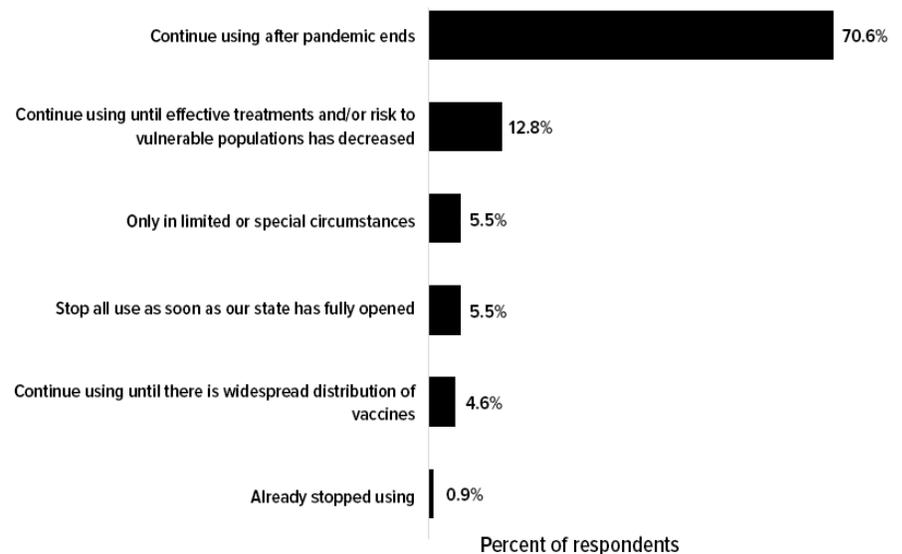
Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts. Percentages will not sum to 100% as districts can report multiple challenges.

TABLE 4
COVID-19 cases reported in federal probation or pretrial agencies among officers, support staff, and clients

Presence of Covid in office	Agencies with Covid cases	
	Number	Percent
Confirmed cases – officers or support staff		
Yes	101	92.7%
No	5	4.6
Unknown	3	2.8
Confirmed cases – clients		
Yes	94	86.2%
No	7	6.4
Unknown	8	7.3

Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts.

FIGURE 3
Plans to continue using videoconferencing technologies for persons on federal probation or pretrial supervision



Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts.

by the pandemic and the strategies employed to address these challenges. First, we asked district chiefs whether any particular issue (such as drug testing or home contacts) represented a challenge; we then inquired into the severity of these challenges. Certain issues were identified as representing challenges by over 95 percent of chiefs, including the ability to conduct in-person meetings with clients, client access to the necessary technologies, treatment providers closing or limiting admission to their facilities, supervisees unable to obtain employment, fear of contracting COVID-19 among officers or support staff, and officers unable to test for drugs or respond to client noncompliance with supervision conditions (see Table 6).

An examination of chief perceptions about the seriousness of these challenges is displayed in Figure 4 (next page). The challenges district chiefs considered most serious included the limited ability to test supervisees for drugs and to meet face-to-face with persons on pretrial or post-conviction supervision; over half the chiefs designating these issues a challenge listed them at the serious level. The fear among officers and support staff of contracting COVID-19 and the refusal of many jails to accept persons violating their supervision terms were also deemed serious challenges by 40 percent or more of chiefs who rated these issues as problematic. In addition, over half the chiefs reported that client access to technology and the difficulties involved in

holding supervisees accountable by responding to noncompliance or initiating revocation proceedings presented a moderate challenge during the pandemic.

District chiefs were also asked to provide their opinions about the most beneficial strategies used to address the pandemic. According to district chiefs, the most beneficial strategies included allowing officers to telework, mandating mask mandates for all officers/staff, providing access to PPE, and permitting officers/staff to work in rotating schedules or skeleton crews; over four-fifths of chiefs reported that these strategies were the most beneficial (see Figure 5, next page). Additionally, the availability of telehealth services and the use of video-conferencing technologies were deemed mostly beneficial strategies by over three-fourths of federal probation and pretrial chiefs.

Data Sources Used to Adapt and Respond to the Pandemic

Last, we explored the resources used to adapt and respond to the pandemic. All 109 respondents reported using guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC); 69 percent marked that they used guidelines issued by the Federal Judiciary Emergency Response Team (JERT); and 60 percent stated that guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) was used when devising policies in response to the pandemic (see Table 7). Conversely, less than 10 percent of

federal probation and pretrial chiefs reported using guidelines issued by the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), the Executives Transforming Probation and Parole (EXiT), or the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera, 2020). Regarding specific data sources used to track the prevalence of COVID-19 in local communities, 88 percent of district chiefs indicated that they turned to COVID-19 trackers maintained by state systems and 41 percent relied upon the John Hopkins University's COVID-19 tracker. Finally, 17 of the 109 district chiefs hired consultants to provide them with advice on how to best protect their officers, support staff, and clients during the pandemic.

TABLE 5
Policies implemented in response to identification of positive COVID-19 cases in federal probation and pretrial agencies

Responses to Covid	Officers or support staff		Clients	
	Number of agencies	Percent	Number of agencies	Percent
Required officers or support staff to quarantine until negative	97	88.9%	--	--
Contact tracing	87	79.8	60	55.1%
Remote work for officers or support staff	86	78.9	69	63.3
Cleaning services/increased cleaning	83	76.2	49	45.0
Encouraged medical attention	83	76.2	68	62.4
Skeleton crew in office	67	61.5	60	55.1
Test officers or support staff	56	51.4	45	41.3
Closed office temporarily	42	38.5	32	29.4
Remote supervision for individual until cleared	--	--	90	82.6

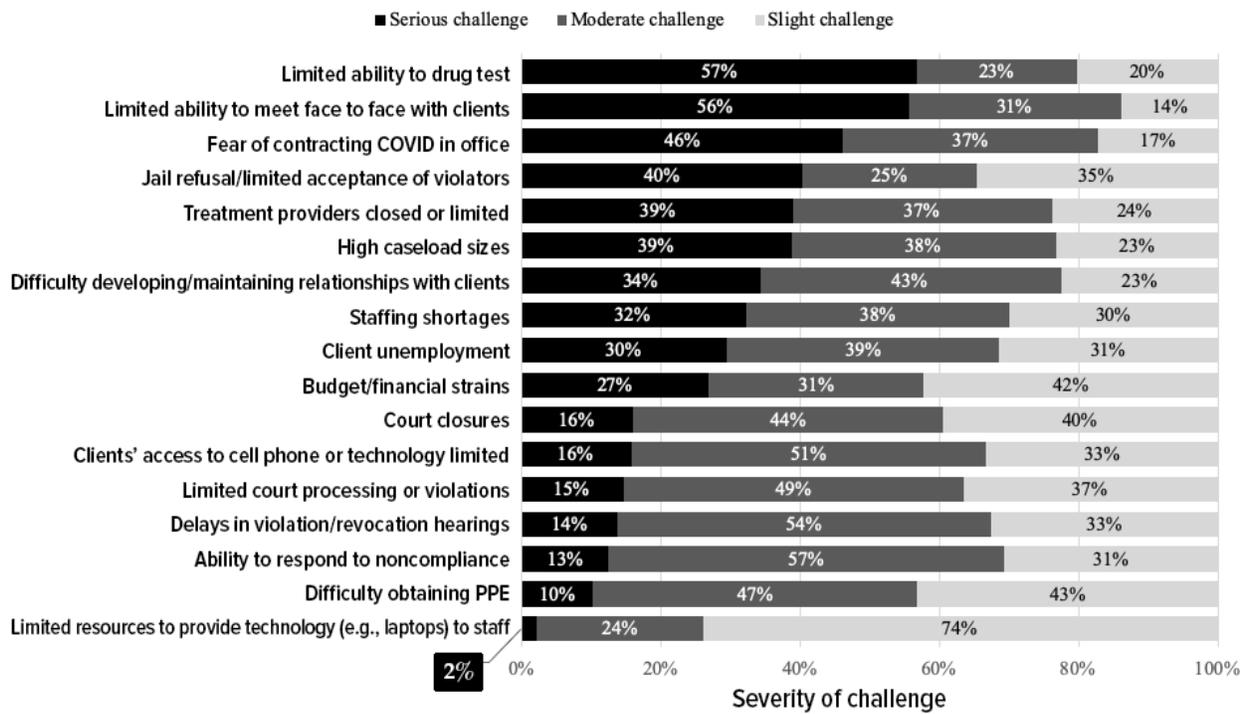
TABLE 6
Challenges federal probation and pretrial agencies faced in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

Types of challenges	Agencies identifying challenge	
	Number	Percent
Limited ability to meet face-to-face with clients	108	99.1%
Clients' access to cell phone or technology limited	108	99.1
Treatment providers closed or limited	105	96.3
Client unemployment	105	96.3
Limited ability to drug test	104	95.4
Fear of contracting COVID in office	104	95.4
Ability to respond to noncompliance	104	95.4
Difficulty developing/maintaining relationships with clients	102	93.6
Delays in violation/revocation hearings	95	87.2
High caseload sizes	90	82.6
Difficulty obtaining PPE	88	80.7
Staffing shortages	87	79.8
Limited court processing or violations	82	75.2
Court closures	81	74.3
Budget/financial strains	78	71.6
Jail refusal/limited acceptance of violators	72	66.1
Limited resources to provide technology (e.g., laptops) to staff	46	42.2

Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts.

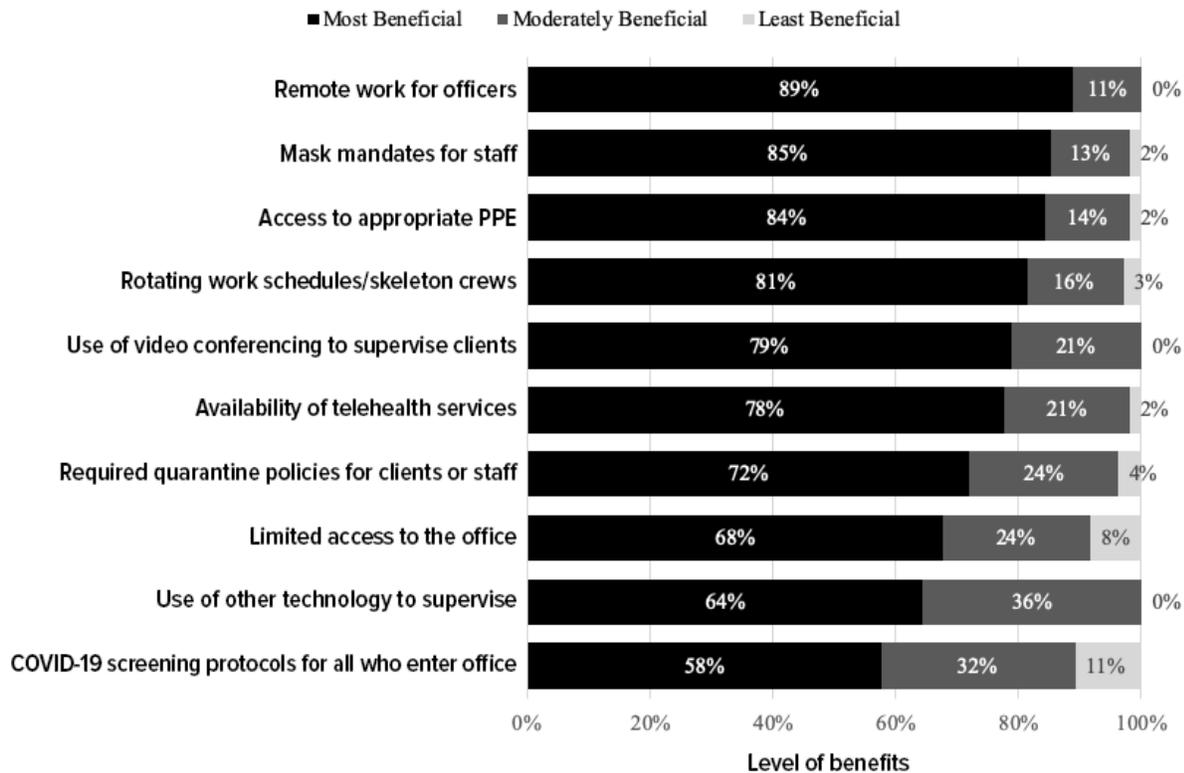
Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts.
-- Not applicable

FIGURE 4
Severity of challenges federal probation and pretrial agencies faced in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic



Note: For each response type, the number of respondents excludes those who marked not applicable. See preceding table for the number of respondents who identified a challenge for each response type.

FIGURE 5
Strategies federal probation and pretrial agencies use that have been beneficial in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic



Note: For each response type, the number of respondents excludes those who marked not applicable. Over 95% of the 109 respondents indicate that the above detailed strategies were beneficial with the exception of rotating work schedules (6% not applicable), limiting office access (12% not applicable), and COVID-screening protocols (22% not applicable).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study's main purpose was to examine the federal supervision system's responses and adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic presented unparalleled challenges to the federal probation and pretrial system. Specifically, many daily activities conducted prior to the pandemic, including the interaction among officers and court personnel; the contacts between officers and their pre-trial or post-conviction clients at the office, home, workplace, or community; the opportunities for officers to build rapport with their clients; the application of drug testing and location monitoring; and the capacity of officers to track and respond to noncompliance, underwent substantial changes during the pandemic. The current study attempted to measure how these changes manifested themselves in the federal supervision system by assessing district responses to the pandemic, examining technological alternatives to in-person supervision, exploring the frequency of COVID-19 outbreaks among district offices, gauging district chiefs' perceptions of the major challenges experienced

during the pandemic and the most beneficial responses to those challenges, and analyzing the main resources district chiefs used when developing responses to the pandemic.

In general, results show that nearly all districts instituted some combination of preventative, containment, and response measures aimed at protecting their officers, support staff, and clients from the virus. Many of these actions centered on providing face masks and requiring their use, sharing information across districts, employing screening tools, and authorizing the extensive use of telework or rotating work schedules. These measures were instituted at the start of the pandemic, and most districts have continued using them.

The survey also highlighted that districts, and their treatment providers, adapted various technological platforms to supervise persons in lieu of in-person contacts. Districts reported the widespread use of several technologies, including telephone calls, texting, telehealth, and video-conferencing (such as FaceTime and Zoom) as a mechanism for administering supervision or treatment. Several of these

technologies, particularly telehealth or video-conferencing, were relatively new, and many districts reported that they plan to continue using them after the pandemic subsides. The major impediments to implementing these technologies were unreliable internet access, especially in rural areas; increased cybersecurity risks; and the inability of supervisees to adapt to the necessary technologies.

Despite the system's attempts to limit exposure to COVID-19, nearly all the chiefs reported that at least one of their support staff, officers, or clients tested positive for the virus, with several districts manifesting multiple outbreaks. Districts reacted to the presence of COVID-19 among their officers and support staff by engaging in a variety of responses ranging from requiring the use of quarantines to contact tracing to cleaning offices and to encouraging all affected personnel to seek medical attention.

The survey also revealed insightful information about the chief's perceptions of the key challenges districts faced in response to the pandemic and the most beneficial strategies for addressing these challenges. According to the chiefs, the pandemic generated several serious challenges to effective supervision, including the limited ability to drug test, meet face-to-face with clients, and use jails as a means of holding violators accountable. Many chiefs also stated that officer/staff fear of contracting COVID-19 represented a serious concern. In addition, they reported that issues involving officer capacity to actively respond to noncompliance and initiate revocation hearings in response to noncompliance were of moderate concern. The most beneficial strategies addressing these and other challenges that arose during the pandemic were the use of remote work/rotating work schedules, staff mask mandates, access to PPE, the use of video-conferencing technologies, and the application of telehealth by treatment providers. Finally, most of the respondent chiefs reported using resources and guidelines issued by the CDC, JERT, and DHS when developing responses to the pandemic.

Many of the findings reported above align with research currently being conducted on state and local probation and parole agencies. Specifically, the UCF survey of the nation's probation and parole agencies found that the largest changes reported by these entities were the decrease of in-person contacts and the corresponding move to various technologies (such as telephone calls, video-conferencing, email, and texting) as a mechanism for supervising

TABLE 7
Resources and data sources used by federal probation and pretrial agencies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Resources and data sources used	Number	Percent
Resources used to adapt and respond to pandemic		
Center for Disease Control Guidelines	109	100.0%
Judiciary Emergency Response Team's Guidelines	75	68.8
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Guidance	65	59.6
World Health Organization Guidance	30	27.5
State and Local Departments of Public Health	13	11.9
APPA's Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Planning Guidelines	6	5.5
Other Resources	5	4.6
EXiT: Executives Transforming Probation & Parole COVID-19 Response Statement	4	3.7
Vera Institute of Justice's Guidelines for Preventative and Responsive Measures	1	0.9
Data sources about prevalence of COVID-19 to assist in decision-making		
COVID-19 trackers maintained by state systems	96	88.1%
COVID-19 tracker maintained by John Hopkins Website	45	41.3
COVID-19 trackers maintained by major news organizations	40	36.7
Other data sources	10	9.2
Hired a consultant to address COVID-19-related concerns		
Yes, consultant hired	17	15.6%
No, but did seek professional advice	6	5.5
No consultation services sought	86	78.9

Note: Includes 109 respondents located in 94 federal judicial districts.
APPA = American Probation and Parole Association.

individuals (Viglione et al., 2020b). Similar to the federal system, many state community correction agencies noted that the use of video-conferencing technologies represented a novel method of supervision (Viglione et al., 2020b). Another major resemblance between the federal supervision system and state and local systems involved the challenges of holding people accountable for violations. Many state agency directors expressed concerns that courthouse closures or delays in case processing, the unwillingness of many courts to execute arrest warrants or hear violation cases, and the limited capacity of jails to accept probation/parole violators severely restricted their capacity to revoke persons in violation of their supervision conditions (Viglione et al., 2020b). Federal probation and pretrial chiefs expressed similar concerns in the current survey. Last, as in the federal system, many state probation and parole directors asserted that the restrained capacity to test persons on supervision for drugs and hence monitor the extent to which persons might be relapsing into drug addiction was a major concern (Viglione et al., 2020b).

Findings from the current survey have several major implications for the federal supervision field. First, it is important to acknowledge that the federal system, without any major roadmap or prior planning mechanisms, was able to develop and then quickly implement a series of preventative, containment, and response measures that allowed officers to continue conducting the business of supervision during this challenging time. While the federal system should take solace in its ability to quickly adapt to challenging circumstances, federal supervision agencies should further strengthen and prioritize disaster preparedness so that business operations can continue without major interruptions in response to any future crises.

Of all the adaptations in federal supervision that occurred in response to the pandemic, perhaps the most significant entailed the move from face-to-face to various electronic forms of supervision and treatment. As demonstrated in the current research and in other articles published in this issue of *Federal Probation*, the pandemic has forced the federal probation and pretrial system to substitute in-person for electronic supervision irrespective of a client's risk level or supervision status. While the implications of replacing in-person for electronic supervision and telehealth could be potentially profound, little research exists on the efficacy

of virtual supervision and telehealth treatment modalities that could provide guidance for the federal system (Viglione et al., 2020b). The few research studies conducted were at the state or local level, centered on the application of kiosks or telephone systems of supervision, and examined the applications of these electronic supervision mechanisms on a subset of low-risk supervisees (Barnes et al., 2010, 2012; Belshaw, 2011; Ogden & Horrocks, 2000; Viglione & Taxman, 2018; Viglione et al., 2020b; Wilson et al., 2007).

The dearth of existing research, combined with the massive implementation of virtual supervision, means that little is known about how the contours of federal pretrial and post-conviction supervision changed during the pandemic. Key issues, including the extent to which the content and patterns of virtual interactions differ from in-person communications, the topics discussed by officers and their clients in a virtual environment, and officers' attitudes about employing virtual supervision techniques, are unknown. Another area of concern entails what happens to the modes of supervision when officers are restricted from conducting home visits and observing the client's family and other intimate partners. Although some researchers have begun exploring differences in the communication patterns between in-person and virtual contacts (see Koetzle & Schwalbe, 2020), much additional work, particularly in the federal area, is needed. Moreover, almost nothing is understood about the changes that occurred in substance use, mental health, and sex offender treatment through the extensive use of telehealth practices. Finally, and perhaps most important, little is understood about whether community safety was endangered, or whether perhaps it was not impacted at all, by the replacement of face-to-face with virtual supervision. The federal supervision system should seek to fill these informational gaps by examining these issues with the goal of better understanding how virtual supervision can continue to be integrated into daily practices. Perhaps a greater subset of persons on pretrial or post-conviction supervision could be supervised through remote methods than originally envisioned prior to the pandemic.

The federal system's ability to respond to violations and hold violators accountable constituted another major change to the traditional modes of supervision. In fact, the continued presence of COVID-19 might place long-term limits on the capacity of federal

officers to apply revocations as a method of ensuring compliance with supervision conditions. If federal officers are precluded from using revocations at pre-pandemic levels, other non-incarceration methods of responding to noncompliance will have to be explored. Probation and pretrial chiefs should investigate the feasibility of applying a system of community or graduated sanctions rather than use revocations to respond to noncompliance both during and perhaps after the pandemic subsides (Viglione et al., 2020b). Future research should consider exploring whether community-based non-incarceration approaches for dealing with noncompliance can be used in place of revoking someone from pretrial or post-conviction supervision. A related issue involves the ability to drug test and hence monitor individual relapses into drug addiction. Federal agencies will have to rely on expert advice on conducting drug testing safely while COVID-19 remains an issue.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had enormous impacts on community supervision at the local, state, and federal levels. While some research has focused on the pandemic's effects among state probation and parole agencies, the current research provides a first-time examination into the pandemic's impact on the federal supervision system. A survey of 109 federal probation and pretrial chiefs revealed that the system responded rapidly to the pandemic's onset by implementing a series of preventative, containment, and response measures and continued to use those measures into 2021. The survey also showed that most federal supervision agencies substituted various technological platforms for in-person supervision and treatment and that most respondents indicated they plan to continue using these technologies even after the pandemic ends. Moreover, the pandemic's direct impact on federal pretrial and post-conviction agencies was explored with results showing that most federal districts had at least one, if not several, officers or support staff persons testing positive for the virus. Last, the survey revealed that many chiefs were concerned about the pandemic's effect on officers' capacity to meet in person and build rapport with their clients, monitor their clients for potential relapse into drug use, and hold persons accountable for violating their supervision terms. Future research will need to explore whether the move away from in-person to electronic supervision affected the patterns of communication between officers and clients and whether community safety was impacted by the drastic changes in supervision

occurring during this time. Ultimately, the federal supervision system will need to ascertain at a district and national level what aspects of pandemic supervision should be maintained or discarded after the pandemic ends.

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