



South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services' Absconded Offenders

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The South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services (SCDPPPS) supervises offenders ordered to probation by the court and/or paroled by the State Board of Pardons and Paroles. SCDPPPS oversees offenders through community sanctions and ensures that offenders meet their conditions of supervision (SCDPPPS, 2015a). For every 100,000 adult residents in South Carolina, 916 are under SCDPPPS' supervision (Kaeble & Alper, 2020). As of September 30, 2020, SCDPPPS had 62,334 individuals under its supervision. Approximately 39% (N= 24,571) of these individuals were on active supervision, meaning they have required contact with their agents and their compliance with supervision conditions is being monitored. The remaining 61% (N= 37,763) of the individuals were under SCDPPPS' jurisdiction but not in an active supervision level. These individuals included those who have completed their sentence but still owe fines and fees (i.e., administrative monitoring), individuals awaiting release from incarceration in order to begin the portion of their sentence that will be served in the community, individuals serving their sentence in another state, and absconders.

Absconders are individuals under court or board ordered supervision with whom the probation and parole agent has lost contact with and/or individuals who repeatedly failed to attend required contacts with their agent. The offender may either have left the jurisdiction without approval or may still be in the jurisdiction but is effectively avoiding his or her agent. High numbers of absconders threaten community supervision's credibility and effectiveness (Parent, Wentworth, Burke, & Ney, 1994). This is in part because none of the goals of community supervision are met when an offender absconds. The crime control goal of community supervision is nullified since the offender is not being monitored. He or she is not complying with conditions of supervision, which often entails rehabilitative efforts, so the goal of rehabilitation is not being met. The goal of punishment is not met since the offender is not

complying with restrictions. Additionally, absconders typically receive little attention from community supervision agencies so the threat of punishments for absconding has little deterrent effect (Mayer, Gray, & Maxwell, 2004). While there is some increased risk to public safety, the majority of absconders are not re-arrested for new charges, making it unlikely that most offenders are engaging in serious and/or violent criminal acts while absconded (Mayer et al., 2004; Parent et al., 1994). That being said, absconding still allows the offender to negate his or her sentence, avoid punishment, and deny any sense of justice (Mayer et al., 2004).

Due to the limited research on the characteristics and behaviors of absconders, there is a need to more thoroughly examine this population (Belshaw, 2011; Farrall, 2002; Mayer et al., 2004; Parent et al., 1994). From the sparse research available, the commonly identified predictors of absconding are unstable living arrangements, unemployment, substance use problems, more extensive criminal histories and community violation records, and age, with younger offenders being more likely to abscond (Mayer et al., 2004; McReynolds, 1987, as cited in Mayer et al., 2004; Williams, McShane, & Dolny, 2000). Factors that do not appear to be associated with absconding are marital status and gender (Mayer et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2000). Race and absconding had mixed results with some finding minorities are more likely to abscond while other research found whites were more likely to abscond (McReynolds, 1987, as cited in Mayer et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2000).

Of the 62,334 individuals under SCDPPPS' supervision on September 30, 2020, 5,599 offenders were in absconded status. This equates to 9% of SCDPPPS' population. In order to be equivalent to national figures, SCDPPPS needs to reduce its absconder average to 7%. The goal of this paper is to expand SCDPPPS' knowledge of absconders and to make recommendations

that would assist in preventing current offenders under supervision from absconding and decrease the number of current absconders.

Defining Absconders

On SCDPPPS’ website, an absconder is defined as, “an offender under the Department’s supervision who has fled from supervision, or who is otherwise absent without proper permission” (SCDPPPS, 2015b). Abscond is defined in policy as, “absent from the offender’s approved place of residence or employment and avoiding supervision” (SCDPPPS, 2017:2). Absconder, abscond, or absconding appears in eight of SCDPPPS policies:

Policy	How Does The Policy Relate To Absconding?	Is Absconding Defined Or The Process For Identification Described?
106- Supervision Contacts and Codes	Describes when the absconded investigation event code should be used in SCDPPPS’ Offender Management System (OMS)	No
114- In-State Transfers	Describes process if an offender fails to report on the expected date of arrival	Yes- States check residence and employment; if it appears that the offender has absconded, conduct an investigation
115- Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision	Describes an absconding violation and mandatory retaking for offenders who absconded	Yes- Lists three specific activities and what report needs to be submitted to the sending state
702- Responding to a Violation	Lists absconding as a high severity violation	No
703- Citations and Warrants	States a warrant must be entered into National Crime Information Center (NCIC) prior to the offender’s supervision level being changed in OMS as absconded	No- However, says see Policy 704 for the procedure for determining absconded status
704-National Crime Information Center (NCIC)	Describes when warrants for absconding should be entered or removed from NCIC	No
707- Administrative Hearings	Describes when a located and arrested absconded offender is required to have an administrative hearing	No

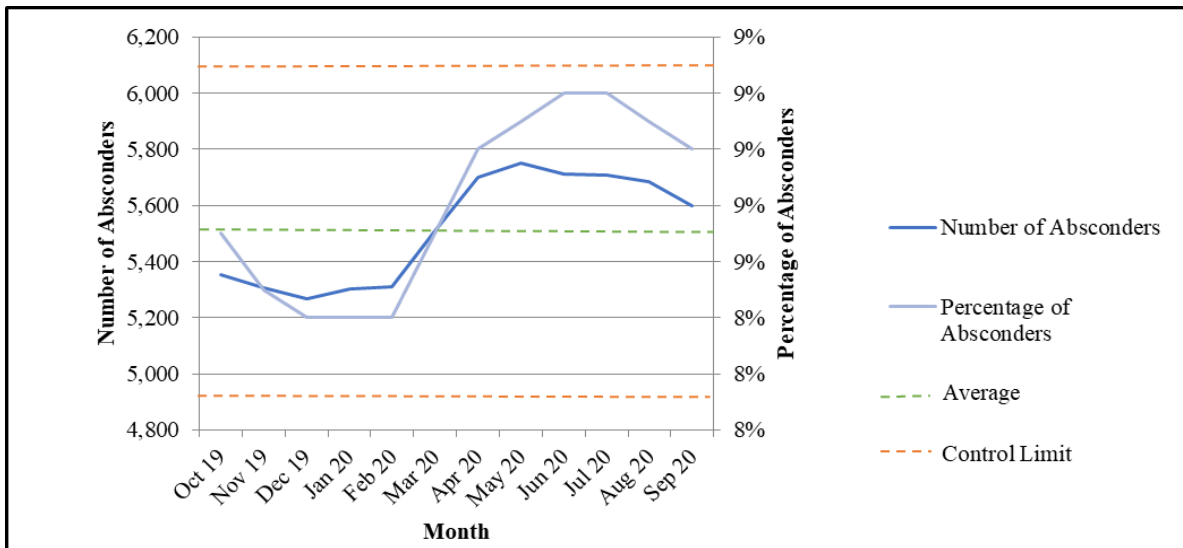
Policy	How Does The Policy Relate To Absconding?	Is Absconding Defined Or The Process For Identification Described?
903- Violation Hearings, Early Term & Successful Case Closures	Describes process for notifying victims and/or witnesses when an offender absconds	No

Policy 114 states that after 48 hours of an in-state transferring offender not reporting to the county office, an agent is to check the residence and employment site. “If it appears that the offender has absconded, an investigation should be conducted within seven days” (SCDPPPS, 2019:3). However, there is no reference to what an investigation would entail. Policy 115 lists three activities that should be done prior to classifying an offender as an absconder. Those activities are conducting a field contact at the last known place of residence, contacting the last known place of employment, and contacting known family members and collateral contacts (SCDPPPS, 2017). Based on a review of SCDPPPS’ policies, the definition is assumed and not defined in policy and the investigations steps are not clearly stated. However, an examination of archived policies found that in the past, Policy 704 had a definition and listed steps to confirm absconded status. It appears that the definition and absconder investigation steps were accidentally removed from policy.

SCDPPPS Absconders

On average, 9% of SCDPPPS total jurisdictional population is absconded (*see Appendix A for fiscal year estimates*). Based on the examination of a 12-month period, it appears that absconding is a common cause variation. Common cause variation is “created by many factors that are commonly part of the process” and will never be fully removed (Thompson, 2020, slide 76). The goal is to reduce the standard deviation (Thompson, 2020). In order to assist with

making recommendations to reduce the standard deviation, a more extensive examination of the population occurred.

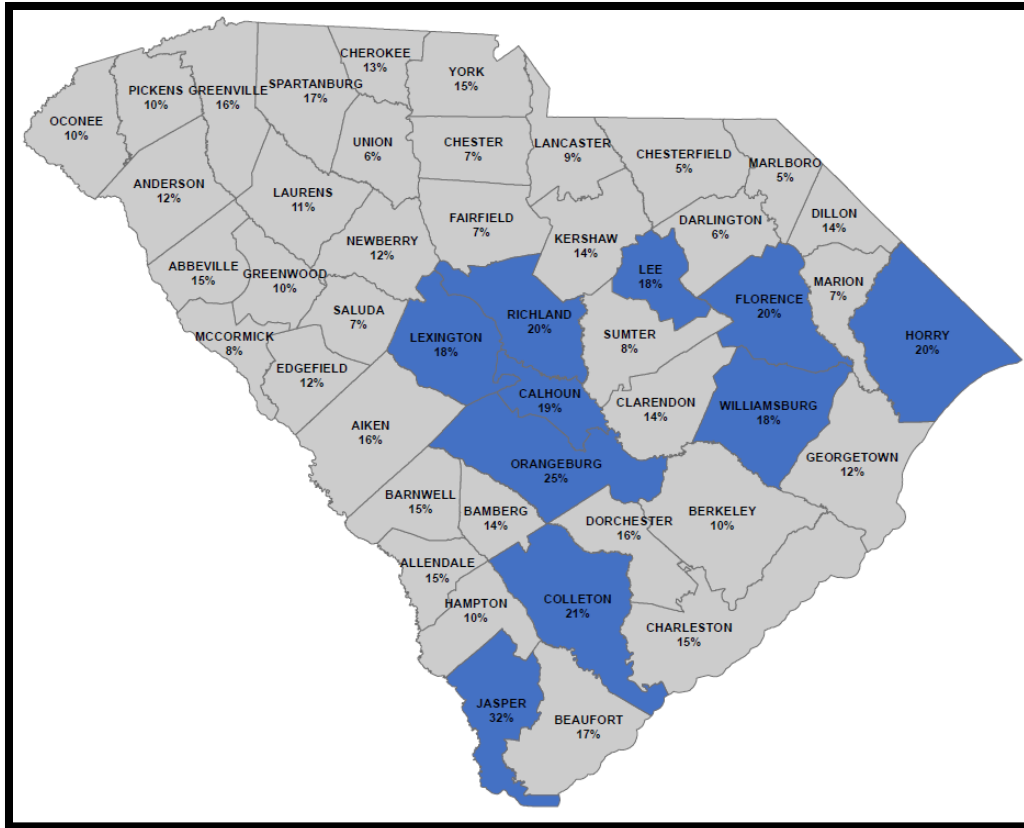


Data from September 30, 2020, showed that SCDPPPS’ absconders are slightly more likely to be white, male, not young, and non-gang affiliated. Slightly less than half of the offenders in absconded status were listed as employed when they absconded. The overwhelming majority did not have to register as a sex offender and were serving a sentence for a felony. The majority had an offense categorized as non-violent. Offenders had served an average of 23 months on supervision prior to absconding and were typically serving a probation sentence. The absconders’ offenses fell into 83 keyword offense categories (*see Appendix B for the most common key word categories*). Offenders in absconded status had 373 different main offenses; main offense is coded as the offense with the longest sentence (*see Appendix C for the most common main offenses*).

Demographic		Number	Percentage
Race	Asian	16	<1%
	Black	2,448	44%
	Hispanic	139	3%
	White	2,971	53%
	Other	25	<1%

Demographic		Number	Percentage
Sex	Female	1,277	23%
	Male	4,322	77%
Age (in years)	Mean	40.9	
	Median	40	
	Mode	42	
	Minimum	18	
	Maximum	82	
Gang Membership	Yes	165	3%
	No	4,464	80%
	Suspicion	131	15%
	Missing	839	2%
Employment Status	Disabled/Retired	220	4%
	Employed	2,524	45%
	Unemployed	2,074	37%
	Missing	781	14%
Sex Offender Registry	Yes	26	<1%
	No	5,557	100%
	Unsure	16	<1%
Type of Offense	Felony	3792	68%
	Misdemeanor	1,781	32%
	Other	26	<1%
Violent	Yes	324	6%
	No	5,275	94%
Months on Supervision (in days)	Mean	695.1	
	Median	469	
	Mode	189	
	Minimum	0	
	Maximum	9,432	
Order Type	Parole	212	4%
	Probation	5,215	93%
	Other Release Programs	172	3%

Roughly, 40% of offenders in absconded status were from four counties (Greenville, Spartanburg, Richland, and Charleston, respectively) (*see Appendix D for map*). However, these are also some of the counties with the greatest offender population. When controlling for population by comparing a county's absconder average to the statewide average of 9%, 35 counties are above the statewide average. Ten counties have more than double the statewide average.



Unfortunately, other possible demographics (e.g., military affiliation, educational level, living arrangements) are either not required fields in OMS and/or in text fields making it difficult to analyze that data. SCDPPPS absconding population appears to align with literature regarding absconder demographics.

SCDPPPS’ Fugitive Investigation Unit

In accordance with Strategic Plan Objective 1.3.2 (i.e., form a fugitive investigation unit (FIU) to address the absconded offender population by January 2017), SCDPPPS established a FIU on June 1, 2019. It houses two fugitive investigators, who are Class 1 Law Enforcement certificated agents, and one criminal analyst. The GPS¹ Operations Center (GOC) Agent in Charge oversees the FIU. The goals of the FIU are to:

¹ GPS stands for global position system.

- conduct investigations leading to the withdrawal of the warrant and/or the arrest of any wanted person,
- provide concentrated emphasis to absconded cases with determinations of high-risk levels, violence, weapons, victims, and/or community safety concerns,
- provide SCDPPPS staff with all available investigative and resource-tools, and
- enhance law-enforcement relationships across South Carolina, highlighting its networking efforts with similar divisions also participating in offender investigations and apprehensions (SCDPPPS, 2020a).

On December 1, 2020, a focus group was held with the two fugitive investigators, the criminal analyst, and the GOC Agent in Charge and three main topics were discussed:

1. Roles within the FIU

The fugitive investigators stated they typically focus on five cases at a time. The priority cases are those identified as violent, a gang member, and/or are under supervision for a sex offense or domestic violence offense. The fugitive investigators receive investigation requests from the county offices and external entities, as well as receive a quarterly list of absconders from the Office of Research and Evaluation. The criminal analyst assists with searching offenders' social media accounts, reviewing incident reports, pulling credit reports, and searching utilities and the Department of Motor Vehicles' records. Once a possible location for the offenders has been identified, the fugitive investigators conduct surveillance and/or organize a team to serve the warrant.

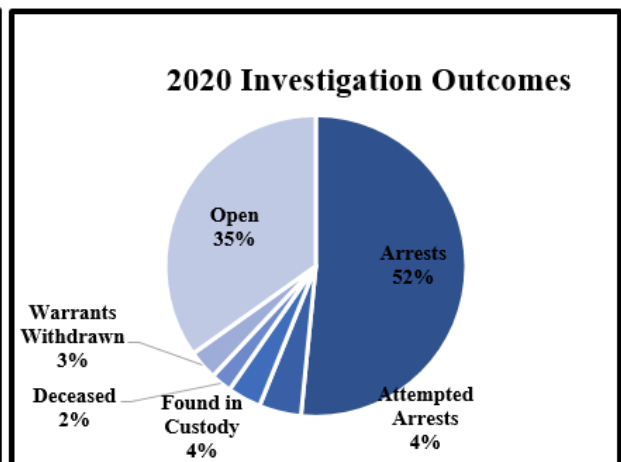
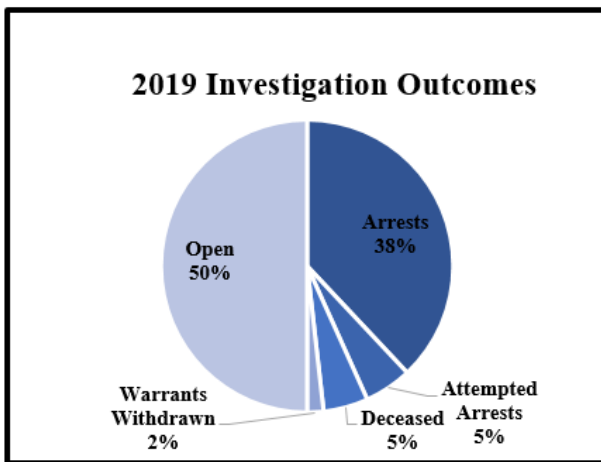
2. Positive aspects of the FIU

The FIU stated being located in the South Carolina Information and Intelligence Center, also known as the Fusion Center, has been an asset. Being housed in the Fusion Center

grants the FIU access to additional resources as well as access to the other agencies and fugitive teams. The location has allowed strong partnerships to develop. Additionally, the FIU felt beginning as a small unit has been positive since it has allowed the unit to focus on developing and perfecting processes. The FIU also appears to work well together. The FIU has identified goals for the unit as well as maintains monthly outcome reports.

3. Areas of needs and/or improvement

The FIU expressed a need for more staff, both in terms of number of fugitive investigators and criminal analysts. They felt an expansion would increase the number of apprehended absconders. They also identified the need for additional software that would assist in locating absconders. In order to assist with surveillance, the FIU stated surveillance vehicles and additional equipment are needed. The FIU also shared that internally within SCDPPPS little is known about the unit. Due to the lack of awareness of the FIU and their purpose, county offices sometimes view the FIU presence with suspicion versus as an asset. Despite having detailed documents describing the FIU's goals and purpose and multiple standard operating procedures, none of the documents can be accessed by SCDPPPS staff without requesting rights to the FIU's shared drive.



In 2019, the criminal analyst assisted in 150 absconded investigations and responded to 13 requests for information, with two (15%) being requests from outside the FIU. In 2020, the criminal analyst assisted in 505 absconded investigations and responded to 85 requests for information, with two (2%) begin requests from outside the unit. The fugitive investigators investigated 502 offenders in 2019 and 221 absconders in 2020².

State Comparison

An examination of other southeastern states' website found that some states utilize their websites more than SCDPPPS to facilitate the capture of absconders while other states do less. Currently, SCDPPPS defines absconder on the agency's website and highlights four "most wanted offenders," all of which are absconders with the most recent person having absconded September 7, 2018. One individual is listed as "Captured", while the remaining three are listed as "At Large". There is a request for information with a phone number. The information provided includes name, race, sex, age, height, weight, hair color, eye color, scars/tattoos, original offense, last known address, and notes that might be relevant, such as the person is a registered sex offender or gang member (SCDPPPS, 2015b). A review of the "At Large" individuals found that one person has subsequently been captured and is in jail, meaning only two of the four individuals are currently absconded.

Under the Georgia Department of Community Supervision's (GADCS) standard conditions of supervision website, it states that offender will not abscond but does not define absconding or have any additional information regarding absconding or current absconders (GADCS, n.d.). The North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) defines absconding. However, absconding is defined on the Victim Services for Prisons, Probation, and Parole page

² Due to COVID-19, the warrant serve process had to be curtailed, possibly leading to less warrants being served.

versus the Community Corrections' page (NCDPS, n.d.). Though not defined, under Community Corrections there is an absconded probation search. The search results includes the absconder's name, gender, race, ethnic group, birth date, age, probation/parole office, name(s) of record (i.e., aliases), incarceration summary, and sentence history. Additionally, a picture is provided and there is a phone number to contact with information about the person's whereabouts (NCDPS, 2012). The Florida Department of Corrections' (FDOC) website does have an absconder/fugitive search. The search results includes the absconder's name, race, sex, birthdate, supervision begin date, supervision type, aliases, and current community supervision history. A photo is provided as well as a request for information with a phone number and email address (FDOC, n.d.). Absconder is also defined on the bottom of each search result. Based on a review of southeastern states' websites, it appears that SCDPPPS' website could be modified to assist with locating absconded individuals.

Summary

Absconding is a threat to the credibility of community supervision and it denies victims and the public a sense of justice (Mayer et al., 2004; Parent et al., 1994). Currently, SCDPPPS' percentage of absconders is slightly above the national average. In order to be equivalent to or less than the national average of 7%, it is recommended that SCDPPPS adopt the following nine recommendations. The recommendations are based on a review of the literature, an examination of SCDPPPS' absconder data, a focus group with the FIU, and a comparison to other states.

Recommendations

SCDPPPS has to take a two-pronged approach to reduce its absconded population. SCDPPPS has to (1) prevent current offenders under supervision from absconding and (2) adopt

more aggressive efforts to locate and apprehend absconders (Parent et al., 1994). In attempt to prevent offenders from absconding, it is recommended SCDPPPS:

1. Add the definition and required investigation steps back into policy

Since the definition and listed steps to confirm absconded status appeared to have been removed from Policy 704, it is recommended they be added back and that the policy states that at least five of the contacts be performed prior to an offender being classified as an absconder (*see Appendix E for possible policy language*). This will expand the agent's responsibility in determining if the offender has truly absconded (Parent et al., 1994). The addition back into the policy and the required number of contacts will increase the consistency among the county offices in classifying offenders as absconders.

2. Conduct a predicative analysis

Though age, race, and sex cannot ethically be used in predictive models, an examination of other possible predictors (e.g., employment status, order type, length on supervision) should be examined to determine who is at greater risk for absconding (Mayer et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) that SCDPPPS has does not include binary logistic regression. It is recommended that SCDPPPS either obtain a SPSS packet that includes binary logistic regression or explore collaborating with a university or research organization to conduct the analysis. If predictor factors are identified, the intake process and supervision level allocation should be examined and possibly restructured in attempt to negate the predictors.

3. Pilot an Absconder Risk Assessment

Due to traditional risk assessments not being designed to predict absconding, they have only had modest success in predicting absconding. (Pyrooz, 2012). The Abscond Risk

Instrument (ARI) has “demonstrated sufficient predictive and discriminant validity in the identification and classification of absconding juvenile parolees” (Pyrooz, 2012: 933). It remains unclear whether the ARI would be effective in predicting absconding in adult offenders. It is recommended that SCDPPPS test the ARI’s predictive ability with its population or procure a different instrument designed to assess risk for absconding.

In attempt to address current absconders, it is recommended SCDPPPS:

4. Evaluate SCDPPPS’ FIU

Having a fugitive unit is considered an aggressive strategy to locate and apprehend absconders (Parent et al., 1994). SCDPPPS has a fugitive unit comprised of three full-time staff. However, prior to expanding the FIU it is recommended that the FIU be evaluated. Contingent on the results of the evaluation, a workload model should be developed to assist with identifying position need and allocation.

5. Increase the FIU’s exposure

It appears there is limited knowledge about the FIU’s existence, purpose, and processes among SCDPPPS’ staff. It is recommended that the FIU attend and discuss the FIU at all Field Operations’ regional meetings and staff meeting in counties where the FIU might frequent. The goal being for field staff to have exposure to the FIU staff and for the FIU’s role to be understood so the FIU’s presence will be viewed with less suspicion. The FIU should also meet with sections where the section could benefit from the FIU (e.g., Domestic Violence Unit, Office of Administrative Hearings, Office of Victim Services). Additionally, it is recommended that the feasibility of adding FIU statistics to the published reports and adding a FIU objective to the Strategic Plan be explored.

6. Expand the usage of searching non-criminal justice record systems

Potentially, the majority of absconders could be located by searching public utilities or state/local government agencies' records (Parent et al., 1994). Since it is not feasible for the criminal analyst to conduct all searches, it is recommended that several SCDPPPS staff members obtain the ability to search non-criminal justice record systems. They would be assigned with the additional duty of conducting searches upon request and possibly receive a special assignment pay for the additional duty. The goal for having additional individuals conducting searches is to increase the number of absconders located and provide agents with more options for record search assistance.

7. Expand the usage of the amnesty initiative

Research suggests that most individuals who abscond remain in the community where they lived while under active supervision. They may be reluctant to contact their agent and/or resume reporting because they fear sanctions and possible imprisonment. Amnesty initiatives allow absconded offenders to turn themselves in with little or no sanctions (Parent et al., 1994). Similar to other community corrections entities, SCDPPPS has utilized a form of an amnesty strategy. Some examples include the Richland County office's participation in the United States Marshals Service's 2009 Fugitive Safe Surrender Program when twenty-eight of SCDPPPS' absconders were located. In 2017, during the Greenville County office's amnesty project, 19 offenders surrendered themselves; in 2019, 31 offenders took advantage of the office's initiative. It is recommended that SCDPPPS expand the use of such strategies throughout the state.

8. Increase the usage of absconder warrant sweeps

Since even with an amnesty option some absconders will not surrender, it is recommended that SCDPPPS increase their usage of warrant sweeps. During SCDPPPS'

most recent absconder warrant sweep, Palmetto Clean Up, 177 absconders were located and arrested (Greene, 2019). Additionally, the media coverage of SCDPPPS actively investigating and apprehending absconders could serve as a deterrent for absconding among current active offenders (Mayer et al., 2004).

9. Update SCDPPPS' webpage

It is recommended that SCDPPPS' website be updated to include the definition of absconding and an Absconder@ppp.sc.gov email be created and posted on the website. Additionally, it is recommended that there be a search option that would allow for a search of all absconded offenders. The information on the webpage would need to be current and accurate. The FIU recommends expanding the "most wanted" to ten individuals. The ten individuals would be screened and approved by the FIU, with priority being given to high-risk offenders (SCDPPPS, 2020b). It is recommended that the FIU has a more active role with the SCDPPPS' webpage in regards to absconders.

Evaluation

Absconder data should continue to be tracked monthly to determine if and which initiatives are having an impact. To evaluate the strategies geared towards preventing offenders from absconding, the number of individuals classified as absconders should be examined. The goal is to reduce the number of individuals being classified as absconders. To evaluate the strategies addressing the current number of absconders, the number of individuals being removed from absconder status should be examined. The goal is to increase the number of these individuals being removed from absconder status. The combination of less individuals absconding and increasing the number of individuals being apprehended or located will reduce SCDPPPS' absconder population.

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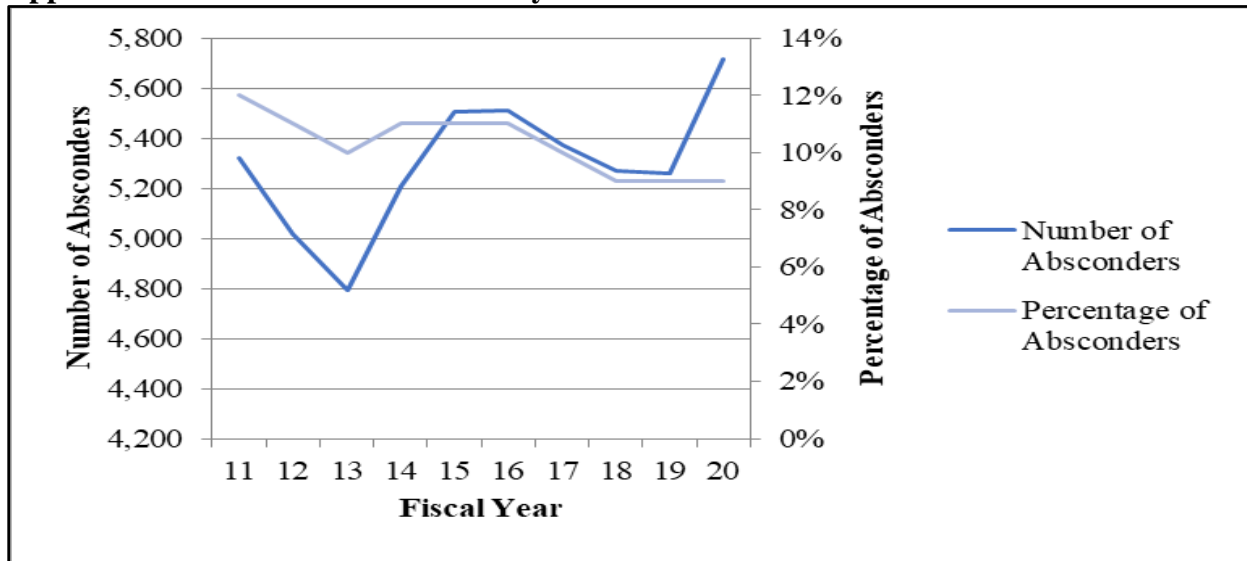
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Appendix A- Number of Absconders by Fiscal Year



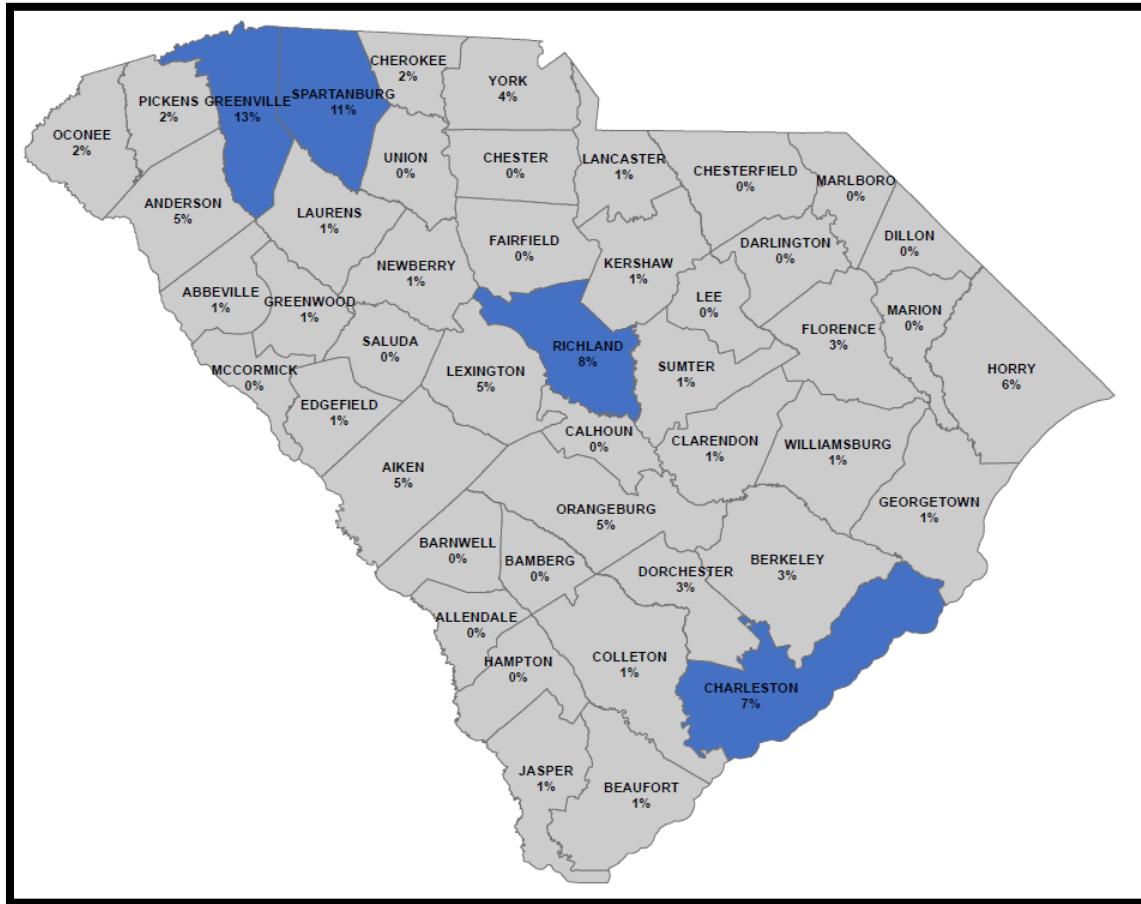
Appendix B- Most Common Offense Keyword Categories

Offense Keyword Category	Number	Percentage
Drugs	1,235	22%
Burglary	614	11%
Larceny	474	9%
Forgery	421	8%
Domestic Violence	381	7%
Assault	345	6%
Breach of Trust	248	4%
Financial Transaction Card Fraud	211	4%
Shoplifting	167	3%
Vehicle	164	3%

Appendix C- Most Common Offenses Based on Main Case

Main Case	Number	Percentage
Possession of less than one gram of methamphetamine or cocaine base, 1st offense	346	6%
Burglary, non - violent (after June 20, 1985), 2nd degree	304	5%
Domestic violence, 2nd degree	219	4%
Burglary (after June 20, 1985), 3rd degree - 1st offense	196	4%
Forgery, value less than \$10,000	167	3%
Enhancement for 3rd or subsequent offense, value \$2000 or less	151	3%
Grand larceny, value more than \$2,000 but less than \$10,000	141	3%
Forgery, value less than \$5,000 (no longer used)	125	2%
Legal custodian, unlawful neglect of child or helpless person	125	2%

Appendix D- Absconders as a Percentage of County Population



Appendix E- Possible Language for Policy 704

Definition of absconded (fugitive):

Absconding is the act of hiding oneself to avoid arrest or prosecution. An offender is determined to be absconded if the supervising agent has investigated the offender's whereabouts and based on the findings of the investigation, the offender's whereabouts are unknown.

Steps to determine if an offender has absconded:

To determine whether an offender has absconded supervision, an investigation will be conducted and will include at least five of the following actions:

- Conduct a home visit at last known residence
- Contact or visit the last known employer
- Contact or visit family members
- Contact local law enforcement
- Search local detention centers and jails
- Contact or visit last known landlord
- Visit neighbors
- Contact or visit codefendants
- Contact friends
- Contact the United States Post Office

Entering an absconder in NCIC and in the Offender Management System (OMS):
Once the investigation has been completed and it is determined the offender has absconded, the agent will staff the case, a warrant will be issued and submitted for NCIC³, NCIC Local, or NCIC NOEX, and the case will be placed in absconded status in OMS. In the event an offender is determined to be absconded after the issuance of a warrant, the agent will staff the case and submit it for NCIC, NCIC Local, or NCIC NOEX, and the case will be placed in absconded status in OMS. The absconded investigation schedule event code will be used to document the investigation and will list the five actions taken to confirm the offender has absconded.

³ Earlier in Policy 704 NCIC categories are defined as NCIC no limitations or specific limitations (i.e., warrant would appear nationwide), NCIC Local is defined as Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina warrant notifications only, and NCIC NOEX is defined as South Carolina warrant notification only.