The Council of State Governments West (CSG West) Public Safety Committee convened on July 17th, 2019 in Big Sky, Montana. The session was led by the committee’s chair, Washington Representative Sherry Appleton, along with the support of Oregon Representative Rick Lewis and Ken Truitt of Alaska Representative Chuck Kopp’s office, the committee’s vice chair.

During the session, juvenile justice and criminal justice reform, along with reentry programs, were discussed with an overlapping theme of measuring and assessing the effectiveness of programs. Expert panelists emphasized the importance of evaluation, which allows testing of viability as well as the advisability of continuing a program.

Sarah Wurzburg, Deputy Program Director of Behavioral Health at the CSG Justice Center, touched on trends in the West, assessment forms in evaluating outcomes within the juvenile justice system and illustrated specific state examples, such as Colorado’s Improving Outcomes for Youth (IOYouth). The Colorado IOYouth initiative works with state and local jurisdictions to align their policies, practices, and resource allocation to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for youth, while also enhancing public safety.

Speaking on the topic of reducing technical revocations and improving probation & parole outcomes, Tracy Velazquez, Manager of Criminal Justice Research at Pew Charitable Trusts, shared a recent publication titled To Safely Cut Incarceration, States Rethink Responses to Supervision Violations. Susanne DiPietro, Executive Director of the Alaska Judicial Council followed by speaking on the importance of assessments in criminal justice reform, the theft threshold - a conversation around what crimes constitute a misdemeanor versus felony and elaborated on how public safety can sometimes be counter-intuitive.
Final remarks were made by Tarra Simmons of the Washington Public Defender Association, who shared her life experience as a 14-year old mother, former inmate, and now Attorney and Skadden Fellow in Seattle, Washington. In sharing her struggles and achievements, she was able to offer her perspective of the justice systems’ need to illuminate the prison systems culture and collateral consequences for those who are reentering society. The session concluded with a question and answer period between the panelists and committee members.