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FOR RELEASE: June 1, 2006, 2:00 PM CST

Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) annual meeting, May 31-June 2, 2006, Hyatt Regency, San Antonio, TX.

CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS: WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM?

The number of prison inmates in the U.S. has increased dramatically in recent years. Of the 1.4 million inmates held in state or Federal prison in 1999, over half were parents. These parents had an estimated 1.5 million minor children. The majority of these children live in situations where it is highly likely that their parent's incarceration has at least some direct impact on family functioning; almost 50% of incarcerated parents lived with their children prior to their prison admission, and over 80% report that their children currently live with the other parent or with a relative.

- **What kind of a family life do these children have after a parent is incarcerated?**
- **How do these children deal with the "transition" when a parent is incarcerated?**
- **What is the effect of a new parental figure in a parent's life?**
- **Can prevention programs help these children cope with life without a parent?**

The incarceration of a parent can be a major family structure transition for the children of inmates, in which parenting losses and gains can occur. When family transitions occur, the children frequently experience decreased or infrequent contact with one or both parents and a loss in family income. Such transitions are often followed by the addition of a new parental figure, which is correlated with problematic outcomes for some children. Aside from family structure transitions, children of incarcerated parents typically experience poverty and frequent shifting of housing and school situations both before and after the incarceration. Despite these problems, little attention has been given to these children in terms of preventing them from having problems later in life. Very few preventive interventions have been developed to address the needs of the children of incarcerated parents and their families.

Researchers at the Society for Prevention Research will present preliminary results of two state-wide surveys of the children of incarcerated parents conducted within the Oregon Department of Corrections inmate population. Participants were queried about child and family demographics, family history, child and family visitation patterns, and current child functioning.

Sources: J. Mark Eddy PhD and Charles R. Martinez, Jr. PhD, both at Oregon Social Learning Center; Jean Kjellstrand MSW, Portland State University; and Paul Bellaty PhD, Oregon Department of Corrections.