

Opinion: Have parole agents learned from Garrido?

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After far too long, the shocking details of how federal probation officers completely failed to supervise Phillip Garrido are coming to light.

The hard-to-believe mistakes and horrendous judgment are as bad as, if not worse than, those of California parole agents. Those who were supposed to protect society from the likes of Garrido let him keep Jaycee Lee Dugard prisoner for 18 years.

By stonewalling, the U.S. Parole Commission tried to escape being held to account. It failed in that, too.

This month, James Ware, the chief U.S. District Court judge for Northern California, took it upon himself to make public a confidential report issued in December by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts that is unsparing in its criticism of federal parole officers and their supervisors. "I believe that the strength of our public institutions is tied directly to their openness to public scrutiny," wrote Ware, who deserves full credit for releasing the report.

Then Monday, Garrido's 351-page federal parole file was released through a Freedom of Information request filed by The Bee in September 2009.

Together, they itemize an inexcusable record of ineptitude and leniency – "clearly substandard," the report concludes – during the nearly 11 years that Garrido was under federal parole supervision, from December 1988 until his early discharge in March 1999.

During all that time, officers made less than a dozen home visits. One of those rare checks came in June 1991, only nine days after Garrido snatched 11-year-old Jaycee near her home in South Lake Tahoe.

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