



Home for Good:

A Campaign to Expand MN Work Release

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Short-staffed prisons and reentry homelessness and poverty increase violence in community and behind bars. The solution? *A two-year \$30 million shift from prison facilities to work release, and a one-word statutory change could dramatically shrink DOC short-staffing and homelessness, increasing safety while saving money.*

The Department of Corrections (DOC) work release program places incarcerated people in supervised housing to work or participate in a vocational or educational program as part of their community reintegration. According to DOC data received April 2021, *over 1,500 low-risk people are currently unable to access this program, despite eligibility under state law, due to bad budgeting and restrictive DOC policy.*

Minnesotans deserve more. True public safety means people getting “home for good.” Work release...

- **Is a proven reentry tool with low risk to the public. Nearly 80% of participants complete, while less than 0.2% commit a new, often nonviolent, crime on the program, an average of 1 a year with 533 participants,** according to 10 years of DOC data from 10-2022. According to a 2015 DOC Evaluation, work release is a successful long-standing program, with participants earning an average of \$5,000 more their first year out. Recent participants say having savings, work experience, and transportation before finding housing is essential to success in today's market.
- **Reduces recidivism by 15% with demonstrated possibilities of up to 43%,** based on suggestions in the aforementioned DOC evaluation and shown in the 2017 Israeli study, Reinforcing the impacts of work release on prisoner recidivism: the importance of integrative interventions, Weisburd et al.
- **Improves safety outcomes without increasing costs. Work release costs 66% as much as incarceration, \$90 compared to \$136.35 per person each day,** according to the DOC's 2021 Performance Report and a Oct. 2022 DOC Commissioner update.
- **Dramatically reduces homelessness.** A 2021 Department of Corrections (DOC) legislatively mandated shows *25% of those released from Minnesota's prisons last year entered into homelessness, yet nearly 0% were released homeless from work release,* according to DOC Work Release Director Terry Byrne.

- **Increases access and continuity in higher education, a proven recidivism reducing strategy.** Some college programs report recidivism rates as low as 3.8%, see the 2015 Oregon DOC case study by Betsy Simpkins in the journal *New Directions for Community Colleges*.
- **Gives incarcerated people an incentive to focus on rehabilitation.** The DOC's MRRA FAQ says 38 states have found such incentives effective in good time laws and in Minnesota's existing CIP program.
- **Safely addresses dramatic staff shortages.** Since 2018, only reducing population has dramatically addressed DOC staff shortages. Despite losing 438, or 16%, of filled staff positions Jan 2018 to Jan 2022, *inmate-to-staff ratios actually decreased 6.6% on average* due to population reductions, Feb 2022 DOC data. A 2020 MN Ombuds for Corrections study notes "[DOC] Employee interviewees did not express any concerns about using the work release program to manage the prison population."
- **Significantly reduces short staffing reducing violence against staff and prisoners, allows for increased rehabilitative programming - and gives back exploding staff overtime costs, which have increased nearly \$11.5 million since 2018:** 2022 OLA report on prison safety; 12-2022 DOC data.
- **Adds needed workers to the job market.** According to MN DEED, there are 3.5 job openings for every job seeker in Minnesota, a trend likely to increase according to *A Job Can Change a Life*, Dec. 2022.

How can the Legislature succeed in getting incarcerated Minnesotans "home for good"?

1. Shift \$15 million from DOC facilities to work release in 2023, \$30 million in 2024. This saves money overall and on overtime costs; decreases crime, homelessness, short staffing, and prison violence.
2. Strengthen MN statute 244.065 to ensure this effective crime prevention program's fully utilized:
Subdivision 1. Work. When consistent with the public interest and the public safety, the commissioner of corrections must may conditionally release an inmate to work at paid employment, seek employment, or participate in a vocational training or educational program, as provided in section 241.26, if the inmate has served at least one half of the term of imprisonment.

Implementation looks like the MN DOC using...

- An expanded budget to increase housing sites and work release staff - leveraging this increase to build cross-system partnerships with community, county, and government agencies.
- The current program as a typical step between prison and successful community living.
- An "expanded incentive work release" in alignment with public safety; for example, in completing a personalized plan as proposed by the MRRA, higher education, etc.

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