

# One Minnesota Budget



## Family Support and Connection

Preserving strong bonds with family while a person is incarcerated leads to more sustained community ties, promotes rehabilitation, and reduces recidivism and future crime. Studies repeatedly find a significant link between family contact and success when returning to community.

The Governor's budget recommendation includes investments to support incarcerated individuals to meaningfully engage with their families through more routine contact with loved ones, increased parenting programming for incarcerated moms and dads, and expanded capacity for families and their communities to create positive connections with incarcerated individuals.

### In Minnesota:

- **73%** of those incarcerated in Minnesota are parents
- **66%** of men and **77%** of women incarcerated are parents to minors
- **56%** of men and **66%** of women were living with their children prior to incarceration
- **40%** of children in foster care have an incarcerated parent(s)
- **80%** of children with an incarcerated parent need state services including mental health, alcohol/drug treatment, and child welfare
- **58%** of incarcerated people have a family member with a criminal record

Children suffer when their parents go to prison. To break the cycle of intergenerational criminality, stabilize families, reduce recidivism, and help children lead healthy, prosocial lives, the Governor recommends the following investments:

### Create a Family Support Unit

The requested investment of \$550,000 per year ongoing will create a family support unit within the Department of Corrections to serve individuals incarcerated in all 11 prisons and their families on the outside of the prison walls. The unit will focus on supporting meaningful connections between incarcerated individuals and their families, including partnering with community members and organizations on evidence-based programming such as parenting education and connection. The unit will lead the agency on developing strategies and policies to support incarcerated individuals and their families.

## Eliminate Cost Barriers for Communications

The DOC proposes \$2 million per year ongoing to eliminate the cost of phone and video calls for incarcerated individuals in state facilities.



While advancing technology has made phone and video calling more affordable and accessible, incarcerated individuals often face significant challenges paying for these services. Notably, family members of those incarcerated often pay the high cost of phone and video calls to support their incarcerated loved ones.

Many incarcerated individuals describe telephones as lifelines, helping them to stay connected, to co-parent their children, and to secure future housing. Isolation and limited communication with family members can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety for incarcerated individuals and their loved ones.

Ninety-five percent of individuals in prison will return to our communities. If they are connected to their families and support systems, it's better for everyone.

**More than one-third of families with an incarcerated family member goes into debt because of prison phone costs.**

- *Prison Policy Initiative*

**“Phone calls provide hope, sanity, and a desire to do better.”**

- *Incarcerated individual*

## Invest in Family-Focused Release Services

In 2021, the Minnesota Legislature passed the first-in-the-country Healthy Start Act, providing incarcerated mothers the opportunity to create strong bonds with their newborn babies, increasing positive outcomes for both mom and baby. It provides the DOC the authority to conditionally release those who are pregnant or post-partum within a year of the infant's birth. However, when a parent or primary caregiver on supervision faces a technical violation and return to prison, the DOC lacks the ability to provide alternatives to incarceration that are in the best interest of the child and keeping the individual in the community.

The requested investment of \$510,000 would create family-focused release services. The request would fund community corrections residential programming and placement, contracted program interventions, and deliver services such as substance use and mental health assessments, cognitive skills programming, trauma-informed care, family-based interventions, childcare coordination, and accommodations for children and their parents.

