

2025 Legislative Report: Healthy Start Act



Minnesota Department of Corrections
1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 200
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108-5219
(651) 361-7200
TTY (800) 627-3529
April 2026

The total cost of salaries, printing, and supplies incurred in the development and preparation of this report was approximately \$1,586 (reported as required by Minn. Stat. §3.197).

This report can be provided in another format upon request.

Table of Contents

I. Background	3
II. Healthy Start Policy and Process	3
a. Policy Criteria and Review Process	3
b. Trends in Admissions to Prison While Pregnant	4
III. 2025 Healthy Start Data.....	5
a. Individuals Granted Healthy Start Release.....	5
b. Individuals Not Receiving a Healthy Start Release	6

2025 Legislative Report: Healthy Start Act

I. Background

In May 2021, the Minnesota Legislature created releasing authority for the Department of Corrections (DOC) related to pregnant and recently post-partum individuals ([Laws of Minnesota 2021, Reg. Sess. Chapter 17, Section 1](#)). The Commissioner of Corrections has the authority to conditionally release an incarcerated person from prison to the community to engage in work, vocational training, substance abuse or mental health treatment, education, or parenting education, while completing their sentence, if they are either:

- Pregnant; or
- Within eight months post-delivery.

This Healthy Start conditional release (“Healthy Start release”) may last the duration of the pregnancy and up to one year of the newborn child’s life.

[Minn. Stat. § 244.065](#), subd. 2(d) requires DOC to file a written report with the legislature annually, reporting on a variety of data related to individuals released under this new authority from state correctional facilities.

The Minnesota Department of Corrections is required to report on the following for the prior calendar year:

1. The total number of individuals conditionally released from prison under this authority; and
2. The duration of the releases.

II. Healthy Start Policy and Process

The legislature required the Commissioner of Corrections to “develop policy and criteria to implement this subdivision according to public safety and generally accepted correctional practice.”¹ DOC Policy #205.123 Healthy Start Placement for Pregnant and Post-Partum Persons governs the healthy start conditional release process and states the criteria for eligibility and the standard for approval or denial of healthy start.

a. Policy Criteria and Review Process

DOC Health Services identify potentially eligible parents at intake by testing for and inquiring about pregnancy or post-partum status. People meeting these initial criteria for Healthy Start are then referred to the parenting coordinator for further eligibility screening and to gauge

¹ [Minn. Stat. § 244.065](#), subd. 2(c).

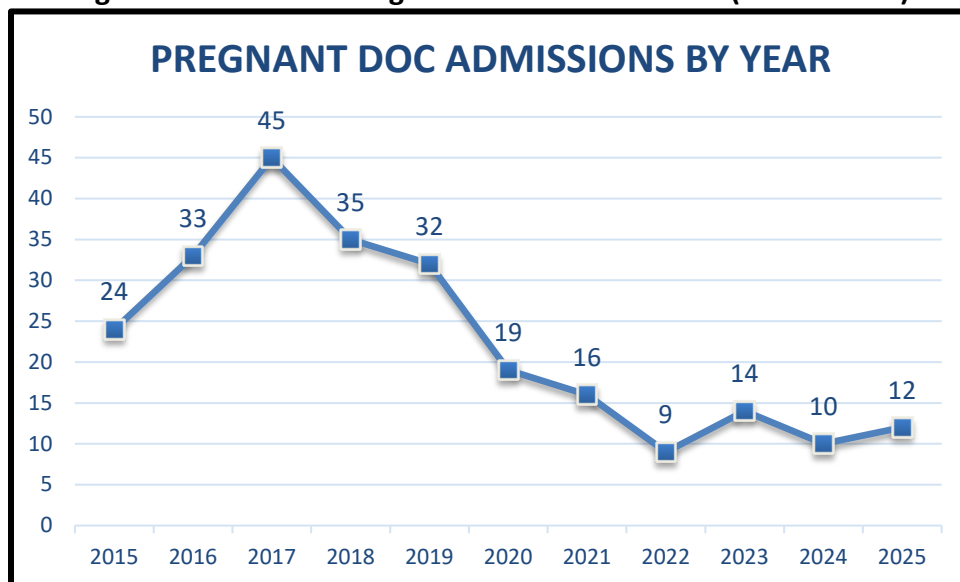
their interest in the opportunity. Interested and eligible parents then undergo a public safety review by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals. Approval and denial recommendations are made to the Commissioner of Corrections for a final decision. If approved, the Healthy Start Release Team is activated to plan for the person’s conditional release.

DOC created the eligibility criteria for Healthy Start based on the length of statutory release authority afforded to the DOC. Mothers are eligible throughout pregnancy and for up to one-year post-birth. If an individual would not meet their confinement release date during a Healthy Start release period or is not legally permitted to parent their infant, they are not eligible for Healthy Start release. These eligibility criteria are aligned with recommendations from child development experts on attachment and bonding needs for infants. Babies need to be bonded with an ongoing primary caregiver and Healthy Start is granted to a parent when they can maintain that caregiver role uninterrupted by a mandatory return to prison. There are some limited exceptions based on the health of the infant and whether there are extenuating circumstances that would necessitate healthy start placement, such as neonatal intensive care needs.

b. Trends in Admissions to Prison While Pregnant

In establishing the need for Healthy Start legislation, the DOC and stakeholders examined and shared data between the years of 2015 through 2019. During those years, on average there were 25-30 pregnant persons admitted to prison, and 40% of those had less than one year to serve. (Prior to 2021, DOC did not have data on a person’s post-partum status and only pregnancy information was available.) Since the statute’s inception, the numbers of pregnant persons have declined (Fig. 1). The numbers of individuals admitted who are pregnant appear stable within the past few years and yet is drastically lower than historical patterns.

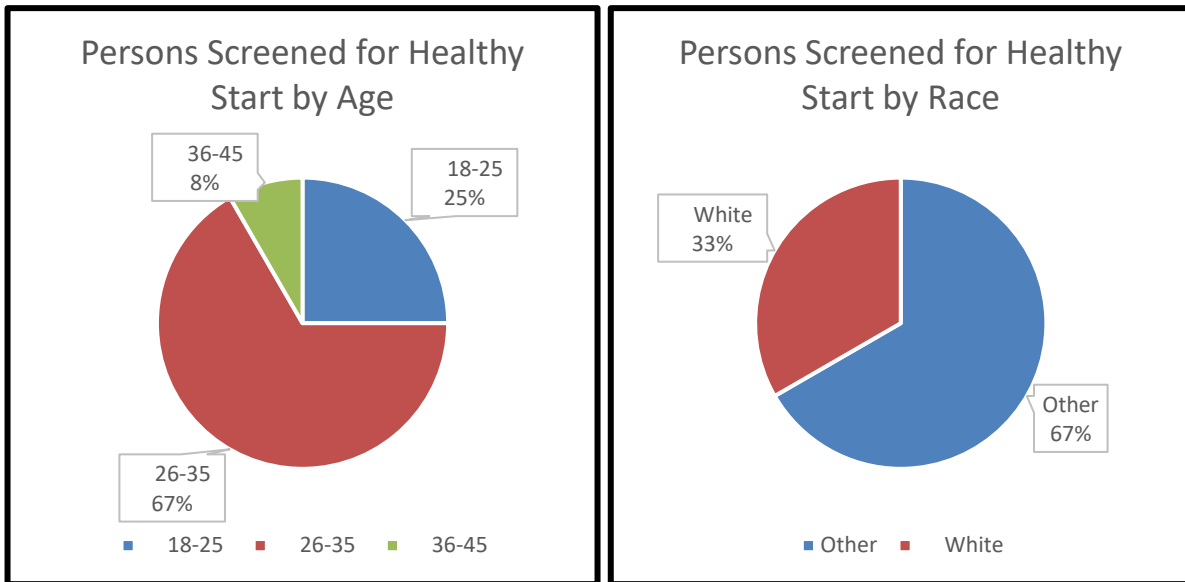
Figure 1. Number of Pregnant Person Admissions (2015 – 2025)



III. 2025 Healthy Start Data

DOC captures demographic data for people screened for Healthy Start and those granted the conditional release. Between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, 12 women were screened for Healthy Start. Sixty-seven percent of the women screened were races other than white² and a majority were over 26 years old (Fig.2).

Figure 2. Pregnant or Post-Partum Persons Screened for Healthy Start by Age and Race

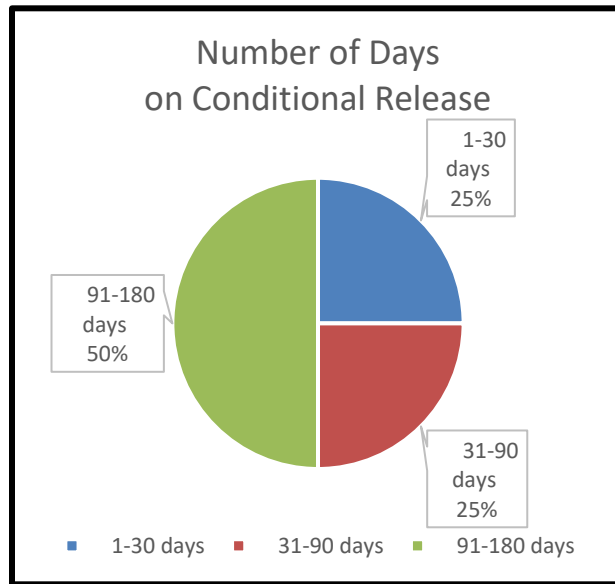


a. Individuals Granted Healthy Start Release

In 2025, four people were on Healthy Start release. Two people were previously released in 2024, and two new people were granted release in 2025. Three of the participants were between the ages of 26-35 and one was between 36-45. Two of the individuals were white and two were other races. Of those on release in 2025, one participant was on release for less than 30 days due to a prison return for absconding from supervision. One participant served 1 to 3 months and the final two served 3 to 6 months on Healthy Start release (Fig. 3). During this reporting period, two participants successfully completed Healthy Start and one remained on conditional release into 2026.

² In reporting the race of Healthy Start participants, racial groups comprising fewer than 5 people were grouped as "Other Races" to protect the identity of participants.

Figure 3. Numbers of Days on Conditional Release



b. Individuals Not Receiving a Healthy Start Release

In 2025, DOC determined that eight people were ineligible for Healthy Start. In reviewing the demographics of those deemed ineligible for Healthy Start release, 43% were white and 57% were of other races. Three individuals (37%) were committed to DOC from the seven-county metro area (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, Washington) and five (63%) were from Greater Minnesota counties. Like those who were released on Healthy Start, most women who were ineligible for Healthy Start were in the 26-35-year-old range.

Of the eight candidates deemed ineligible for Healthy Start, one candidate was ineligible for public safety reasons. The Healthy Start Team asserted that she presented risks to her unborn infant if released from prison without addressing underlying challenges. Six of the candidates deemed ineligible were screened out to due length of time to serve. Four of the candidates had less than a few months to serve, were early in their pregnancies and/or would have had ample time to situate themselves in communities prior to their infants' births. The remaining two had prison sentences of more than three years, exceeding the one-year Healthy Start release time permitted by statute. If released, these mothers would have had to return to prison after spending up to one year in the community following their infant's birth (Fig. 4).

There were two screened and eligible candidates who did not release in 2025. One person's approval was deferred, to be released in 2026, after completing recommended programming while incarcerated to address public safety needs. Lastly, one person declined the Healthy Start release.

Figure 4. Number of Individuals Not Released by Reason

