



Alaska Reentry & Justice Partnership

A statewide coalition of individuals and organizations advocating for supports and services that promote success for all justice-involved Alaskans at all phases of their justice involvement. Members include people with lived experience, family members, reentry coalitions and case managers, community providers, and state agencies.

SUPPORT ACCESS TO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN ALASKA'S CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

The Alaska Reentry & Justice Partnership supports efforts to expand digital technology resources and opportunities in Alaska's correctional system for improved access to supports and services—including mental health and addiction treatment, telehealth, education and training, reentry and transitional services, housing and employment assistance, faith-based, peer support, tribal, visitation, and ID/Social Security acquisition—to promote successful recovery, reentry after incarceration, and reduced recidivism.

BACKGROUND:

Before the COVID public health emergency, Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) offered a variety of programming to inmates, delivered by DOC education and behavioral health staff, which varied from facility to facility. DOC also provided contracts to community agencies who delivered evidence-based in-reach programming, treatment, and reentry planning. Since COVID, DOC has prioritized inmate and staff safety, requiring suspension or reduction of most in-reach and programming opportunities.

Inmates who were previously participating in treatment, recovery, and/or reentry programs, currently have minimal or no access to those programs. DOC has worked to provide self-study opportunities, books, and entertainment, but restrictions on small gatherings inside DOC has curtailed classes and group sessions.

Community providers and reentry case managers are reporting an increased number of inmates leaving custody without recovery or reentry support, putting them at greater risk for relapse, recidivating, or homelessness. Without access to clients inside the prisons, community providers and case managers are not able to fully assist DOC with reentry support processes outlined in AS 33.30.011. Additionally, DOC's goal of administering "the principle of reformation" as stated in the state constitution is challenged during the pandemic, highlighting the need to support new systems and reformative opportunities. The Partnership supports DOC's efforts to balance safety and security with access to digital resources.

Recommendations:

- Continue working to improve and expand safe and secure technological and digital resources at DOC facilities—that may include access to tablets and digital kiosks, closed-system computer and/or TV programming, monitored videoconferencing, video calls for visitation, distance learning, and more.
- Expand access to telehealth resources between clinicians, clients, and/or case managers for inmates with mental health and addiction disorders.
- Create a secure online instructional link for access to GED, vocational, and post-secondary programs that operate between institutions.
- Address Alaska state statutes related to inmate access to technology.
- Address institutional definitions and policies related to inmate access to technology.

Steps moving forward:

- Research safe and secure digital resources that are being used successfully in other jurisdictions.
- Assess current technological and digital resources at DOC facilities to identify gaps and barriers.
- Identify outside resources, including funding for technical assistance, staff, and hardware.