



March 14, 2021
Rep. Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
State Capitol Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Kreiss-Tomkins,

The Kenai Peninsula Reentry Coalition is writing in support of the expansion of safe, secure methods of technology within Department of Corrections' facilities and access to state-issued identification cards and driver's license renewals for inmates serving 120 days or more, as discussed in House Bill 118.

Since the Coronavirus pandemic hit Alaska, the Kenai Peninsula Reentry Coalition (KPRC) has worked to adapt programming to fit the changing needs and restrictions placed on inmates. This has included becoming adept at using video conferencing platforms to connect with providers and corrections to continue our mission. Unfortunately, the Coalition has yet been unable to connect with inmates and those releasing through in-reach methods and many have fallen through the cracks.

With prisoner access to digital resources like video communication and online programming, community agencies like KPRC will be able to finally continue to help identify need, gaps, and barriers prior to release to ensure an organized strategy for reentry planning. Many vocational training and certification programs, Adult Basic Education, computer literacy, and post-secondary academic services have ceased since the pandemic-related lockdown. GED classes and testing, which could be performed online, have been paused and left many inmates feeling like their future is less assured without a diploma.

The cancellation of behavioral health-related courses is much more concerning. Groups for inmates with substance use disorders, anger management, and cognitive behavioral therapy have always been a standard for the Alaska Department of Corrections. Without these classes, inmates are more likely to sustain a relapse once released into the community, therefore falling victim to the cycle of recidivism. However, with something as simple as a computer and webcam, community agencies can take over these necessary skill-building classes using digital resources.

Reentry planning is often a multifaceted effort requiring teamwork and time. By connecting with inmates prior to release through video conferencing in-reach, we will again be able to assist the inmate and Probation Officers in building a strong, comprehensive plan for success outside the institution.

Additionally, with HB 118's plan for issuing state identification cards and driver's license renewals to inmates serving over 120 days, we are able to show the prison population in Alaska that we take the success of each individual seriously and understand the challenges faced without proper form of identification. With the Division of Motor Vehicles closed to walk-ins, it has

become an even greater challenge to assist with getting identification. By offering this small yet meaningful hand-up, we will invest in the success of every reentrant across our state.

Finally, we believe that addressing the statutes related to inmate use of technology and the policies within the institutions which lead to the practices we seek is important to this effort and to HB 118. The Kenai Peninsula Reentry Coalition greatly appreciates and supports efforts to increase access to programming and successful reentry through digital resources and needed identification. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Katie Cowgill



President
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Board of Directors
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