

RE: Support for House Bill 118

March 17, 2021

Chair Rep. Kriess-Tomkins and Members of the House State Affairs Committee

Dear Representative Kreiss-Tomkins and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of HB 118. The Department of Corrections (DOC) is required to facilitate an inmate's rehabilitation or the inmate's compliance with a reentry plan or case plan developed under AS 33.30.011 related to employment, education, vocational training, access to legal reference materials, visitation, or health care.

The importance of providing government identification, which is fundamental to any inmate reentering the community for seeking a social security card for employment, opening a bank account to manage finances, etc. etc. cannot be underestimated. Neither can the importance of expanding access to computers for inmates in Alaska Department of Corrections custody for rehabilitation, reentry and recidivism reduction.

First, successful completion of mental health and/or substance use treatment is likely to reduce recidivism. Treatment can be economically and effectively delivered to many inmates online and through CCTV systems.

Second, returning citizens struggle with the use of modern technology such as computers, touch screens, tablets and cell phones as they endeavor to navigate and integrate into the community. Long term inmates who have been incarcerated for years and decades have literally been left behind from technology that they will be required to use to seek employment, apply for health care, food stamps and other emergent benefits which assist with reentry. They are released into our communities with little functional knowledge about modern and appropriate use of everyday technologies. Teaching inmates how to use computers and other modern technologies to access engage in educational and vocational opportunities, access resources, communicate around release planning, learn computer skills that have become nearly mandatory by most employers, or otherwise retain familiarity with computers and technology will help to improve rehabilitation, reentry and recidivism reduction outcomes.

Finally, access to computers and DOC supervised access to the internet would allow inmates to apply for Medicaid and other government benefits prior to their release to community. Medicaid regulations do not allow reimbursement for any treatment rendered to people who are incarcerated. Waiting until after prison release to apply for Medicaid causes delays in health care and behavioral health treatment, frustrating the goals of rehabilitation, reentry and reducing recidivism.

The days are long gone when understanding computer skills and conducting educational, vocational, treatment and accessing important resources are 'frills' for DOC inmates.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Rhoades

Retired Judge  
Director,  
One2one Mentorship Program for  
Justice Involved Women