HOUSE BILL NO. 35

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT

Introduced: 1/22/25
Referred: Community and Regional Affairs, State Affairs

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

"An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

*** Section 1.** AS 33.30.015(a) is amended to read:

(a) The commissioner may not

(1) make per capita expenditures for food for prisoners in a state correctional facility operated by the state that exceed 90 percent of per capita expenditures for food that is available to enlisted personnel in the United States Army stationed in the state;

(2) provide, in a state correctional facility operated by the state,

(A) living quarters for a prisoner into which the view is obstructed; however, the commissioner is not required to renovate a facility to comply with this subparagraph if the facility is being used as a correctional facility on August 27, 1997, or if the facility was already built before being acquired by the department;

(B) equipment or facilities for publishing or broadcasting

material the content of which is not subject to prior approval by the department as consistent with keeping order in the institution and prisoner discipline;

(C) cable television service other than a level of basic cable television service that is available as a substitute for services that are broadcast to the public in the community in which a correctional facility is located;

(3) allow a prisoner held in a state correctional facility operated by the state to

(A) possess in the prisoner's cell a

(i) cassette tape player or recorder, [A] video cassette recorder (VCR), or **telephone;**

(ii) computer or electronic tablet unless used for a purpose approved under (I) of this paragraph [A COMPUTER OR MODEM OF ANY KIND];

(B) view movies rated "R," "X," [OR] "NC-17**,**" **or television shows rated "TV-MA"**;

(C) possess printed or photographic material that

(i) is obscene as defined by the commissioner in regulation;

(ii) could reasonably be expected to incite racial, ethnic, or religious hatred that is detrimental to the security, good order, or discipline of the institution or violence;

(iii) could reasonably be expected to aid in an escape or in the theft or destruction of property;

(iv) describes procedures for brewing alcoholic beverages or for manufacturing controlled substances, weapons, or explosives; or

(v) could reasonably be expected to facilitate criminal activity or a violation of institution rules;

(D) receive instruction in person, or by broadcast medium, or engage in boxing, wrestling, judo, karate, or other martial art or in any activity that, in the commissioner's discretion, would facilitate violent behavior;

(E) possess or have access to equipment for use in the activities listed in (D) of this paragraph;

(F) possess or have access to free weights;

(G) possess in the prisoner's cell a coffee pot, hot plate, appliance or heating element for food preparation, or more than three electrical appliances of any kind;

(H) possess or appear in a state of dress, hygiene, grooming, or appearance other than as permitted as uniform or standard in the correctional facility;

(I) use a computer **or electronic tablet** other than those approved by the correctional facility; the use of a computer **or electronic tablet** under this subparagraph may be approved only **to facilitate the prisoner's rehabilitation or the prisoner's compliance with a reentry plan or case plan developed under AS 33.30.011,** as part of the prisoner's employment, education, [OR] vocational training**, access to legal reference materials, visitation, or health care, or for another purpose identified by the commissioner in regulation,** and may not be used for any other purpose;

(J) smoke or use tobacco products of any kind**;**

(4) allow a state correctional facility operated by the state to charge a fee for electronic mail or electronic visitation services.

*** Sec. 2.** AS 33.30.015 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

(f) The commissioner may not replace in-person visitation with the use of a computer or electronic tablet. To the extent practicable, the commissioner may not replace an existing program or service provided to a prisoner for the purpose of rehabilitation with the use of a computer or electronic tablet authorized under (a)(3)(I) of this section. A computer or electronic tablet may be used only to supplement an existing program or service.

*** Sec. 3.** The uncodified law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section to read:

APPLICABILITY. AS 33.30.015(a)(4), enacted by sec. 1 of this Act, and AS 33.30.015(f), enacted by sec. 2 of this Act, apply to services used by a prisoner on or after

1 the effective date of this Act.

Representative Rebecca Himschoot

Angoon, Craig, Edna Bay, Elfin Cove, Hollis, Hoonah, Hydaburg, Kake, Kasaan, Klawock, Kupreanof, Naukati, Pelican, Petersburg, Port Alexander, Point Baker, Port Protection, Sitka, Tenakee Springs, Thorne Bay & Yakutat

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

HOUSE BILL 35 – VERSION N

"An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners"

House Bill 35 recognizes the functionality of 21st century technology and the role it can play in reforming Alaska's correctional system. Current Alaska statute does not include guidelines on prisoner use of electronic devices, making it difficult for the Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide devices to prisoners. HB 35 specifies the access a prisoner is allowed under DOC supervision in an effort to improve rehabilitation and assist with reentry.

Tablets and computers are not a luxury. Instead, they are tools that are extremely helpful with the rehabilitation process. They allow prisoners to access educational materials, gain experience with workplace technology, and improve connectivity to telehealth. Electronic devices also offer supplemental online visitation as a solution to Alaska's geographic vastness. Perhaps most importantly, HB 35 will introduce prisoners to common electronic devices and programs that are now ubiquitous within our society.

Alaska is one of the last states in the nation to introduce devices into prisons. Many other states have implemented similar legislation in an effort to enhance prison conditions and reduce contraband brought into correctional facilities. These programs have resulted in improvements in prisoner behavior and initiative and have successfully decreased the disparity between prison and reentry exposure to everyday technology.

Device access has the capability of reducing recidivism. Ninety-five percent of Alaska's current incarcerated population will eventually be released. Incarcerated individuals who are released without any support or plan in place are all-too-often hit with the harsh conditions that they were living in when they were initially arrested, and it is common for those individuals to relapse back into substance abuse or reoffend. Unfortunately, the support programs that are currently in place to assist with reentry (such as those facilitated through DOC, the Department of Health (DOH), and non-profit organizations) do not have the capacity to reach every single inmate before they are released, and electronic devices can supplement in-person "inreach" to prisoners while they plan for reentry.

Allowing prisoners to use specific programs and have limited access to information and services on electronic devices will enhance public safety and help ensure that Alaska's incarcerated population is better prepared for reentry.

A companion measure to Senate Bill 19
Staff Contact: Ella Lubin | ella.lubin@akleg.gov | (907) 465-3732

Representative Rebecca Himschoot

Angoon, Craig, Edna Bay, Elfin Cove, Hollis, Hoonah, Hydaburg, Kake, Kasaan, Klawock, Kupreanof, Naukati, Pelican, Petersburg, Port Alexander, Point Baker, Port Protection, Sitka, Tenakee Springs, Thorne Bay & Yakutat

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SECTIONAL ANALYSIS

HOUSE BILL 35 – VERSION N

"An Act relating to the use and possession of electronic devices by prisoners"

Section 1:

Adds an exemption (I) to the prohibition against electronic devices for prisoners. It also adds television show ratings to the list of banned movie ratings.

Subparagraph (I) adds additional accepted uses for electronic devices including use for rehabilitative and case plan purposes, legal material access, health care access, or another purpose identified by the commissioner in regulation.

Subparagraph (4) adds language that prohibits correctional centers from charging fees for electronic device use.

Section 2:

States that electronic device services are meant to supplement existing services, not replace them, to the extent practicable. Electronic devices may not be used to replace in-person visitation.

Section 3:

Adds clarifying language regarding the applicability of the effective date.

A companion measure to Senate Bill 19

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Technology Education Programs in Prisons increase Prosocial Behaviors and Computing Attitudes

Submitted on March 4, 2024

BENTON INSTITUTE for BROADBAND & SOCIETY (https://benton.org)

Monday, March 4, 2024

Digital Beat

Technology Education Programs in Prisons Increase Prosocial Behaviors and Computing Attitudes


Jabbari

Currently, the majority of incarcerated people in the United States cannot access consistent, high-quality education. When they are released, they often lack skills that are in high demand by employers. Unsurprisingly, 75 (https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/legal-documents/060917-trone-reportweb_0.pdf) percent of returning citizens are still unemployed one year post-release, and over 67 (https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/recidivism-prisoners-released-30-states-2005-patterns-2005-2010-update) percent of returning citizens are re-arrested within three years post-release. To curb this cycle, experts recommend comprehensive reforms, which include expanding educational and vocational training opportunities within correctional facilities—a recommendation that is getting increased attention as a consequence of Second Chance Pell (https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-expansion-second-chance-pell-program-and-actions-help-incarcerated-individuals-resume-educational-journeys-and-reduce-recidivism).[1]

Over the past three years, a coding education program has launched in medium- to low-level correctional facilities in Missouri. Participants are recruited from across the state to apply and are transferred to facilities that offer the program. If accepted, participants start a 6-month program that meets the needs of technology employers today, focusing on both front-end and back-end web development, as well as project management. For their final project, students are encouraged to develop technology tools that can solve real-world problems that they have witnessed or experienced.


Terada

The program, now called Unlocked Labs (https://www.unlockedlabs.org/), was the brainchild of Jessica Hicklin, who taught herself to code through books, without the internet, while incarcerated. Through a prison volunteer, Hicklin got connected with LaunchCode (https://www.launchcode.org/), a technology training program, in 2017. In the following year, Hicklin adapted LaunchCode's open-source curriculum for a platform that meets the requirements of Missouri prisons. Since the coding program's initial pilot in 2018 at the Potosi Correctional Center, the LaunchCode program has trained over 150 justice-impacted technologists across four prisons in Missouri.

The long-term goal of these programs is to increase employment and reduce recidivism. The link between prison education and increases in employment, as well as reductions in recidivism, has been largely supported in previous research (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0264550517699290?casa_token=WKtzdhBikn8AAAAA:epLK_9pJsU6iQGA-aXmx39J619tEex-tE6DUn-SfoSb6xuSZlopNuNejkKOYMIToAmMG1uuYfRxv). However, less is known about some of the social and emotional benefits of prison education. Given the social nature of coding and the focus on problem-solving in the curriculum, researchers at the Social Policy Institute explored whether participating in the program was related to prosocial behaviors and positive computing attitudes. Prosocial behaviors are a set of voluntary, desirable actions aimed at helping and consoling others (Caprara et al., 2005 (https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/abs/10.1027/1015-5759.21.2.77)). To measure prosocial behaviors, we used the 16-item Prosocial Behavior Scale (PBS) developed by Caprara et al. (2005). Computing attitudes are beliefs about the nature of knowledge and problem-solving in computer science. Higher scores represent greater interest in computer science problems, as well as

more positive beliefs about one's ability to understand, make appropriate connections, and solve computer science problems. To measure computing attitudes, we used the 25-item Computing Attitudes Survey (CAS) (Dorn & Tew, 2015 (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08993408.2015.1014142)).


Mayer

Our study leverages a pre- and post-test design. All applicants were given an opportunity to participate in the study, which included a small monetary incentive for completing the surveys ($20). While admitted applicants were allowed to receive the full benefits of the six-month program, non-admitted applicants were provided with a short introduction to the course, as well as printed course materials. Non-admitted applicants were encouraged to reapply in later course offerings. In our analysis, we used multivariate linear regression to examine the extent to which individuals who completed the program (program participants) experienced an increase in prosocial behaviors and computing attitudes when compared to individuals who were not admitted to the program (program non-participants). In addition to the treatment and outcome measures, we also controlled for individual-level characteristics, including age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and program entrance score. The sample used to measure prosocial behaviors included 115 individuals: 86 program participants and 29 non-participants. The sample used to measure computing attitudes included 82 individuals: 64 program participants and 18 non-participants.

Across both measures, regression results indicate that program participants had significantly higher scores in the post-surveys than non-participants. Figures 1 and 2 present the margin plots that compare the results between participants and non-participants over time. In Figure 1 we see that program participants demonstrated similar levels of prosocial behaviors over time (pre-survey=4.01; post-survey=4.00), while the levels of non-participants decreased over time (pre-survey=3.76; post-survey=3.62). In Figure 2 we see that program participants demonstrated increased levels of positive computing attitudes over time (pre-survey=3.63; post-survey=3.67), while the levels of non-participants decreased over time (pre-survey=3.42; post-survey=3.36).

Figure 1. Measure of prosocial behaviors

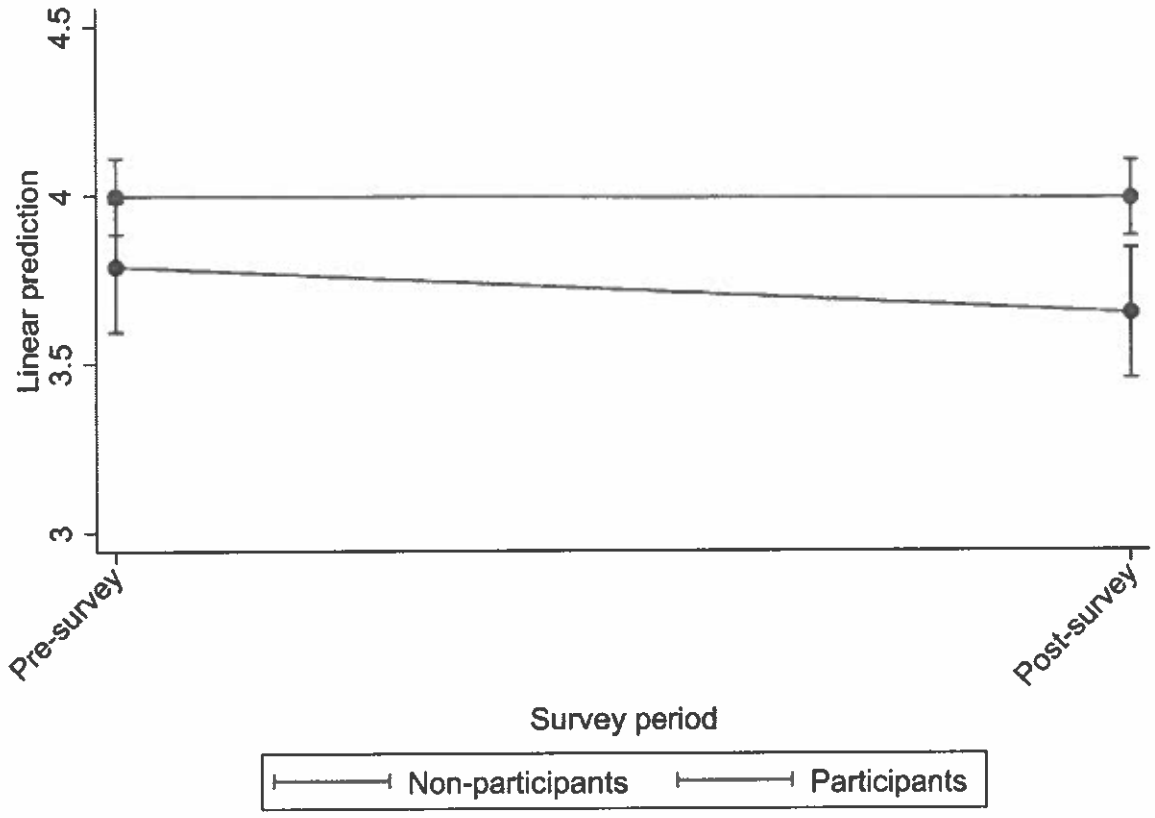
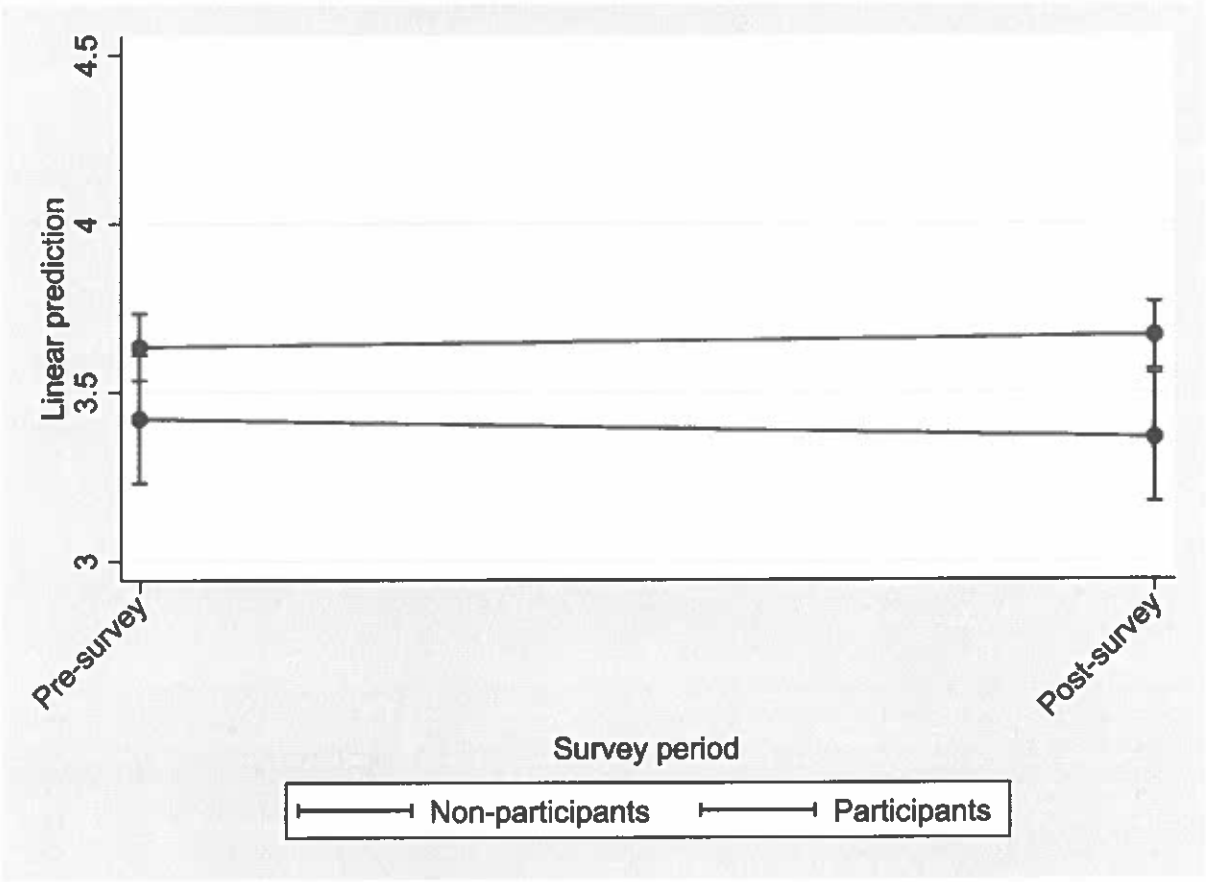


Figure 2. Measure of computing attitudes



Overall, these results demonstrate that this prison education program has positive impacts that extend beyond employment and recidivism. Indeed, participating in the program was associated with significant increases in prosocial behaviors and computing attitudes. Prosocial behaviors appear to decrease over time in prisons, yet participating in the program can be seen as curbing this deterioration, which can not only have positive impacts on the individual, but on his or her environment as well. Improved computing attitudes, on the other hand, can be seen as a more direct prerequisite to successful post-release employment in technology, which can both improve employment outcomes for individuals and help fill critical skill shortages in the labor market. Although it is difficult to disentangle the influence of the program's content (e.g., having students create a technology tool that helps solve real-world problems) and instructional strategies (e.g., having students work in teams to solve coding problems), it is clear that there are social benefits to participating in a prison education program like this one.

While future research is needed to understand the long-term impacts of prison education programs on employment and recidivism, our findings suggest that positive impacts of prison education can occur in the short term and extend to social and emotional domains as well. When considering the growing demand for workers with technology skills, national movements to expand prison education (e.g., Second Chance Pell) and improve the re-entry process (e.g., Re-Entry 2030 (https://reentry2030.org/)) should explore technology training programs in prisons.

Notes

[1] The Second Chance Pell Initiative enables individuals in custody to participate in post-secondary education programs with Pell grant funding.

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CORRECTIONS 1

Re-Entry & Recidivism

Not a luxury: How technology can protect inmate mental health

Digital technologies allow prison-involved individuals and their families the tools they need to maintain close relationships despite physical distance

December 12, 2023 12:16 PM

Florida Department of Corrections

By Christopher Ditto

Mental health is one of the biggest obstacles for those serving time. Studies show that about two in five incarcerated individuals have a history of mental illness — approximately twice the national average. Many of the hallmarks that define the modern incarceration system experience, including disconnection from family, loss of autonomy, boredom and lack of purpose, are the same conditions that are linked to negative mental health outcomes.

But instead of being prepared for success post-release, many prisoners are left to navigate crucial reintegration elements, such as securing employment and housing on their own — while struggling with mental health challenges that may have been exacerbated during their time in the incarceration system. However, a growing awareness of the positive impact that technology can have on incarcerated individuals is beginning to change this narrative.

The impact of isolation

Incarceration is an intrinsically isolating experience. Individuals are removed from their homes and families, all but erasing the social support and community. These connections are a prominent factor in an individual's psychological well-being, and losing access to them all at once when entering the penal system can be a very difficult transition. Separation from family and friends has emerged as a major stressor for incarcerated individuals and is associated with psychological distress. Many describe this separation as the most difficult part of incarceration.

This disconnection can be further strained by the lack of accessible communication options. Family members may not have the time or resources to travel to the correctional facility during visiting hours, and difficulty communicating and coordinating can add stress to inmates' relationships with family and friends. Traditional communication avenues are limited to onsite visits, which may be limited to specific time windows on just a few days of the week; outbound-only calls from shared correctional telephones; and facility-reviewed postal mail, which can easily take a week for a single exchange. Justice-involved individuals are all too often left with strained relationships to the very support network that is crucial for successful reintegration.

The benefits of digital technologies

Digital technologies, such as text and video messages and video visitation, offer prison-involved individuals and their families the tools they need to maintain close relationships despite physical distance. Tablets allow prisoners access to a range of virtual communication options, which provide the flexibility and consistency needed to maintain strong ties with their support network. These opportunities are especially important for prisoners with children, providing them the opportunity to be more actively involved in their children's lives. Messaging options also allow for easier communication with family members who have tight schedules or who work jobs which they are unable to accept

phone calls during. Shared photos and video messages can help to remind incarcerated individuals that they have loved ones who care about them.

With traditional options, incoming mail is the only means of communication that can be initiated by the incarcerated individual's family or friends. Both digital messaging and some of the new video visitation systems allow communication to be initiated by the family member, which can have a tremendous impact on mental health. Knowing that a message could arrive at any time introduces an element of hope into the daily experience of incarceration.

In addition, and sometimes as a corollary result of their isolation, incarcerated individuals often face crippling boredom and purposelessness that contributes to poor mental health. Prisoners often have nothing with which to fill long hours, days or even years. This can lead to an increase in aggressive behavior due to a dilated perception of time as monotonous days blend into monotonous months.

Providing prisoners with access to tablets filled with applications tailored towards their needs is a powerful way to mitigate boredom and instill purpose, creating safer, more productive facilities for inmates and staff. Facilities that have implemented tablets, for instance, have recorded a reduction in violence among prisoners.

Applications include entertainment offerings that allow incarcerated individuals the opportunity to break up long days with the sights and sounds of a different world. Music is an especially effective option for combating boredom and idleness. Prisoners have noted that access to entertainment alleviates the stress of incarceration, creating a more peaceful atmosphere.

Educational resources and vocational training also give prisoners a constructive way to structure their time and provide hope for the future and a purpose to work toward. Equipping the incarcerated for life after release is a vital, but all-too-often overlooked, part of the justice system. Even skeptical prison officials, however, have come to recognize the impact of educational resources in cutting down idleness and instilling hope. Prisoners themselves report that these self-guided education and employment tools increase their optimism about the future and help to counteract depression. No one should have to feel hopeless. Giving prisoners access to these resources helps to improve their mental health by giving them hope and an enhanced sense of self-esteem, which are essential to life both during and after incarceration.

https://www.corrections1.com/re-entry-and-recidivism/not-a-luxury-how-technology-can-protect-inmate-mental-health

Newer prison technology is both directly and indirectly helping to improve the mental health of justice-involved individuals. Providing resources that facilitate connection to their support systems and applications help them remain engaged during their time in the incarceration system are ways to help prevent their mental health from deteriorating, but technology can also provide them with health resources, counseling services and stress relief to incarcerated individuals facing a torrent of stressors every day. We all need a little help sometimes, and incarcerated individuals are no exception. Prioritizing their mental and emotional well-being is essential to a strong justice system that strives for rehabilitation and reintegration.

The total loss of autonomy and purpose can lead to the all-too-common combination of powerlessness and despair, driving incarcerated individuals to reckless or violent behavior toward those around them. These feelings are detrimental to the rehabilitation and reintegration process and can increase the risk of recidivism, as inmates are not afforded the opportunity to maintain stability and connection. Tablets' ability to fight boredom and instill purpose is an essential component to prioritizing the safety and well-being of every individual within a correctional facility.

Utilizing technology in prisons is about transforming lives and communities as the justice involved are reminded that their lives are full of significance and potential. Strong relationships, job training and hope – they're all wrapped up in a simple tablet. Prisoners should never be left to struggle with mental health issues on their own. Instead, we must understand how technology can provide opportunities and instill the hope central to successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Technology is the future for everyone, regardless of their past. Giving justice-involved individuals a true second chance starts while they are still serving time. If we want justice for all, we can't leave prisoners behind.

About the author

Christopher Ditto is the vice president of research and development at ViaPath Technologies, a global corrections technology leader that facilitates successful reintegration for incarcerated individuals.
Re-Entry & Recidivism

https://www.corrections1.com/re-entry-and-recidivism/not-a-luxury-how-technology-can-protect-inmate-mental-health

PRIORITY
Criminal Justice
NEEDS INITIATIVE
A project of the RAND Corporation, the Police Executive Research Forum, RTI International, and the University of Denver

Leveraging Technology to Support Prisoner Reentry

Joe Russo, Michael J. D. Vermeer, Dulani Woods, and Brian A. Jackson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

High recidivism rates among justice-involved individuals are a persistent challenge for the corrections sector, and this challenge incurs significant costs to these individuals, their victims, their communities, and the larger society. Therefore, preparing these individuals for successful reentry into the community and long-term desistance from crime is a critical mission of corrections agencies and their community-based partners. To accomplish this, corrections agencies and their partners typically employ a variety of supervision services and programs to address common need areas (e.g., vocational needs, educational needs, family reunification, substance use, mental health, housing), with a focus on the individual's criminogenic factors (i.e., factors associated with an increased likelihood of reoffending). The corrections sector is increasingly leveraging technology-based solutions to deliver and/or augment these services. This trend has been accelerated by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has forced agencies to lean heavily on technology to deliver a wide variety of treatment and supervision services remotely. Furthermore, corrections agencies and their partners are recognizing that returning citizens need access to technology at each stage of the reentry process; however, these agencies also need to minimize associated security risks. This is critical to both providing access to relevant programming content and helping individuals become familiar and proficient with the technology necessary to function in today's world.

Common barriers to using these technologies include cost, staffing requirements to implement technology solutions, scalability, and challenges associated with information-sharing and collaboration between public and private entities engaged in reentry. Furthermore, correctional institutions can be risk averse and might prioritize security above rehabilitative objectives. Naturally, they might be cautious about such innovations as allowing incarcerated individuals access to technology and the internet for programming purposes.

SELECTED PRIORITY NEEDS

RESULTS

Organizational issues

- Implementation guides and best practices for the use of secure tablets should be developed that consider agency objectives (e.g., primarily entertainment or programming), the pros and cons of different funding models, and security issues.

Programming

- Agencies should explore the feasibility of developing a publicly funded, national repository of corrections-specific VR content that is accessible to agencies at no or low cost.

Transitional services

- Best practices and collaboration strategies should be developed for information-sharing solutions that connect relevant agencies within and across states so institutions can apply for and secure IDs prior to release.

Coordination and continuity of care

- Implementation guides should be developed that highlight effective strategies for obtaining funding to establish automated solutions to support coordinated reentry case management; this would allow partner access to essential and timely information across domains, including assessments, case plans, contacts and interactions, program referrals, progress in programming or supervision, status, and outcomes.

Equity issues

- Best practices and effective strategies should be developed for ensuring inclusivity; these strategies should account for diversity among both service providers and the target population (e.g., individuals with disabilities, non-English speakers, cultural differences, access to and ability to pay for technology).

To explore how technology can be better leveraged to improve reentry outcomes, the National Institute of Justice, supported by the RAND Corporation in partnership with the University of Denver, hosted a virtual workshop in March 2021. The workshop brought together a group of prison, jail, and probation and parole administrators; community-based service providers; researchers; and other experts to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with this topic.

The project team used a structured brainstorming approach to develop a set of *needs*, which is a term we use to describe a specific requirement tied to either solving a problem or taking advantage of an opportunity to better address a challenge. This report, which describes these needs, is part of an ongoing series of reports on workshops facilitated by the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative. These results are pertinent to a wide variety of audiences, including corrections practitioners and their community-based partners, technology developers, the research community, and organizations that fund research.

Institutions need guidance to better leverage technology to train incarcerated individuals for high-demand jobs; implement tablet programs; and incorporate such technologies as video visitation and virtual reality.

WHAT WE FOUND

Workshop participants identified and prioritized 37 individual needs. Eleven needs were ranked as high priority. Among the high-priority needs, the following themes emerged:

- The participants identified several examples of the effective use of technology to support reentry. They noted, however, that broader adoption would be facilitated by improved guidance in the form of case studies, best practices, and demonstrated effective strategies. For example, institutions need guidance to better leverage technology to train incarcerated individuals for high-demand jobs; implement tablet programs; and incorporate such technologies as video visitation and virtual reality (VR) into family reunification efforts. Correctional agencies also require guidance to effectively collaborate with relevant agencies to provide incarcerated individuals with documentation of identification prior to release. The participants recommended the development of incentives and implementation guidance to support automated solutions for coordinated reentry case management and data-sharing across justice agencies and their community-based partners. Finally, all stakeholders, including private industry, need guidance to help ensure that innovations are designed and implemented with inclusivity in mind so as not to disadvantage any group.
- Recognizing the power of evidence, the participants called for research and evaluation to establish the efficacy of technology-facilitated reentry initiatives and their impact on key outcomes. Participants recommended studies to evaluate the impact of telepresence technologies on individual and group interventions and studies on "in-reach" activities. Furthermore, research is needed to quantify the impact of access to advanced technology on correctional education outcomes.
- The participants noted the potential of VR to significantly improve programming in a variety of areas (e.g., vocational skills, interviewing and other life skills, treatment). Wider adoption of VR could be fostered by the development of pilot programs and evaluation research to identify (1) best practices for content development and implementation in correctional settings and (2) the impact of VR-based interventions on key outcomes. Relatedly, the participants called for exploration of the feasibility of a publicly funded library of VR content that could be easily accessed by the corrections sector.

About This Report

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, the RAND Corporation, in partnership with the Police Executive Research Forum, RTI International, and the University of Denver, is carrying out a research effort to assess and prioritize technology and related needs across the criminal justice community. This research effort, called the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative (PCJNI), is a component of the Criminal Justice Requirements and Resources Consortium (RRC) and is intended to support innovation within the criminal justice enterprise. For more information about the RRC and the PCJNI, please see www.rand.org/well-being/justice-policy/projects/priority-criminal-justice-needs.

This report is one product of that effort. In March 2021, RAND Corporation researchers and University of Denver staff conducted an expert workshop on leveraging technology to support prisoner reentry. The workshop was convened to identify high-priority technology needs for improving reentry outcomes. This report presents the proceedings of that workshop, topics considered, needs that the workshop participants developed, and overarching themes that emerged from the discussion. This report should be of interest to correctional administrators, reentry services providers, technology providers, and the research community. Other RAND research reports from the PCJNI that might be of interest are

- Joe Russo, Michael J. D. Vermeer, Dulani Woods, and Brian A. Jackson, *Community Supervision in a Digital World: Challenges and Opportunities*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A108-10, 2021
- Joe Russo, Dulani Woods, George B. Drake, and Brian A. Jackson, *Leveraging Technology to Enhance Community Supervision: Identifying Needs to Address Current and Emerging Concerns*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3213-NIJ, 2019
- Joe Russo, Dulani Woods, John S. Shaffer, and Brian A. Jackson, *Countering Threats to Correctional Institutional Security: Identifying Innovation Needs to Address Current and Emerging Concerns*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2933-NIJ, 2019.

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Alaska Reentry Partnership

A statewide coalition of individuals and organizations promoting success for justice-involved Alaskans at all phases of their involvement---pretrial, incarceration, reentry. Members include people with lived experience, family members, reentry coalitions, community providers, state and local agencies.

Access to Digital Technology to Better Serve Justice-Involved Alaskans

The Alaska Reentry Partnership supports the Department of Corrections (DOC)'s efforts to expand opportunities for inmates to access digital technology for access to rehabilitative programming and activities, including: vocational training, education, treatment, recovery, reentry planning, housing and employment assistance, peer support, faith-based, tribal, and visitation—all of which increase the likelihood of success in the community and reduced recidivism. Successful reentry means safer communities.

Since COVID, Alaska's prisons and halfway houses have been challenged with staff shortages. Improved access to digital technology will offer more options for rehabilitative programming and activities when staff aren't available.

In today's world, people need to be 'digitally literate' for basic functioning—filling out applications, applying for jobs, banking, communication, etc. People who have been incarcerated for decades may not have the skills to operate and be successful in a digital world, all critical for reentry success.

The Partnership also recommends updating institutional policies and infrastructure inside Alaska's prisons, halfway houses, and therapeutic court settings to better provide safe and secure video conferencing, closed circuit education channels, telehealth, digital tablets, computer labs, and more.

HB 35 (Rep. Himschoot) and SB 19 (Sen. Myers) have introduced bills that will remove a barrier in state law that restricts inmates inside Alaska's correctional facilities from utilizing certain electronic devices, such as computers or digital tablets.