

## Work Release Program

### Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) work release program was established by the state legislature in 1967 (M.S. 241.26). This statute authorizes the commissioner of corrections to permit carefully-screened incarcerated persons to work at paid employment or participate in approved vocational programming in the community.

The DOC contracts on a per diem basis for work release services. The current average daily population of participants on work release is 167 (fiscal year 2022). The goal of work release is to enhance public safety by providing increased supervision and structure while participants transition from prison to the community.

### Criteria

In accordance with state law, incarcerated people may be eligible for work release after they have served at least one-half of their term of imprisonment. Department policy allows program participation of up to 12 months prior to their supervised release date.

Before acceptance into the program, incarcerated people must have a demonstrated need for transition services and show positive adjustment in work and school programming, treatment programming, or programs offered at medium and/or minimum-security facilities.

Incarcerated people who are determined to be at high risk for re-offending are excluded from participation. This determination is based on current and prior criminal behavior, institutional adjustment, substance use history, and the Minnesota Screening Tool Assessing Recidivism Risk (MnSTARR) assessment.

### Components

The DOC Work Release Unit administers contracts with county jails, jail annexes, and community corrections residential facilities to house work release participants.

The work release program provides a continuum of care by connecting participants to appropriate resources in the community as a follow-up to institution programs. It is a transition to employment and stable residency.

Upon recommendation of the Work Release Unit and institution program review teams, the department's Hearings and Release Unit determines whether conditional release will be granted to participate in work release.

While on work release, participants are required to maintain full-time schedules and abstain from the use of mood-altering substances. Participants are under close supervision while in work release facilities and are subject to random urinalysis and breathalyzer tests to detect chemical use. Those with substance use histories are also required to participate in Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or relapse prevention programs. In addition, participants may attend community-based cognitive skills or other self-help groups to assist with transition.

## Program Requirement

Upon release facility, participants are required to seek employment or begin approved vocational programs. If they have difficulty securing employment, participants are referred to a community program that assists in job-seeking.

The majority of participants find employment within two weeks of placement on work release. Participants must pay a portion of their housing costs while in the work release facility and must pay court-ordered restitution, fines, or other assessments.

## Strict Rules

Participants on work release must adhere to strict rules as established by the department and the contracting facility. Participants must be accountable for their whereabouts at all times. All freedom to move about in the community is considered a privilege and must be earned through their positive program adjustment. Violation of program rules results in sanctions ranging from loss of privileges, to restriction to the facility for a period of time, to a return to prison. The commission of a misdemeanor or felony results in immediate termination from the program and a return to prison. If participants fail to abide by the conditions of furloughs/passes, this is considered escape behavior and may result in discipline and/or new charges.

## Transition

The work release program assists participants with their transition from prison to community. In order to facilitate this transition, those on work release who have maintained steady employment and have followed all program rules may be afforded limited pass activity in the community. They must be accountable for their whereabouts at all times. All freedom to move about in the community is considered a privilege and must be earned through their positive program adjustment. Violation of program rules results in sanctions ranging from loss of privileges, to restriction to the facility for a period of time, to a return to prison. Failure to abide by the conditions of furloughs/passes is considered escape behavior and may result in discipline and/or new charges.

## Further Information

For further information, contact the Work Release Unit at (651) 361-7127.

### *Some basic facts about work release*

- For several decades, work release has served as one of the fundamental elements of Minnesota's state and local corrections systems.
- Empirical research suggests a positive association between employment and an individual's decision to not commit additional crimes.
- Less than two percent of those on work release committed new offenses while participating in the program.
- Work release is cost-effective. Participants reside in community-based correctional facilities for an average cost of \$73.12 per day.
- Work release participants contribute to their own transition. During fiscal year 2021, those on work release paid \$502,050 in room and board.