



Background

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 offenders to work at paid employment or participate in approved vocational programming in the community.

From 1968 to 1972, work release offenders were transferred to county jails, worked in the community during the day, and returned to the jail after work. In 1972, with the assistance of a federal grant, the DOC opened a work release center at the Salvation Army in Minneapolis.

Increases to offender populations created a need for more work release bed capacity and the department began contracting with local facilities for work release placements as a cost-effective means of managing the growth of this program. This resulted in the closing of the department-run center in 1982. The department continues to contract on a per diem basis for work release services. The current average daily population of male and female offenders in work release is 183 (fiscal year 2012).

Goal

The goal of work release is to enhance public safety by providing increased supervision and structure to offenders as they transition from prison to the community.

Criteria

In accordance with state law, offenders may be eligible for work release after they have served at least one-half of their term of imprisonment. Department policy further requires offenders to be within eight months of their supervised release date.

Before acceptance into the program, offenders 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.

Offenders determined to be at high risk for reoffending are excluded from participation. This determination is based on current and prior criminal behavior, institutional adjustment, chemical dependency history, and Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) score.

Components

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

The work release program provides a continuum of care by connecting offenders to appropriate resources in the community as a follow-up to institution programs. It is a transition to employment and stable residency for offenders with these needs. It is also a step toward the community from the controlled environment of the institution.

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

While on work release, offenders are required to be fully employed and abstain from the use of mood-altering substances. Offenders are under close supervision while in work release facilities and are subject to random urinalysis and breathalyzer tests to detect chemical use. Chemically dependent offenders are also required to participate in Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or relapse prevention programs. In addition, offenders may participate in cognitive skills or other self-help groups offered in the community.

Work Requirement

Upon placement in a work release facility, the offender is required to seek employment. If an offender has difficulty securing employment, he or she is referred to a community program that assists in developing job-seeking skills.

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

Transition

The work release program assists offenders with their transition from prison to community. In order to facilitate this transition, offenders on work release who have maintained steady employment and have followed all program rules may be afforded limited pass activity in the community. Offenders 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.

Strict Rules

Offenders participating in work release must adhere to strict rules as established by the department and the contracting facility. Offenders may be terminated from the program or lose privileges, depending upon the severity of any rule infraction. The commission of a misdemeanor or felony results in immediate termination from the program and return to prison.

Further Information

For further information about the department's work release program, contact:

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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. Work release is an excellent method of helping offenders make successful transitions from prison to the community.
- Empirical research suggests a positive association between employment and an offender's decision to not commit additional crimes.
- Less than two percent of offenders on work release committed new offenses while participating in the program
- Work release is cost-effective. Offenders reside in community-based correctional facilities for an average cost of \$59.27 for males per day and \$88.38 for females per day.
- Offenders on work release help offset other costs. During fiscal year 2012, offenders on work release paid \$368,732 in room and board and \$31,051 in restitution to crime victims.

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