

Report to the Law and Justice Interim Committee

Statewide Reentry Task Force

June 25, 2015





Montana Department of Corrections

Director's Office

Steve Bullock, Governor
Mike Batista, Director

Law and Justice Interim Committee
Legislative Services Division
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Dear Law and Justice Interim Committee members:

On behalf of the Statewide Reentry Task Force created by House Bill 68, I am pleased to present the 2015 final report detailing the recommendations related to developing and supporting successful reentry initiatives in Montana. These recommendations have been compiled after thorough research, analysis and discussion.

The Task Force began meeting on a regular basis in August 2013 and has continued to examine Montana's correctional system and assess the application of original solutions as well as those proven effective in other states. They heard from victims and nationally renowned and local corrections professionals who discussed how offenders can successfully make the transition back into their communities. They discussed potential partnerships with other state and local government agencies that could help the community and offenders overcome the barriers to success.

The report also incorporates the ideas presented during public comment at the meetings, as well as through the technical assistance provided by Department of Corrections' staff.

The Task Force and the Department of Corrections extend their sincere appreciation to the Law and Justice Interim Committee for its support in this undertaking and for the opportunity to bring together representatives of the many organizations that must work together to support successful inmate reentry.

Sincerely,

Mike Batista
Statewide Reentry Task Force Chairman
Department of Corrections Director

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I. Statewide Reentry Task Force Membership

The 15-member Statewide Reentry Task Force consists of:

Chairman, Mike Batista	Department of Corrections Director
Nancy Coopersmith	Office of Public Instruction
Stacy Collette	Department of Commerce
Carrie Lutkehus	Department of Public Health & Human Services
Steve Olson	Department of Labor and Industry
Dr. Cody Warner	Montana State University, university system representative
Matthew Dale	Department of Justice, restorative justice representative
Derek VanLuchene	Ryan United President/Founder, crime victims representative
Dr. Gary Mihelish	NAMI Board of Directors, mental health advocate
Casey Schreiner	State Representative (HD22)
Jason Smith	Governor's Office, Director of Indian Affairs
Moe Wosepka	Montana Catholic Conference, faith-based representative
Donna Huston	Center for Children & Families Executive Director, community representative
Timothy Allred	Montana Board of Pardons and Parole Executive Director

The Task Force thanks Siri Smillie, Governor's Office Communities and Safety Policy Advisor, and Loraine Wodnik, Department of Corrections Deputy Director, for their consistent participation.

II. Introduction

Montana's Statewide Reentry Task Force began work in August 2013 to address the responsibilities assigned in House Bill 68 as outlined in Title 46, Chapter 23, Part 9 (2012). The act tasked the Department of Corrections, in consultation with the Task Force, with the following responsibilities:

- (1) Examine and implement programs that will help bring community resources into prisons to support inmate reentry planning and preparation;
- (2) Develop partnerships with and contract with community-based organizations that provide needed services to released inmates in areas such as mental health, chemical dependency, employment, housing, healthcare, faith-based services, parenting, relationship services, and victim impact panels;
- (3) Coordinate with community restorative justice programs to ensure victim concerns and opportunities for restorative justice practices, including restitution, are considered during an offender's reentry; and
- (4) Collect data, conduct program evaluation, and develop findings and any recommendations about reentry and recidivism and include this information in an annual report to be made available to the Law and Justice Interim Committee.

The Department and Task Force recognize that more than 97 percent of all offenders are eventually released from prison into the community and it is the responsibility of the Department and service providers to prepare offenders in an effort to improve their chances of success upon release. The Task Force has focused on identifying evidence-based practices – the techniques or programs that have proven to reliably reduce the likelihood of criminal behavior – and assessing those practices for possible implementation in Montana.

Recidivism, defined as the return to prison for any reason within three years of release, is a threat to public safety, costly to the state and challenging for Montana families and communities. By utilizing evidence-based practices throughout communities and employing the Task Force's recommendations, Montana can anticipate an eventual leveling off or reduction in the prison population. This change in the prison population will ultimately improve public safety by decreasing recidivism and the cost of crime to taxpayers. As fewer offenders recidivate, the impact will be evident at the state level as felony offenders supervised by the Department are more successful in the community. Likewise, we can expect the same trend in the adult misdemeanor population as diversionary programs at the county jail level lead to a decline in the local jail population.

While the Department has focused for years on integrating inmates back into the community, the renewed focus upon reentry emphasizes a collaborative interagency response that creates new connections, provides continuity of services and plans to close

the gaps between the efforts of all parties involved. Recidivism reduction in Montana means less crime and fewer victims, safer correctional programs, more tax-paying citizens and a more qualified work force.

The recommendations outlined in this report represent the strategies the Task Force believes to be important in furthering the state's offender reentry initiative. Some recommendations may require legislative changes, and others additional funding and staff resources beyond the department's existing levels.

What is needed to implement the various requirements of each recommendation is indicated in the report by the following notations:



Indicates legislative approval needed for statutory change



Indicates legislative approval needed for additional funding or staff

III. Review

Beginning in August 2013, the Statewide Reentry Task Force began diligently working towards building a foundation for improved reentry services and programs in Montana. In preparation for the *2014 Report to the Law and Justice Interim Committee*, the Task Force studied the complexities of the criminal justice system in Montana, interviewed former inmates who had experienced varying levels of success in transition, and listened to presentations from professionals within the academic, victim advocacy, criminal justice, and service-based fields. Presenters to the Task Force included individuals with knowledge or experience of barriers affecting the successful transition of populations such as youth, Native Americans, males, females, and those with mental health and chemical dependency issues.

Following the summer of 2014 and the publication of its first annual report, the Task Force began to focus upon the recommendation to the Law and Justice Interim Committee deemed the most integral to creating the framework for successful reentry programs in Montana: the **creation of community-based reentry centers and programs**. The Task Force recognizes that efforts to assist the population involved in the criminal justice system may be duplicative among government agencies such as the Departments of Public Health and Human Services and Corrections, and between community-based organizations. To streamline efforts, government and community partnerships must encourage information sharing and a cohesive effort to provide uninterrupted services to offenders.

Homelessness is closely associated with recidivism and offenders face significant barriers in locating and maintaining affordable housing. The Task Force discussed the lack of public housing available to former inmates and the Department of Commerce took an active role in discovering solutions. Staff at Department of Commerce assessed the application of Section 8 housing standards and regulations to determine if Montana imposed more restrictions than necessary on offender eligibility. Montana's Section 8 Housing Voucher Program is supported entirely through federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds and is the federal government's major program for assisting low-income families, elderly, and disabled individuals to afford safe and decent housing in the private market. Montana must follow Section 8 federal regulations set by HUD, as well as the state Administration Manual adopted by the Department of Commerce.

The Department of Commerce found that the state Administration Manual restricted the eligibility of specific offenders to a greater degree than required under federal law, for example:

- HUD regulations require the state to consider the past three years of specific criminal activity when determining eligibility. The Administration Manual required the state to consider the past five years until 2015 when Commerce modified the guide to match the three year federal regulation.
- HUD allows the state discretion in determining which type of offenses might prohibit participation, however the state set a low tolerance policy that excluded potential participants.

As a result of the Department of Commerce's participation on the Reentry Task Force, these barriers were identified and the program will be continually assessed to reduce excessive limitations on housing eligibility for some criminal offenders.

Over the past 12 months, the Department of Corrections created the **Office of Offender Reentry** staffed with a cross-section of professionals representing the Director's office, probation and parole, information technology, and secure care custody. These individuals have coordinated department-wide efforts to:

- increase internal communication
- embrace a team-oriented approach that focuses on individualized reentry planning for offenders
- better understand evidence-based practices

Additionally, in response to the 2014 annual report, the Department incorporated Task Force recommendations into the department-wide initiatives led by the Department's leadership team, adding initiatives to:

- develop mentoring programs for offenders
- develop programming connecting offenders and family during incarceration and following release
- improve access to health insurance upon release
- invest in program models that reduce recidivism

The Department has also outlined a **three-tiered individualized case plan** structure that will be utilized statewide in correctional facilities and programs. The tiered case plan addresses the unique challenges faced by offenders at each stage of the reentry process, and includes:

- an institutional plan
- a reentry plan and
- a community plan.

On-going efforts are focusing on additional Task Force recommendations including allowing for information sharing and developing programming that addresses trauma.

The Task Force has heard from representatives of the Office of Offender Reentry as well as national experts engaged in reentry work, including Dennis Schrantz, Executive Director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency. The Task Force has reviewed the analysis of the Montana correctional system provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts and National Governor's Association. To provide guidance in Montana's effort to improve upon reentry efforts, the Task Force has reviewed and recommended models developed by the National Reentry Policy Council that have proven effective in other states.

And lastly, due to the support and efforts of the Law and Justice Interim Committee, Senate Bill 101 sponsored by Senator Driscoll to allow the Department of Corrections to set a minimum percentage of inmate earnings saved, was passed into law by the 2015 Legislative Session. This statute, resulting from the 2014 Task Force recommendations, allows the Department to require that a percentage of inmate earnings be saved in a reentry subaccount and allows those funds to be disbursed directly to the inmate's landlord, the inmate, or approved recipients including service providers. Senate Bill 101 gives the Department the authority to lessen the financial difficulties inmates face upon release and ensure that savings are distributed to services providers whose involvement will continue the offender's care and reduce the likelihood an offender will recidivate.

IV. Task Force Recommendations

A. To create community-based reentry centers and programs

The following recommendations for community-based reentry centers and programs have been expanded upon from the 2014 annual report. The recommendation is based on a model described in the Council of State Governments' *Report of the Reentry Policy Council* that combined suggestions from the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Reentry Policy Council advocates for a multi-disciplinary and collaborative approach to primary areas of focus including housing, employment and mental health services. In addition to these areas, the Task Force has included grant development to address areas in which resources are limited and additional funds may be available.

Montana communities vary in terms of readiness to participate in reentry efforts, available resources and population. In areas such as Bozeman, Missoula, Helena, and Billings, faith-based organizations, county attorneys, mentors, previously incarcerated individuals, landlords, and other service providers have gathered to pool resources and enhance inmate reentry. To ensure each community benefits from efforts, regardless of the number of participants, solutions must be broad and adaptable to ensure that different communities can incorporate a framework that assists with **recidivism reduction strategies**. Despite local differences, reduction strategies:

- must be applied using a scientifically endorsed framework to reduce barriers to reintegration and address risks associated with formerly incarcerated individuals
- require multilevel supports to prepare individuals for transition (Woods, Lanza, Dyson & Gordon, 2013)

The Task Force is developing a **community-based reentry tool box** that can provide information about best practices in:

- culturally relevant programs
- pre-release planning
- developing community coordination
- addressing victim concerns
- developing resources such as housing, employment, restorative justice programs, and vocational and educational programs.

Actively involving individuals who comprise the reentering offender's support group, especially family members, is a key component of a functioning reentry structure. Offenders who participate in community support are less likely to recidivate than those who do not engage (Woods, et al., 2013). This on-going effort will be revised continuously as the Task Force gathers input from stakeholders including existing local reentry coalitions, statewide partners, law enforcement and victims. The Task Force anticipates meeting with a variety of stakeholders across the state to ensure the framework remains relevant to communities.

i. Individual Level

A successful reentry organizational structure must include a group of individuals who support returning citizens in the transition planning process, and guide the individual from the institution back into the community. These **Offender Reentry Transition Teams** are comprised of:

- key local service providers
- family and other support group members
- Department of Corrections' staff who address an offender's risks and needs and assist in implementing an effective transition plan, while maintaining a primary focus on public safety

These transition teams have proven successful in communities like Bozeman, Missoula and Billings. The Task Force anticipates receiving continuous feedback from the practicing communities to expand and refine the framework.

ii. Local Level

Also at a local level that is adaptable to the unique needs of the community, **Local Reentry Alliances** will be developed to:

- oversee and monitor the local implementation process
- coordinate local community involvement in the overall statewide recidivism-reduction strategy

These alliances will help build support for the local implementation of the framework and educate the community on how the strategies create safer neighborhoods and better citizens. Many communities in Montana already have these types of alliances in place and they will be invited to participate; in other communities, alliances will be developed by the community with support from the Department and the Task Force.

iii. State Level

The Task Force will continue to act as a representative organization providing statewide policy recommendations to both the Law and Justice Interim Committee and the **State Reentry Alliance**. The State Reentry Alliance will include delegates from each of the organizations represented on the Task Force, and will be expanded to include service-based organizations, nonprofit institutions, and faith-based partners. These additions will enhance the team's perspective and support a statewide framework that will improve collaboration and coordination of offender transition services.

To various degrees, these efforts are currently embodied within communities in Montana that have taken an active role in creating their own reentry coalitions. The Task Force and Department are eager to learn from the successes of these community-based efforts and incorporate the solutions communities have identified into the statewide framework.

Highlights from existing community efforts include:

Paul in Bozeman was released from the Gallatin County Detention Center after nine months of incarceration and was unable to return to his previous home, had lost his job, and was without financial or social support. He became involved with the local reentry initiative, **Fresh Start**, and began making progress towards reintegration with the community.

Upon Paul's release, Fresh Start was able to coordinate housing, appropriate clothing, a job placement company, and a network of support including a recovery group and sponsors. Although his release has not been without difficulty, Paul continues to work towards success and maintaining a life without returning to incarceration. He has proactively addressed an outstanding warrant in a neighboring county, continues to make payments towards his fines, has begun saving money and anticipates locating long term and stable housing in the near future. He regularly participates in anger management, counseling and several recovery groups. As a father, he has also organized supervised visits with his children and has begun to pay his child support.

Levi in Missoula was incarcerated at the age of 16 and spent 15 years incarcerated. After growing up in prison, he now must register as a violent offender. Levi does not have a history of drug or alcohol issues and he has family in the Missoula community and a great attitude. He was apprehensive about probation and parole officers and a support group, having received much of his information while incarcerated from those who had returned to prison. He thought it would be easy for him to succeed based on his own determination and using his own resources. Unfortunately, using this approach, his new relationship began to crumble and he struggled to find both employment and housing. He had no employment history or credit history.

Levi was able to take part in a pilot program at the job service for reentering offenders and the project gave him confidence to seek employment. He has now passed his one-year mark of being out of prison, is a supervisor at a roofing company, in a new and healthy relationship, and has moved into an apartment. He has not violated his terms of supervision and anticipates starting college in the coming year. Levi is finishing a year involvement in the Missoula reentry support group and reports the communication and support he has received from the facilitators and the group members have taught him far more than he ever expected. Levi is thankful for learning from his peers' experiences, and for taking on new challenges and having new experiences in the community. The group has given him a place to learn and practice his newly acquired communication skills.

Kim in Missoula was released from prison in October 2014 after serving a three-year sentence for manslaughter. She was 65, living in a motel and was concerned about her chances of success. Through the **Missoula Interfaith Collaborative**, she was connected with a volunteer mentor who acted as her "bridge" to life in the community. She has now begun working on a Master Gardener's certificate through Missoula County Extension, volunteers at the Montana Food Bank Network repackaging food for statewide food banks, and has joined a women's knitting and social group. With her

newfound confidence and support from positive social peers, Kim is seeking paid work and has found excellent housing close to public transportation.


B. Define Reentry Success

To determine future recommendations and measure the effects of implementation, it is important to define reentry success and the anticipated outcomes of the multilevel efforts, including those of the Task Force and the other entities involved. The Task Force has determined that, for each level of effort, we must define and evaluate reentry success. Although a decline in statewide recidivism rates is the anticipated benefit of enhanced reentry services, it is not an outcome that measures successful reentry strategies.

i. State policy level

Reentry is a philosophy that guides the activities and goals of correctional institutions and programs, and the service-based entities that serve the justice-involved population (Petersilia, 2004). Reentry is the sum of all activities and programs conducted to prepare a reintegrating offender for return to the community, including how they spent time while incarcerated, the release process, and how the community adapts to release including supervision strategies. As a process and not a program, reentry philosophy at the state level is broad and outcomes are difficult to measure (Wilkinson, 2001). It is possible however, to employ a process evaluation to document policies, practices and implementation barriers across the state. Process evaluations are crucial to the success of diversion and release programs and, when added to employment of evidence-based research, can assist policymakers in identifying areas of improvement (Huck & Bowen, 2013). The Department, in conjunction with the Task Force, will endeavor in the coming biennium to address process evaluations for reentry services in Montana.

ii. Program level

Although recidivism reduction is the goal of reentry efforts, applying evidence-based strategies and programs and measuring the specific individual impacts is a more effective way to assess outcomes (Duwe, 2013). The programs that are implemented statewide to reduce the likelihood an offender will engage in criminal activity are quite diverse and vary in location, availability and target population served. For example, contracted service providers such as prerelease centers, community-based treatment programs, and mentoring programs are utilized statewide. An impact evaluation may compare the during- and post-program recidivism outcomes of program participants to a comparison group to determine, on an individual program level, if the program reduced problems related to criminal behavior, employment, housing, mental health, and family relationships (Walters, 2013). The Department will pursue creating an internal structure and attaining grant funding that supports impact evaluations and will encourage service providers to engage in similar assessment measures. 

C. Public Education & Outreach

For reentry efforts in Montana to become successful, communities to which recently incarcerated individuals are returning must understand the risks associated with reintegration, as well as the types of offenders who are returning. Service providers and community members often distance themselves from offenders and react unfavorably to them, anticipating violent behavior and lack of accountability (Snider & Reysen, 2014). Mental illness and substance abuse are common traits of this population and these individuals often face 'triple stigmatization' which threatens their ability to reintegrate. Offenders' presence often causes feelings of mistrust and heightened discomfort in the community (Clayton, O'Connell, Bellamy, Benedict, & Rowe, 2013).

According to the *Department of Corrections 2015 Biennial Report*, 'possession of drugs' is the most common adult conviction for females and the second most common for males. Additionally, more than half of inmates have an addiction, mental illness, or both. Without appropriate support systems and community-based care, this puts them at an increased risk for recidivism (Rich, Chandler, Williams, Dumont, Wang, Taxman, & Western, 2014). While offenders are often rejected by a community that may lack empathy and an understanding of risk factors, public education about programming completion, real or imagined threats to public safety, job skills development and reentry efforts, decreases the likelihood that an offender will face undue discrimination (Snider & Reysen, 2014).

i. Victim Outreach

The Task Force recognizes that victims of crime are integral participants in creating a statewide offender reentry initiative. The engagement of victims of crime provides a strong foundation for reentry partnerships and the perspectives provided by these stakeholders, including an **understanding of victim trauma**, are important information for justice professionals and community members. Recommendations include that a significant effort is made by local community-based reentry alliances to include victims of crime as stakeholders in their efforts and also that the Department provide support when requested to enhance this involvement.

The Task Force also recommends that the Department take steps to provide crime victims a greater awareness of the rights and services available to them as their offenders prepare to enter the community, as well as a better understanding of how reentry efforts increase public safety. **Outreach to victims** should be increased and educational materials on reentry made available for victims of crime, victim advocates and other service providers. These materials should be made accessible online.

Additionally, the Department should increase support for victim-based programming for offenders to convey the harm resulting from crime and to support restorative justice programs (e.g., victim impact panels, impact of crime classes and other educational opportunities).



ii. Housing Outreach

The Task Force recommends that steps be taken to educate community members who provide housing opportunities.

Public housing – Offenders are not eligible for federal HUD public housing assistance if they:

- must register for life on a sex-offender registry
- have been convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine while on public assistance
- have been evicted from public housing in the past three years, unless they complete rehabilitation programs

However, due to misconceptions about federal regulations, many Montana housing authorities restrict assistance eligibility based on previous felony convictions beyond what federal regulations require, creating an unnecessary barrier to success.

Engaging and educating these public housing authorities is a key step in opening the door for public housing assistance for offenders and their families.

Tax credits – Considerable **dollar-for-dollar federal tax credits** are available to private entities that develop and maintain low income properties. Greater efforts to inform landlords or prospective landlords about these opportunities should be initiated, focusing on those who may have the capital to invest in building housing resources that would be suitable for offenders. In addition to creating materials to enhance public awareness, the Task Force recommends that the Department engage in existing community-based reentry efforts to support outreach to landlords or prospective landlords and to enhance involvement in these alliances.

D. Access to Housing

As noted in the *2014 Report to the Law and Justice Interim Committee*, homelessness and recidivism are closely associated. Several studies have demonstrated offenders' homelessness and use of shelters, both before and after spending time in jail or prison, increase re-incarceration rates between 17% and 23% (Michaels, Zoloth, Alcabes, Braslow & Safyer, 1992). Additionally, many homeless individuals are prior offenders; 50% of homeless individuals who participated in a Washington study had a criminal record and almost 30% had at least one felony conviction (Malone, 2009). In general, there is a large overlap between the homeless and offender populations, and Montana could benefit significantly from creating easier access to housing resources throughout the state including reservations.

The Task Force recommends that the Department and additional state stakeholders **examine solutions to homelessness** specific to high-risk individuals including Native Americans to support inmate reentry planning and preparation and to reduce the additional negative impacts of homelessness on communities. The Task Force has reviewed Utah's *'Housing First' model*, which provides housing to chronically homeless individuals. This tenant assistance is not contingent on any particular factor, which is

distinctly different from housing programs that mandate the successful completion of various treatment programs in order to receive assistance. Under the Housing First model, in return for housing assistance, tenants pay \$50 or 30% of their monthly adjusted income every month, whichever is higher.

In reviewing the *Housing First* model, the Task Force learned from Lloyd S. Pendleton, Director of the Utah Homeless Task Force. Utah has been a leader in homelessness reduction, establishing a statewide priority to end chronic homelessness. In just eight years, Utah has reduced the chronic homeless population by 91%, and is on target to reach its 100% reduction goal within its target timeline.* Pendleton estimates that Utah's Housing First program costs approximately \$10,000 per person, about half the \$20,000 it costs to treat and care for homeless people on the street. We could anticipate similar cost savings in Montana where it costs an estimated \$24,000 annually to incarcerate an individual in a county jail. The cost of homelessness to the public is often compounded by emergency medical costs and other public support services that significantly increase the overall fiscal impact. Since the median rent in urban areas of Montana is approximately \$9,500 per year, the state could see a drastic cost savings by providing apartments to homeless individuals as opposed to treating the individuals while on the street.

A *Housing First* program model in Montana would reduce the likelihood that a recently released individual would recidivate as offenders comprise a considerable portion of the homeless population. The use of these models in other states has illustrated that employment of these strategies would also likely benefit many populations who are not yet involved in the justice system including victims of crime, veterans, and those who suffer from mental illness and substance abuse.

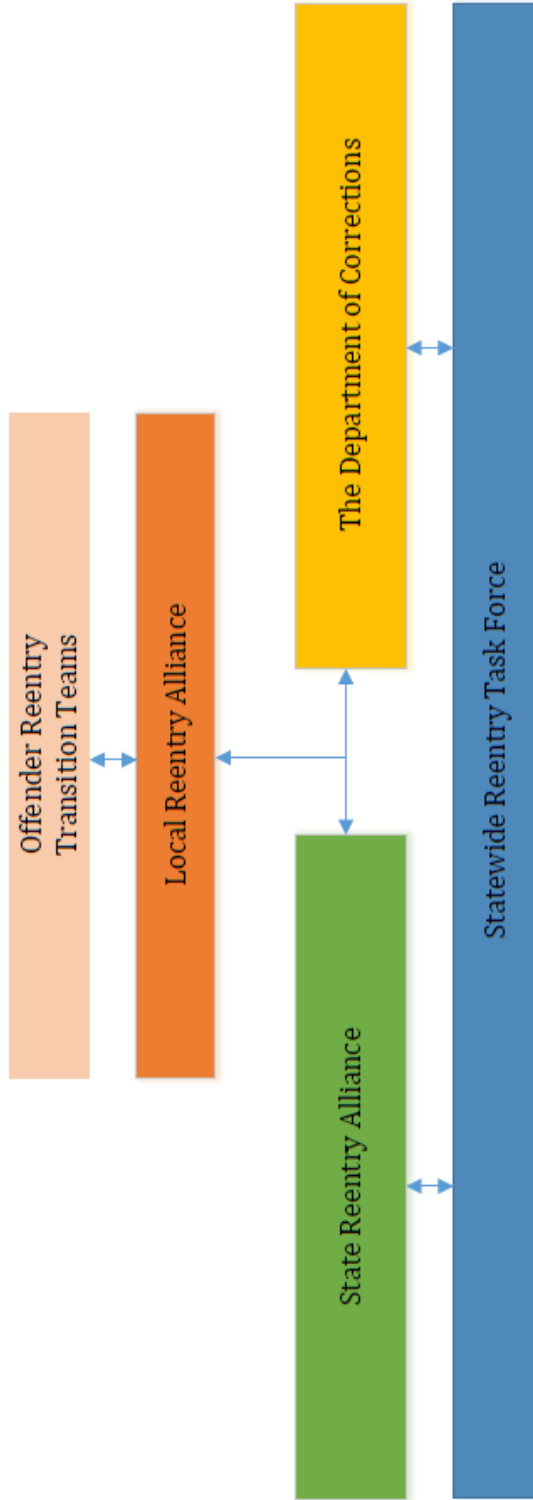
*NOTE: Utah's *Housing First* program excludes sex offenders and other particularly difficult-to-place offenders restricted from public housing benefits by federal regulations. In June 2015, the program was forming a pilot project to house homeless women who were leaving incarceration and were still under community supervision.

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**The Montana Adult Offender Reentry Initiative
Safer Neighborhoods, Better Citizens
Montana Adult Offender Reentry Initiative Organizational Structure**



Participants in the following groups are responsible for oversight or direct provision of service in areas including employment, vocational training, education, housing, healthcare, mental health, alcohol and drug addiction services, and family and child welfare services.

- Offender Reentry Transition Teams include representatives who guide the individual from the institution back into the community through coordinated services.
- Local Reentry Alliances include Law Enforcement, Community and Faith-Based Organizations, Community Corrections Facilities & Programs, Victim Advocates, Successful Offenders, Local Jails, etc.
- The Department of Corrections includes a cross section of staff dedicated to continually improving internal processes and planning the provision of reentry services.
- State Reentry Alliance includes representatives from: Board of Pardons and Parole, Victim Advocates, Community Service Providers, Faith-based Organizations, Law Enforcement, Departments of Labor and Industry, Public Health & Human Services and Commerce.
- Statewide Reentry Task Force includes executive representation from: Governor's Office, Faith-based community, Departments of Labor and Industry, Health & Human Services, Commerce, Victim Advocates etc.



The Montana Adult Offender Reentry Initiative Safer Neighborhoods, Better Citizens Local Organizational Structure



The local organizational structure outlined in the Montana Adult Offender Reentry Initiative requires clear definition of roles and responsibilities with guidance for development, which will be provided by the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) Office of Offender Reentry. The state of Montana will implement the Reentry Initiative Framework beginning with at least three pilot sites in 2015 and 2016 (Missoula, Bozeman, and Billings), and then add additional sites until efforts are implemented statewide. Each pilot site has two key groups of stakeholders who will be instrumental to the wide range of activities needed for implementation of the Framework:

Local Reentry Alliances

Develop, oversee, and monitor the local implementation process and coordinate local community involvement in the overall statewide Reentry Initiative development process. The alliances will help build support for the local implementation of the Framework and educate the community on how the initiative will create safer neighborhoods and better citizens. Many communities already have these types of alliances in place and they will be invited to participate; in other communities, alliances will be developed by the community with support from the Office of Offender Reentry.

An Alliance is composed of representatives from community-based service providers that must be included in successful reentry planning. These representatives are active on the Alliance because of encouragement and support from partner government agency leaders who empower their active participation.

Each Alliance is organized under three co-chairs:

- An administrator from a local correctional facility or local law enforcement agency.
- A DOC Probation and Parole Bureau regional administrator or designee.
- A community representative drawn from the large number of faith, human service, and planning organizations who are critical to the local reentry effort.

The three co-chairs of the Alliance will work with a local community coordinator, as available, or community stakeholders who will be resourced for each site using a combination of local, state, federal and/or foundation funds.

Within each Alliance, there are multiple work groups focused on efforts related to specific areas of need within the community. Such focus areas include Offender Transitional Services, Employment, Housing, and Grant Development. Other work groups may be developed as needed.

Offender Reentry Transition Teams

Transition teams support returning citizens in the transition planning process, and guide the individual from the institution back into the community through a holistic case-management approach. These teams are developed for each returning citizen and are comprised of key local service providers drawn from the membership of the Local Service Provider Alliance, as well as from DOC staff. Team member selection is based on the returning citizen's individual needs, as identified through a validated risk and needs instrument, and the overall goal is the development and implementation of an effective transition plan.



The Montana Adult Offender Reentry Initiative Safer Neighborhoods, Better Citizens State Organizational Structure



The Montana Adult Offender Reentry Initiative was formed by the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) to respond to challenges facing citizens returning to their communities from prison. The Reentry Initiative is a state and local partnership managed by the DOC's Office of Offender Reentry and involves the DOC, Board of Pardons and Parole, other state agencies, community-based service providers, and faith-based groups whose missions are critical to offender reentry reform. It is centered on the principle that every individual released from prison should have the tools and support needed to succeed in the community. Its primary objective is to increase the success rate of individuals leaving prison by providing them with a seamless plan of services and supervision beginning at the time of their incarceration and continuing through their reintegration in the community. Attaining this objective will result in fewer crime victims and crimes committed by former offenders.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REENTRY INITIATIVE

In the fall of 2014, the National Governor's Association and Pew Charitable Trust, Center for the States worked with the Montana Governor's Office, the DOC, the Board of Pardons and Parole, and other state agencies and community stakeholders to conduct a review of Montana's corrections system. The findings revealed that, while praiseworthy work was underway, increased coordination among the various efforts was needed to overcome the barriers to reducing recidivism. In response, the DOC contracted with the Michigan-based Center for Justice Innovation to facilitate development and implementation of a comprehensive reentry improvement strategy. After extensive data analysis and meetings with stakeholders, the DOC collaborated with state agencies to create the Reentry Initiative Framework, laying the foundation for a five-year effort expected to make Montana a national leader in recidivism reduction.

To address the Governor's directive for statewide collaboration, the DOC is developing a state-level organizational structure to fully encourage stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of the Reentry Initiative. The structure begins with the Task Force providing policy recommendations and the State Service Provider Alliance guiding operational-level offender reentry reforms through work groups and department-based teams.

The Office of Offender Reentry

In November 2014, Director Mike Batista created this office to implement offender reentry reforms. Responsibilities include:

- Supporting the use of evidence-based, community-centered services to support successful offender reentry to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety.
- Ensuring collaboration among stakeholders.
- Ensuring the appropriate and responsible use of cost savings realized by justice reforms.
- Collaborating with the local reentry alliances, State Reentry Alliance, and the Statewide Reentry Task Force to develop and execute a robust and systematic offender reentry plan for Montana to assure the effective supervision and delivery of appropriate services to returning citizens.

Statewide Reentry Task Force

The Task Force is chaired by DOC Director Mike Batista and comprised of individuals and organizations from whom the DOC has sought – and will continue to seek – advice and counsel on

improving the success of Montana's returning citizens. Taskforce members include representatives from the Montana Governor's Office, Departments of Justice, Commerce, Public Health and Human Services, and Labor and Industry, and representatives from community-based service providers and faith-based groups. These stakeholders assist the reentry reforms by acting as conduits for communication and building community awareness, support, and participation.

State Reentry Alliance

As Montana adopts the Framework as the roadmap for the Reentry Initiative, the State Reentry Alliance will expand to include service-based organizations, non-profit institutions, and faith-based partners. These additions will enhance the team's perspective and establish the Framework statewide. The Framework should be viewed as a preliminary plan that will be strengthened dramatically through full community engagement. The Alliance will:

- Provide the Statewide Reentry Task Force operational feedback and recommendations including information on identified barriers in each agency as the Framework is implemented throughout Montana.
- Identify methods to improve collaboration and coordination of offender transition services including cross-training, information-sharing, and programs to measure offender reentry management with well-defined, performance-based outcomes.
- Consult with state and local agencies, volunteer and faith-based organizations, and private and nonprofit community leaders with expertise in the areas of prison facilities, release decision-making, reentry, and community supervision to collaborate on offender transition issues and ways of improving operations.
- Provide recommendations to the Task Force for how state laws may be improved regarding improving transition services for potential inclusion in the annual report to the Law and Justice Interim Committee.

The State Reentry Alliance will function through the four following committees representing elements of a successful transition for offenders in Montana. Each of the committees has co-chairs appointed by members of the Statewide Reentry Task Force and efforts will be facilitated by a representative from the Office of Offender Reentry.

The Offender Transitional Services Committee: Given the importance of transition planning from intake through discharge from a correctional facility, a work group comprised of prison officials, community supervision and community justice leaders and service providers will be dedicated to transitional services. This committee will work to ensure stakeholders' perspectives and inputs are taken into account when developing the new processes and policies around transition planning.

The Housing and Employment Committees: Housing and employment for returning citizens are paramount for improved individual and system reentry outcomes. These two service areas are high priorities for the Statewide Reentry Task Force and improvement in these areas will be enhanced by feedback from agency and community stakeholder meetings to determine the state and community assets, barriers and gaps in availability of housing and employment. These committees will work to maximize assets, overcome barriers, and reduce the gaps in these two service areas.

The Grant Development Committee: A significant benefit of defining expectations for improving offender reentry through the Reentry Initiative is an enhanced ability to compete for local, state, federal and foundation grant funding. This committee will identify appropriate funding opportunities and assist with grant-writing activities to apply for and achieve enhanced funding. Federal funding for offender reentry under the Second Chance Act, for example, has grown dramatically over the past decade and state governments with comprehensive designs, strategies, and tactics to reduce recidivism have an excellent track record of receiving grant awards.