Washington State Department of Commerce

Biennial Report of the Statewide Reentry Council

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Report to the Legislature

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WASHINGTON STATEWIDE REENTRY COUNCIL

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Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

Overview

The Washington State Legislature established the Statewide Reentry Council in 2016 to enhance public safety and improve outcomes for individuals reentering society after incarceration under RCW 43.380. This report outlines the Council's legislative recommendations, focusing on racial equity and leveraging the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals to guide reentry practices. It also highlights the Council's accomplishments during the past biennium, demonstrating progress in reentry reform and advocacy efforts.

Legislative mandate

This report fulfills the legislative requirement under RCW 43.380.050(4), which mandates:

> (4) The council shall submit to the governor and appropriate committees of the legislature a preliminary report of its activities and recommendations by December 1st of its first year of operation, and every two years thereafter.

Highlights

- Governor Jay Inslee signed Executive Order 24-03, called "Building Safe and Successful Communities through Reentry," to officially join the Reentry 2030 initiative. This is a national, bi-partisan effort, aimed at helping people who are leaving prison or under government supervision by removing obstacles and improving their chances of success. Washington is the sixth state to sign on, following New York, Nebraska, North Carolina, Alabama and Missouri.
- The Council created its first strategic plan and a three-year logic model, which are being put into place. A new subcommittee was formed to help with the implementation. This progress is largely due to the leadership of Director McFeat.
- Janel McFeat, appointed in January 2023[1] and confirmed in March 2024,[2] has played a key role as Executive Director, driving efforts to expand programs that support individuals transitioning from incarceration back into the community. Her leadership has been crucial in advancing initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for formerly incarcerated people by supporting humane and restorative reentry models.
- The Reentry Council received proviso funding in 2024 to support Divine Alternatives for Dads (DADs), a program that helps fathers overcome legal and relational barriers preventing reunification with their children. Through this funding, DADs addresses challenges such as child support, visitation rights, parenting education and Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs). The program consistently exceeds its goals, helping fathers successfully rebuild their relationships with their families as they reenter society.
- The Washington Statewide Reentry Council met with officials from Thailand to discuss better support for incarcerated women. They exchanged ideas on the UN Bangkok Rules, which focus on the needs of women in prison and reentry. Both groups expressed appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate and improve outcomes for women in the justice system.[3]

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[1] Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023). Janel McFeat named Executive Director of Washington Statewide Reentry Council. https://www.commerce.wa.gov/janel-mcfeat-named-executive-director-of-washington-statewide-re-entry-council/.
[2] Washington State Legislature. (2023). Bill Summary for HB 9800. Washington State Legislature. https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=9800&Year=2023&Initiative=false.
[3] Washington State Department of Commerce. (2023, [Sept. 9, 2024]). Individuals with strong family support are 40% less likely to commit another offense. Facebook.

- The Reentry Council received proviso funding to launch a trauma-informed, peer-led pilot program at Lynnwood Jail. This program offers intensive case management and comprehensive pre- and post-release services, emphasizing a human dignity approach. It is the first time the Reentry Council has received proviso funding specifically for jail programming.[4]
- The Reentry Council will collaborate with tribal leaders and tribal communities with Listening Circles[5] to gather feedback on how to best serve the Native people leaving incarceration.
- The Reentry Council conducted Youth Listening Circles at Echo Glen and Green Hills Youth Facilities, to provide listening spaces for incarcerated youth, promoting personal growth and supporting their successful reentry. These efforts reflect the Council's dedication to addressing the unique needs of our youth population.
- The Reentry Council visited all 11 state prisons in Washington in April 2024 and plans to visit again in April 2025 for Listening Circles and to promote healing and reentry support. Listening Circles are held after a Concert of Hope performance. The concerts are an essential part of the circle process. These facilities include:

    - Airway Heights Corrections Center
    - Cedar Creek Corrections Center
    - Clallam Bay Corrections Center
    - Coyote Ridge Corrections Center
    - Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women
    - Monroe Correctional Complex
    - Olympic Corrections Center
    - Stafford Creek Corrections Center
    - Washington Corrections Center
    - Washington Corrections Center for Women
    - Washington State Penitentiary

Additionally, the Council will continue visits in 2025 and has already visited the following:

- Yakama Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility (Adult and Youth)
- Lynnwood Jail
- Kitsap County Jail
- Clark County Jail
- Whatcom County Jail

Council recommendations

- Promote Restorative Justice and Trauma-Informed Practices in all prison, jails, youth facilities, and tribal facilities.
- Include currently incarcerated individuals on the Reentry Council, which would add two member seats to the Council, with one representative from a women's facility and one from a men's facility.

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https://www.facebook.com/WAStateCommerce/posts/pfbid02oJGLuTqsQg5xyqr2rWJs6Yn9XXHjqHje4wj3pwr7f2AF6VuT2dx6WCAMkh4qanV5l.

[4] Washington State Department of Commerce. (2024). Washington Statewide Reentry Council - Public Performance Review. Results Washington. https://results.wa.gov/sites/default/files/April%202024%20Reentry%20PPR%20Presentation%20final%204.22.24.pdf.

[5] Mehl-Madrona, L., & Mainguy, B. (2014). Introducing healing circles and talking circles into primary care. The Permanente Journal, 18(2), 4-9. https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/13-104.

- Add three members from state agencies to the Council, which would increase representation for state agencies critical to implementing Reentry 2030 and the Governor's Executive Order 24-03. This includes the Employment Security Department, Health Care Authority, and Department of Social and Health Services.
- Expand Family Listening Circles for incarcerated people.
- Increase Reentry Council involvement in jails and expand to tribal jails.
- Address racial disparities affecting Native people (increase work with tribes).
- Develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan.
- Strengthen collaboration with behavioral health providers. Feedback from focus groups showed an increase in mental health care needs for people who are incarcerated.

Reentry 2030 Goals (housing, employment and health care):

- **Housing**: Zero return to homelessness by 2030
- **Employment**: 40% of individuals released form incarceration will be employed within six months following release by 2030
- **Health care**: 100% of eligible individuals are signed up for Medicaid 90-days pre-release by 2030

Council updates and activities

The Council is involved in reentry efforts at the local, state, and federal levels. Members and staff work on various taskforces, committees and groups to keep up with changes in reentry policies and focus on the needs of the justice-impacted community. Below is a partial list of the Council's activities:

This year the Council welcomed a new staff member, Esther Matthews, who has joined as a Statewide Reentry Council program coordinator. In this role, Esther will be responsible for coordinating legislative affairs, analyzing bills, managing legislative data requests, and assisting with policy development efforts. She will also oversee the development of the Council's reports, including fiscal notes and annual summaries. Esther's extensive background in research, justice system advocacy, and policy analysis strengthens the Council's ability to foster human-centered equitable reentry systems and support justice-impacted individual across Washington state.

State-level work and relationships

- State Opioid/Fentanyl Summit: Strengthening pathways to healing
- Monthly meetings with Department of Corrections (DOC) for reentry coordination
- DOC Amend/Washington Way Prison Reform Stakeholder Group: Advocating for prison reforms inspired by Norway's rehabilitative approach[6]
- Washington Voting Rights Restoration Coalition: Pushing for the restoration of voting rights for individuals with felony convictions
- Quarterly meeting with Washington State Advisory Council on Homelessness (SACH) and the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)
- Community Partners for Transition Solutions (CPTS): Collaborating with local organizations to bridge gaps in reentry services
- Oversight Construction Trade Committee: from Chapter 355, Laws of 2024 (HB 2084) committee
- Monthly meeting with the Office of Corrections Ombuds
- American Correctional Association Member

[6] Rehabilitative Justice: What the US Can Learn from the Norwegian Model. (n.d.). Journal of International Peace and Prosperity. Retrieved November 19, 2024, from https://jipp.org/read/1-2-rehabilitative-justice-what-the-us-can-learn-from-the-norwegian-model

- Judicial Discretion Act Workgroup
- Solitary Confinement Advisory Group
- Statewide Family Council
- New partnership with Statewide Jail Technical Assistance Program and Washington DSHS/Office of Forensic Mental Health Services.
- Interim Reentry Stakeholder Group
- Office of Public Defense Advisory Committee

Reentry Council committees and subcommittees

The Council has several committees and subcommittees focused on key areas:

- Legislative Subcommittee
- Hiring Subcommittee
- Membership Selection Committee
- Reentry 2030 Subcommittee
- Strategic Planning Subcommittee

National activities

- Council of State Governments Reentry 2030: Engaging in national discussions about reentry 2030 regarding human-centered, transparent, coordinated, and equitable practices
- American Correctional Association Member

Legislative action

Since the Statewide Reentry Council's last report, the Council has supported reentry-related laws and secure funding for Reentry Council staffing to advance strategic initiatives. By working with lawmakers, state agencies and community partners, the Council has helped pass important bills that improve services and opportunities for people leaving incarceration. Below is a list of key laws the Council supported in recent sessions, showing its ongoing effort to remove barriers and support successful reentry.

2024 legislative session

Chapter 355, Laws of 2024 (2SHB 2084) – Construction-Related Apprenticeship in State Prisons

The bill establishes an oversight committee to improve construction-related training and pathways to state-registered apprenticeships within state prisons. Notably, the Reentry Council has a seat on this oversight committee, ensuring the Council's involvement in making training programs more accessible and equitable for incarcerated individuals. This provides a direct pathway to living-wage jobs post-release, highlighting the Council's role in shaping reentry-focused workforce development.

Chapter 315, Laws of 2024 (E2SHB 2099) – State ID Cards for People Leaving Incarceration

This bill ensures that individuals released from state prison or state hospitals receive a state ID card, a crucial requirement for accessing housing, employment and benefits essential for reentry.

Chapter 32, Laws of 2024 (2SSB 5983) – Expanding Gate Money for Releasing Individuals

This bill ensures expands the availability of gate money to people leaving work release, sentencing alternatives, and other custody conditions. The funding provides essential support for food, shelter, and transportation upon release from state custody.

Chapter 38, Laws of 2024 (ESSB 5974) – Juvenile LFO Debt Removal

This bill removes legal financial obligations (LFOs), excluding restitution, for juveniles for LFOs imposed prior to July 1, 2023. It ensures that these previous debts are cleared from records and will not affect individuals during background checks.

2023 legislative session

Chapter 467, Laws of 2023 (2SSB 5134) – Gate Money Increase

SB 5134 changed the language for gate money allowance from a set $40 to "no less than $40", which allows for the gate money amount to be determined during the budget process each biennium, versus a set dollar amount in the statute that cannot be increased without new legislation. The gate money upon release was increased in the budget to $300. In future years, this amount can be adjusted in the budget without requiring new legislation.

Chapter 446, Laws of 2023 (ESHB 1169) – Elimination of Mandatory LFOs

HB 1169 eliminates the state's last remaining mandatory LFOs and requires courts to waive the Victim Penalty Assessment (VPA) for indigent individuals. It also eliminates the DNA collection fee and replaces those fees with alternative, reliable state funding sources. For youth, HB 1169 eliminates the mandatory VPA and DNA collection fee, as well as the remaining discretionary non-restitution fees, and makes past fees uncollectable.

Council recommendations

The Washington Statewide Reentry Council's recommendations aim to improve reentry outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals by focusing on fairness, public safety, and system reforms. These proposals emphasize trauma-informed care, better cooperation across justice systems, and investments in specific community needs. Grounded in the Council's mission to advocate for Washington laws, investments, and attitudes that support more humane, equitable, and restorative reentry systems, the recommendations reflect a commitment to disrupting the cycle of mass incarceration. By transforming systems to treat each individual with dignity and equity, these efforts increase public safety and help individuals successfully reintegrate into society. Below is a summary of the Council's key recommendations and the data supporting them.

Promote restorative justice and trauma-informed practices

The Council advocates for the expansion of restorative justice (an approach that focuses on repairing harm by encouraging accountability and healing) and trauma-informed practices (methods that recognize the impact of past trauma on behavior) in state correctional facilities. Research shows that addressing trauma, instead of focusing solely on punishment, reduces the likelihood of recidivism. A 2023 study from the Washington State

Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) found that trauma-focused programs can lower recidivism by up to 30%.[7] Similarly, restorative justice practices promote humane environments and support rehabilitation. Investing in these approaches increases community safety and will ultimately reduce costs to the public.

Include currently incarcerated individuals on the Reentry Council

The Council recommends including currently incarcerated individuals to inform policies aimed at supporting reentry. Their lived experiences offer critical insights into barriers such as mental health access, job training, and post-release services. Data from the Office of Financial Management (2023)[8] shows that programs co-designed with individuals directly impacted by incarceration are more effective in reducing recidivism. Involving these voices ensures that policies are theoretically sound and practically applicable.

Include state agency representation on the Reentry Council

Multiple agencies are named in Executive Order 24-03, several of which are not currently included in or partnered with the Reentry Council. The Council recommends increasing seat membership for state agencies critical to implementing Reentry 2030 and the Governor's Executive Order 24-03. This includes the Employment Security Department, Health Care Authority, and Department of Social and Health Services.

Expand family Listening Circles

In addition to addressing the needs of incarcerated individuals, the Council recommends expanding family Listening Circles, which are structured spaces where families of incarcerated individuals can share their concerns and experiences. Family involvement plays a crucial role in the reentry process, helping individuals transition more smoothly back into society. These Listening Circles can strengthen emotional connections and improve mental well-being for both the incarcerated individual and their family. A 2023 JLARC report found that individuals with strong family support are 40% less likely to commit another offense. This data reinforces the importance of involving families in reentry strategies.[9]

Enhance reentry services in jails and tribal facilities

The Council recommends improving reentry services in jails and tribal facilities, which are often under-resourced. Native people, in particular, face a disproportionate level of incarceration in Washington. Though they make up only 1.9% of the state's general population, they account for 5.5% of the prison population. This overrepresentation highlights the need for reentry programs specifically designed for tribal communities.

Address racial disparities

In line with its focus on tribal facilities, the Council highlights the need to address racial disparities that disproportionately affect Native communities. After incarceration, Native people often face challenges in finding housing, employment, and healthcare, leading to higher recidivism rates. Partnering with tribal governments and developing culturally tailored programs are key to addressing these issues. The Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee[10] 2023 report outlines ongoing efforts to strengthen

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[7] Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2023, Trauma-Focused Programs and Their Impact on Recidivism. Wsipp_Inventory-of-Evidence-Based-Research-Based-and-Promising-Programs-for-Adult-Corrections-Preliminary-Report_Report.pdf (wa.gov).
[8] Washington State Office of Financial Management, Long-Term Recidivism: Assessing the Washington Prison Population's Return to Prison, https://sac.ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/pdf/long_term_DOC_recidivism.pdf.
[9] Washington State Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, Reentry and Recidivism Reduction Programs (2023), https://leg.wa.gov/jlarc/reports/2023/Reentry/pf_b/default.html.
[10] Washington State Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee. (2023). Reentry Services and Recidivism Data Report. Retrieved from https://leg.wa.gov/jlarc/reports/2023/Reentry/f_c/default.html.

partnerships with tribal communities and improve reentry services.[11] The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) provides recidivism data, a measure recommended by the Council's enabling statute.[12]

Develop a comprehensive community engagement plan

The Council recommends implementing a formal plan to engage a wide range of stakeholders. These include formerly incarcerated individuals, advocacy groups, and community leaders. Involving diverse voices ensures that reentry reforms address the varied needs of those most affected by incarceration. According to the 2023 JLARC report, community-driven approaches — programs designed with input from local groups — lead to better outcomes by tailoring services to specific community needs. This plan also aims to increase transparency and accountability in how reentry policies are implemented.

Fully implement and fund support for Executive Order 24-03

The signing of Executive Order 24-03, called "Building Safe and Successful Communities through Reentry," intends to make successful reentry a realty by 2030. It directs the Reentry Council to:

- Executive and small cabinet agencies support reentry efforts by consulting with the Washington Statewide Reentry Council and maximizing government resources and services to address discrimination, underemployment, unemployment, and housing.
- Coordinate efforts with other state agencies to meet the goals of Executive Order 24-03, track progress, and address challenges to improving reentry systems by 2030. A full-time project manager is recommended to effectively coordinate these efforts.
- Collaborate with DOC and DCYF to build an outreach plan to employers to identify workforce needs that individuals with criminal history can meet with appropriate training.
- Make recommendations to the governor and state agencies regarding legislation and administrative rules that would help reduce recidivism.
- By Sept. 1, 2025, the following agencies will consult closely with the Washington Statewide Reentry Council: Corrections; Children, Youth and Families; Licensing; Employment Security; Labor and Industries; Social and Health Services; Enterprise Services; Health Care Authority; and Commerce.
- Agencies must submit yearly reports to the Governor's Office and the Statewide Reentry Council. These reports should show how agencies are progressing toward their goals and identify barriers, such as financial issues or lack of resources, so these problems can be fixed through future government actions.

Next steps

The Council has identified specific actions to support our goals and recommendations. Many of these actions are already occurring, either as a pilot program or on the state level.

Promote restorative justice and trauma-informed practices

The next steps for promoting restorative justice and trauma-informed practices begin with a pilot project at Lynnwood Jail, currently funded through a supplemental FY25 proviso. Data and feedback from participants will be collected to track outcomes. We will make improvements based on what we learn. If the pilot program

demonstrates early success, the Council recommends expanding it to other jails. The goal is proving that these practices help with healing, make communities safer, and support rehabilitation.

The Reentry Council will also work with tribal leaders to support reentry programming that is culturally informed for Native individuals and tribal communities. This includes using Listening Circles[13] to gather feedback on how to best serve Native people returning from incarceration. The Council has a partnership with the Dispute Resolution Center and Collective Justice to help support these efforts.

Expand family Listening Circles for incarcerated people

The Council will collaborate with DCYF, DOC, jails and tribes to develop a plan focused on supporting incarcerated individuals and their families. The Council will also work on increasing family involvement, addressing their needs during incarceration and after release, while ensuring cultural respect in working with tribes. A tracking system will be set up to monitor progress and contributions from all involved.

Increase Reentry Council involvement in jails and expand to tribal jails

The Reentry Council is expanding its efforts in jails and tribal facilities by working with organizations such as the Statewide Jail Technical Assistance Program, Washington DSHS Office of Forensic Mental Health Services, and the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC). These partnerships will strengthen reentry services and improve coordination. In 2025, Listening Circles will be conducted in jails and tribal facilities to gather feedback from incarcerated individuals, their families, and staff to improve outcomes. The Council will also collaborate with a Reentry 2030 tribal representative to ensure culturally appropriate strategies are implemented. A 90-day pre-release planning process will be introduced by 2030, focusing on employment, housing, healthcare, and family reintegration, to reduce recidivism and align with Reentry 2030 goals.

Strengthen collaboration with behavioral health providers

To improve mental health services for incarcerated individuals, a representative from the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) within DSHS will be requested. This representative will focus specifically on mental health needs to guide reentry planning. Listening sessions will be held with incarcerated individuals to gather ideas on improving mental health services and securing funding. These steps will ensure that mental health is a key focus in reentry efforts and that the voices of those directly impacted are heard.

Develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan

The Council recommends creating a formal plan to involve a diverse range of stakeholders, including formerly incarcerated individuals, advocacy groups and community leaders. Engaging these voices ensures that reentry reforms meet the specific needs of those most impacted by incarceration. The 2023 JLARC report highlights that community-driven approaches are more successful in tailoring services to local needs. This plan will also promote transparency and accountability in the implementation of reentry policies.

Reentry Executive Order 24-03/Reentry 2030 Goals: Housing, Employment and Health Care

[13] Restorative Education. "Listening Circles." Restorative Education, 2020, www.restorativeeducation.org/listening-circle.

The Council recommends forming a Reentry 2030 subcommittee as a next step to meet the 2030 Reentry Goals. All required agencies will report annually to the Council and consult quarterly to track progress. Additionally, the Council and state agencies are exploring ways to collaborate to ensure successful implementation. As part of this effort, the Council will fully implement Executive Order 24-03 by creating a Reentry 2030 Executive Order Subcommittee. This subcommittee will help achieve the Reentry 2030 goals, ensuring that all state agencies prioritize reentry efforts and submit annual progress reports. The Council will also collaborate with DOC and DCYF to develop an outreach plan for employers, identifying workforce needs that individuals with a criminal history can fill with appropriate training.