TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

The Committee on Corrections and Institutions to which was referred House Bill No. 219 entitled "An act relating to creating a family support pilot program for incarcerated parents and guardians" respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

Sec. 1. INTENT

(a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Department of Corrections ensures gender parity in the access to services and programs that strengthen family connections.

(b) It is the further intent of the General Assembly that the Department of Corrections develop a phased plan to expand the application of 28 V.S.A. § 128 to all Vermont correctional facilities by 2028.

Sec. 2. 28 V.S.A. § 102(c) is amended to read:

(c) The Commissioner is charged with the following responsibilities:

* * *

(24) To include funding to sufficiently provide and sustain trauma-informed family support services and programming pursuant to section 128 of this title in the Department's annual proposed budget for the next subsequent fiscal year for the purposes of developing the State budget required to be submitted to the General Assembly in accordance with 32 V.S.A. § 306.

Sec. 3. 28 V.S.A. § 128 is added to read:

§ 128. INCARCERATED PARENTS AND GUARDIANS; FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

(a) Family Support Program. The Department of Corrections shall establish the Family Support Program to provide free parenting and family support to all incarcerated individuals who are parents and guardians. The Program shall include individualized services and programming intended to provide:

(1) increased knowledge and skill for incarcerated parents and guardians to address the specific needs of their children;

(2) resources to incarcerated parents and guardians to engage in needs-specific planning and communication strategies with their children and their children's caregivers;

(3) child-friendly visitation spaces, in consultation with the Department, for in-person and virtual visits between parents or guardians and their children, including establishing safety protocol;

(4) outreach and coordination with appropriate services for the children of incarcerated parents and guardians and the children's caregivers;

(5) improved cross-system coordination and collaboration to deliver necessary services to the families of incarcerated parents and guardians; and

(6) reentry support and preparation for incarcerated parents and guardians.

(b) Program support. The Department may support the operation of the Family Support Program established pursuant to this section through grants of financial assistance to, or contracts for services with, any nonprofit entity that meets the Department's requirements.

(c) Contingent on funding. The Family Support Program established pursuant this section shall operate only to the extent funds are appropriated for its operation.

(d) Annual report. Annually, on or before July 1, the Department shall submit a written report to the House Committees on Corrections and Institutions and on Judiciary and the Senate Committees on Institutions and on Judiciary, concerning:

(1) the funding, participation, and outcomes of the services and programming established pursuant to this section; and

(2) considerations and any progress towards sustained statewide programming and gender parity.

Sec. 4. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS; FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM; IMPLEMENTATION

The Department of Corrections shall first implement the Family Support Program established under 28 V.S.A. § 128 at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility and Northern State Correctional Facility.

Sec. 5. APPROPRIATION

(a) The sum of $114,870.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Corrections in fiscal year 2026 for the purpose of supporting the Family Support Program at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility in accordance with 28 V.S.A. § 128.

(b) The sum of $276,208.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Corrections in fiscal year 2026 for the purpose of establishing and supporting the Family Support Program at the Northern State Correctional Facility in accordance with 28 V.S.A. § 128.

Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

(Committee vote: _____)

_____

Representative _____

FOR THE COMMITTEE