

1 H.435

2 Introduced by Committee on Corrections and Institutions

3 Date:

4 Subject: Department of Corrections; corrections employees; human resources;
5 organizational structure

6 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to make
7 miscellaneous changes regarding the Department of Corrections, including the
8 organizational structure and practices for hiring, training, certifying, and
9 disciplining employees.

10 An act relating to miscellaneous Department of Corrections-related
11 amendments

12 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

13 * * * Polygraph Examinations; Drug Testing; Report * * *

14 Sec. 1. JOINT LEGISLATIVE JUSTICE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE;

15 CORRECTIONAL EMPLOYEES; POLYGRAPH

16 EXAMINATIONS; DRUG TESTING; STUDY; REPORT

17 (a) The Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee shall study
18 permitting the Department of Corrections to administer polygraph
19 examinations to certain applicants for employment and to conduct drug testing
20 for certain employees.

1 (1) In particular, the Committee shall study the following:

2 (A) With respect to polygraph examinations:

3 (i) the positions within the Department for which applicants for
4 employment should potentially be subject to polygraph examinations;

5 (ii) the cost of administering polygraph examinations in relation to
6 the identified positions;

7 (iii) whether polygraph examinations would be an effective
8 supplement to the Department's existing background investigation procedures
9 for applicants and whether any potential alternatives to polygraph
10 examinations might be more effective for the Department;

11 (iv) issues related to the use, retention, storage, and destruction of
12 information obtained through polygraph examinations; and

13 (v) the potential benefits and drawbacks of the Department using
14 polygraph examinations as a screening tool.

15 (B) With respect to drug testing:

16 (i) whether the Department could benefit from the ability to
17 conduct drug testing to a greater extent than is currently permitted under State
18 law;

19 (ii) categories of employees for whom the Department should
20 potentially be granted additional statutory authority to conduct drug testing;

1 (iii) circumstances under which the Department should potentially
2 be permitted to require employees within the identified categories to submit to
3 a drug test;

4 (iv) whether the Department should be permitted to carry out
5 random, scheduled, or facility-wide drug testing for the identified categories of
6 employees;

7 (v) the potential cost of conducting drug testing in relation to the
8 identified categories of employees;

9 (vi) whether the existing safeguards and procedural requirements
10 for employee drug testing established in 21 V.S.A. chapter 5, subchapter 11
11 may require modification if the Department is granted additional authority to
12 conduct employee drug testing; and

13 (vii) potential privacy, safety, and other concerns that may arise in
14 relation to expanded employee drug testing because of the nature of the work
15 environment in correctional facilities.

16 (2) If it has sufficient time and resources, the Committee may also study
17 the following issues:

18 (A) the potential recourse for the Department and employees in
19 relation to a positive drug test; and

1 (A) a former judge with knowledge of the criminal justice system,
2 appointed by the Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court;

3 (B) a retired attorney, appointed by the Department of State's
4 Attorneys and Sheriffs;

5 (C) a former corrections officer, appointed by the Vermont State
6 Employees' Association;

7 (D) a formerly incarcerated individual, appointed by the Defender
8 General;

9 (E) the Executive Director of the Vermont Network Against
10 Domestic and Sexual Violence or designee;

11 (F) a former management-level employee of the Department of
12 Corrections with experience in corrections management, appointed by the
13 Governor; and

14 (G) an individual at large with knowledge of and experience in the
15 correctional system, crime prevention, human resources, or compliance,
16 appointed by the Governor.

17 (2) No member, at the time of appointment or during membership, shall
18 be employed by the Department of Corrections or work in any part of the State
19 correctional system. To the extent feasible, the appointing entities shall
20 appoint members that will create a diverse Commission including gender,
21 racial, and cultural diversity. Commission members shall demonstrate an

1 understanding of and respect for the values, dignity, and diversity of
2 individuals who are in the custody of the Commissioner of Corrections and
3 those working within the State correctional system. If an appointing entity is
4 unable to find a candidate for appointment to the Commission who meets the
5 criteria of subdivision (1) of this subsection, the appointing entity may appoint
6 an individual with relevant lived experience.

7 (c) Powers and duties. The Commission shall have the following duties:

8 (1) provide advice and counsel to the Commissioner of Corrections in
9 carrying out the Commissioner's responsibilities at the Department of
10 Corrections to monitor reporting of sexual misconduct, oversee the
11 implementation of the Department's anti-retaliation policy, create transparency
12 and implement policies relating to misconduct, and review disciplinary actions;

13 (2) monitor the Department in the following areas:

14 (A) the timely reporting of allegations of sexual misconduct;

15 (B) compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act;

16 (C) the Department's implementation of and adherence to policies
17 relating to employee misconduct and discipline;

18 (D) employees' adherence to Department policies, procedures, and
19 directives, particularly to code of ethics and anti-retaliation policies;

20 (E) maintenance of an independent reporting hotline to the State
21 Police; and

1 (F) investigations of employee misconduct, the movement of
2 contraband in facilities, threats to personal safety, and the Department's
3 response to major events that occur in the Department of Corrections,
4 including the death of an individual in the custody of the Commissioner of
5 Corrections and the escape of an individual from a Department facility or
6 Department custody; and

7 (3) beginning on January 1, 2023, submit an annual report to the
8 Commissioner of Corrections, the Secretary of Human Services, the House
9 Committee on Corrections and Institutions, and the Senate Committee on
10 Judiciary reporting on metrics that assess the Department's performance in the
11 areas identified in subdivision (c)(2) of this section, including listing the
12 number of complaints of retaliation and complaints of sexual misconduct and
13 the outcomes of those complaints; identifying areas of repeated noncompliance
14 with policies, procedures, and directives; and providing recommendations for
15 improving compliance and eliminating instances of sexual misconduct in the
16 Department of Corrections.

17 (d) Member terms. The members of the Commission shall serve staggered
18 three-year terms. A vacancy created before the expiration of a term shall be
19 filled in the same manner as the original appointment for the unexpired portion
20 of the term. A member appointed to fill a vacancy before the expiration of a
21 term shall not be deemed to have served a term for the purpose of this

1 subsection. Members of the Commission shall be eligible for reappointment.

2 Members of the Commission shall serve not more than two consecutive terms.

3 A member may be removed by a majority vote of the members of the
4 Commission.

5 (e) Meetings.

6 (1) The Commission shall annually select a chair from among its
7 members at the first meeting.

8 (2) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

9 (f) Assistance. The Commission shall have the administrative, technical,
10 and legal assistance of the Department of Corrections.

11 (g) Commissioner of Correction's duties. The creation and existence of the
12 Commission shall not relieve the Commissioner of his or her duties under the
13 law to manage, supervise, and control the Department of Corrections.

14 (h) Reimbursement. Members of the Commission shall be entitled to
15 receive per diem compensation and reimbursement for expenses in accordance
16 with 32 V.S.A. § 1010.

17 Sec. 3. SUNSET OF CORRECTIONS MONITORING COMMISSION

18 28 V.S.A. § 123 (Department of Corrections Monitoring Commission) is
19 repealed on July 1, 2025.

1 Sec. 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CORRECTIONS MONITORING
2 COMMISSION

3 (a) The Corrections Monitoring Commission, created in Sec. 2 of this act,
4 is established on January 1, 2022.

5 (b) Members of the Commission shall be appointed on or before
6 December 1, 2021. Terms of members shall officially begin on January 1,
7 2022.

8 (c)(1) In order to stagger the terms of the members of the Corrections
9 Monitoring Commission as described in 28 V.S.A. § 123 in Sec. 2 of this act,
10 the initial terms of those members shall be as follows:

11 (A) the Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court shall appoint a
12 member for a three-year term;

13 (B) the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs shall appoint a
14 member for a two-year term;

15 (C) the Vermont State Employees' Association shall appoint a
16 member for a three-year term;

17 (D) the Defender General shall appoint a member for a one-year
18 term;

19 (E) the Executive Director of the Vermont Network Against
20 Domestic and Sexual Violence or designee shall serve a two-year term;

1 (F) the Governor shall appoint a member to fill the position
2 designated in subdivision (b)(1)(F) of Sec. 2 of this act for a two-year term;
3 and

4 (G) the Governor shall appoint a member to fill the position
5 designated in subdivision (b)(1)(G) of Sec. 2 of this act for a one-year term.

6 (2) After the expiration of the initial terms set forth in subdivision (1) of
7 this subsection, Commission member terms shall be as set forth in 28 V.S.A.
8 § 123 in Sec. 2 of this act.

9 Sec. 5. 28 V.S.A. § 124 is added to read:

10 § 124. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS; CORRECTIONS

11 INVESTIGATIVE UNIT

12 (a) Creation. There is created the Corrections Investigative Unit (CIU)
13 within the Department. The purpose of the CIU shall be to investigate:

14 (1) allegations of violations of the Prison Rape Elimination Act;

15 (2) major events that occur in the Department, including the death of an
16 individual in the custody of the Department or the escape of an individual from
17 a facility or the custody of Department staff;

18 (3) Department compliance with policies, procedures and directives;

19 (4) the movement of contraband in facilities; and

20 (5) threats against the personal safety of Department employees and
21 individuals in the custody of the Department.

1 (2) is any offender being supervised by the Department of Corrections
2 while on parole, probation, supervised community sentence, or furlough, where
3 the employee, contractor, or other service provider ~~is currently engaged in a~~
4 ~~direct supervisory relationship with the person being supervised.~~ For purposes
5 of this subdivision, a person is engaged in a direct supervisory relationship
6 with a supervisee if the supervisee is assigned to the caseload of that person
7 knows or reasonably should have known that the offender is being supervised
8 by the Department, unless the offender and the employee, contractor, or person
9 providing services were married, parties to a civil union, or engaged in a sexual
10 relationship at the time of sentencing for the offense for which the offender is
11 being supervised by the Department.

12 (b) A person who violates subsection (a) of this section shall be imprisoned
13 for not more than five years or fined not more than \$10,000.00, or both.

14 Sec. 7. CRIMINAL JUSTICE COUNCIL; DEPARTMENT OF
15 CORRECTIONS; CERTIFICATION PROCESS

16 During the 2021 legislative interim, the Criminal Justice Council and the
17 Department of Corrections shall develop a proposal governing minimum
18 training standards, complaint investigations, and a process for certification and
19 decertification of correctional officers as defined in 28 V.S.A. § 3. The
20 proposal shall give the Council the authority to investigate allegations of
21 correctional officer misconduct and to certify and decertify correctional

1 officers. On or before December 1, 2021, the Council and the Department
2 shall report the proposal to the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee.

3 * * * Effective Date * * *

4 Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

5 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2021.