
This act summary is provided for the convenience of the public and members of the General Assembly. It is intended to provide a general summary of the act and may not be exhaustive. It has been prepared by the staff of the Office of Legislative Counsel without input from members of the General Assembly. It is not intended to aid in the interpretation of legislation or to serve as a source of legislative intent.

Act No. 159 (H.876). An act relating to miscellaneous amendments to the corrections laws

Subjects: Corrections; earned time; medical care

This act enhances procedures to assist with an individual's reentry into the community from a Department of Corrections' (the Department) correctional facility, as well as creating initiatives to reduce the incarcerative population, expand earned time programs, enhance approaches to family visitation in correctional facilities, and increase the Department's hospital coverage staffing.

Specifically, this act requires the Department to provide offenders who are prescribed medication while incarcerated with not less than a 28-day supply of the medication and a prescription voucher to redeem within the community upon discharge, contingent on the medication's availability and appropriateness. Additionally, the Department is required to provide offenders who are prescribed medication for opioid use disorder a legally sufficient supply to ensure that the offender can continue taking the medication upon discharge with enough time to obtain the prescription in the community. In both circumstances, the Department must identify health care providers or substance use treatment programs and help with scheduling to continue care as part of the offender's reentry plan. The act also requires the Department to coordinate with the Department of Motor Vehicles to assist in the provision of a non-driver identification card upon discharge, as well as provide information on other forms of identification and driving privileges.

This act also charges the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee to explore the expansion of the Department's earned time program to include parolees, as well as expanding the program to permit earned time for educational credits earned by both offenders and parolees. The act also creates the Family Friendly Visitation Study Committee to examine how the Department can facilitate greater family friendly visitation methods of all inmates who identify as partners, guardians, and parents with visitation rights.

Additionally, this act expresses the General Assembly's intent to eliminate Vermont's practice of housing inmates in privately operated, for-profit, or out-of-state correctional facilities by 2034. With that in mind, various arms of State government must collaborate and submit a report to committees of jurisdiction detailing methods to reduce the number of offenders and detainees in Vermont correctional facilities. Moreover, the act charges the Department and Department of Buildings and General Services to submit recommendations to committees of jurisdiction detailing the incorporation of modern reentry and transitional services to assist in obtaining housing, job opportunities, and other services to reintegrate into society, along with the recommended size of a new women's correctional facility, including the scope and quality of programming and services offered.

Finally, the General Assembly desires afford relief to probation and parole officers that provide emergency hospital coverage in addition to their own duties by having the Department present a plan to the committees of jurisdiction to address the attendant staffing issues in hospitals.

Effective Date: July 1, 2024