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H.219

Introduced by Representatives Headrick of Burlington, Arsenault of Williston,
Bos-Lun of Westminster, Burkhardt of South Burlington, Casey
of Montpelier, Chapin of East Montpelier, Cole of Hartford,
Greer of Bennington, Gregoire of Fairfield, LaLonde of South
Burlington, Logan of Burlington, Masland of Thetford, McGill
of Bridport, Minier of South Burlington, Morrissey of
Bennington, Sweeney of Shelburne, and Winter of Ludlow

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Corrections; administration of the Department; family support and
programming

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish
Family Support Pilot Programs at the Chittenden Regional Correctional
Facility and Northern State Correctional Facility to provide free family support
services and programming to incarcerated parents and guardians.

An act relating to creating a family support pilot program for incarcerated
parents and guardians

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

2 Sec. 1. FINDINGS AND INTENT

3 (a) Findings. The General Assembly finds that:

4 (1) Approximately 6,000 children in Vermont have an incarcerated
5 parent or guardian annually, with a significant majority unable to maintain
6 meaningful family connections due to a lack of correctional facility
7 programming.

8 (2) Research demonstrates that comprehensive family programs,
9 including opportunities for child-friendly visitation, assists with reducing
10 recidivism, enhancing community reintegration, and promoting child well-
11 being.

12 (3) The Department of Corrections collaborates with a local nonprofit to
13 provide incarcerated female parents and guardians at the Chittenden Regional
14 Correctional Center with a trauma-informed, comprehensive approach to
15 strengthen family connections that minimizes the adverse effects of parental
16 incarceration and fosters better outcomes for parents and children.

17 (4) While Vermont incarcerates a higher percentage of parents and
18 guardians compared to the national average and provides family-friendly
19 support services for incarcerated female parents and guardians, no comparable
20 program exists for incarcerated males, which leaves a critical gap in family
21 support services.

1 (5) Expanding family support services and programming to incarcerated
2 male parents and guardians may yield societal benefits by preserving family
3 connections and mitigating the trauma of incarceration on parents, guardians,
4 children alike.

5 (b) Intent.

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

9 (2) It is the further intent of the General Assembly that the Department
10 of Corrections develop a phased plan to expand the application of 28 V.S.A.
11 § 128 to all Vermont correctional facilities by 2028.

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

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

14 * * *

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

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

2 § 128. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS; INCARCERATED PARENTS
3 AND GUARDIANS; FAMILY SUPPORT PILOT PROGRAM

4 (a) Family Support Pilot Program. The Department of Corrections shall
5 establish pilot programs at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility and
6 Northern State Correctional Facility to provide free parenting and family
7 support to all incarcerated individuals who are parents and guardians. The
8 program shall include services and programming to provide:

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

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

14 (3) child-friendly visitation spaces for in-person and virtual visits
15 between parents or guardians and their children, including establishing safety
16 protocol;

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

19 (5) reentry support and preparation for incarcerated parents and
20 guardians; and

1 (6) improved cross-system coordination and collaboration to deliver
2 necessary services to the families of incarcerated parents and guardians.

3 (b) Program support. The Department may support the operation of the
4 programs established under subsection (a) of this section through grants of
5 financial assistance to, or contracts for services with, any nonprofit entity that
6 meets the Department's requirements.

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

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

13 (2) considerations and any progress towards statewide implementation
14 and gender parity.

15 Sec. 4. APPROPRIATION

16 The sum of \$400,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
17 Department of Corrections in fiscal year 2026 for the purpose of establishing
18 and supporting the Family Support Pilot Program in accordance with
19 28 V.S.A. § 128.

1 Sec. 5. PROSPECTIVE REPEAL

2 28 V.S.A. § 128 (Department of Corrections' family support pilot program)

3 is repealed on July 1, 2028.

4 Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

5 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.