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H.219

An act relating to establishing the Department of Corrections' Family Support Program

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

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.

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

2 § 128. INCARCERATED PARENTS AND GUARDIANS; FAMILY
3 SUPPORT PROGRAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 (b) Program support. The Department may support the operation of the
4 Family Support Program established pursuant to 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) Contingent on funding. The Family Support Program established
8 pursuant this section shall operate only to the extent funds are appropriated for
9 its operation.

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

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

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

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

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

6 Sec. 5. [Deleted.]

7 Sec. 6. EFFECTIVE DATE

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