

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2169

As Reported by House Committee On:
Community Safety, Justice, & Reentry

Title: An act relating to a pilot program creating a healthier environment for correctional officers, department of corrections staff, and individuals within a correctional facility.

Brief Description: Concerning a pilot program creating a healthier environment for correctional officers, department of corrections staff, and individuals within a correctional facility.

Sponsors: Representatives Mosbrucker, Goodman, Leavitt, Simmons, Ormsby, Graham, Callan, Rule, Cheney and Davis.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Safety, Justice, & Reentry: 1/22/24, 1/29/24 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Corrections (DOC) to establish a four-year pilot program at the Washington State Penitentiary East Complex with the goals of improved communication between correctional officers, DOC staff, and incarcerated individuals and reducing recidivism.
- Requires the DOC to select contact officers, train correctional officers on dynamic security tactics, and initiate appropriate improvement efforts as part of the pilot program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SAFETY, JUSTICE, & REENTRY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Goodman, Chair; Simmons, Vice Chair; Mosbrucker, Ranking Minority Member; Griffey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Davis, Farivar, Fosse, Graham and Ramos.

Staff: Lena Langer (786-7192).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

Department of Corrections.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) operates and manages 11 adult correctional facilities across the state. There are nine facilities serving males and two facilities serving females. As of December 2023, 13,614 individuals are incarcerated in the DOC correctional facilities.

The Washington State Penitentiary (WSP) East Complex currently houses over 550 minimum custody incarcerated individuals who are within six years from release. The WSP East Complex is the only minimum custody facility in Washington State with an onsite pill line.

Washington Way.

According to the National Institute of Justice, the research, development, and evaluation agency of the United States Department of Justice, research has shown that correctional officers experience high stress levels, burnout, and a variety of other mental health related consequences as a result of their jobs.

The Washington Way program is a partnership between the DOC and the Amend program at the University of California San Francisco to bring a health-focused approach to transforming the culture within Washington's correctional facilities and reentry centers. The Amend program's primary partner is the Norwegian Correctional Service.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Corrections (DOC) must establish a four-year pilot program at the Washington State Penitentiary (WSP) East Complex with the goals of improved communication between correctional officers, DOC staff, and incarcerated individuals and reducing recidivism. The DOC must select contact officers to act as mentors and coaches to incarcerated individuals. The DOC must train correctional officers in the pilot program on dynamic security tactics, which must improve the relationship between incarcerated individuals and correctional staff. Certain officers may also receive specialized competency-based, programmatic training in crisis de-escalation.

The DOC must initiate appropriate improvement efforts so that the work environment for corrections officer and life while incarcerated resembles life in the community to the highest extent possible. Such efforts may include painting and planting programs.

The Secretary of the DOC must adopt any rules and policies necessary to implement the requirements of the pilot program.

By December 1 each year, the DOC must report to the Governor and the Legislature on:

- the number of correctional officers, DOC staff, and incarcerated individuals participating in the pilot program and a summary of improvement projects undertaken;
- any effects on behaviors and participation by correctional officers, DOC staff, and incarcerated individuals;
- differential outcomes for those participating in the pilot program compared with those not participating in the pilot program; and
- recidivism outcomes for those individuals that participated in the pilot program while incarcerated, including arrests, charges, and convictions.

The act expires on June 30, 2030.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The average life expectancy of a correctional officer is 59 years old, which is 16 years younger than the average life expectancy. The bill aims to provide an environment that is safe and healthy for those working in correctional facilities. In Norway, there is a prison system that is working better than the state's prison system. Norway is not Washington, but there are some things that are great takeaways from Norway that the state can do to reduce recidivism. Over 90 percent of incarcerated people are going to serve their sentence and return to the community. Currently, there is a separation between correctional officers and the incarcerated people in the correctional facilities. There should be a way to treat those incarcerated humanely, and prepare them to move back into society. This bill improves the relationship between correctional officers, the Department of Corrections (DOC) staff, and those that are incarcerated.

There is excitement for the Amend and Washington Way programs. This bill gives support to the state's correctional officers. This bill would transform the role of correctional officers at the Washington State Penitentiary (WSP) East Complex. Dynamic security is increasingly recognized as the best practice in security at correctional facilities. Contact officers are coaches and role models for incarcerated individuals. This bill also calls for improvements to the environment. In the Amend program, this is called normalization. The living environment is the working environment for the officers that work there. There is strong support for this bill. If this bill passes, DOC staff will live longer and healthier lives, and the people that live in the facilities will return better rehabilitated to their communities.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The bill speaks to establishing contact officer positions. The WSP East complex currently houses 550 minimum security inmates. The original layout has not been changed to reflect the minimum security individuals that are incarcerated there. With dedicated resources, the DOC believes the WSP East Complex can be transformed into a healthier environment. The Washington Way program provides a structure to assist individuals with the transition to the community. The DOC has invested in providing a healthier environment for staff and for those in the care and custody of the DOC. The Washington Way program focus on humanity in corrections and draws inspiration from Norway. To date, over 850 DOC staff have been trained. There are four active pilot programs operating in DOC facilities. This pilot program would be an added layer of support for the DOC programming.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Gina Mosbrucker, prime sponsor; Kelsey Engstrom, Amend at University of California San Francisco; and James McMahan, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs.

(Other) Courtney Grubb and James Key, Washington State Department of Corrections.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.