

RECOMMENDATION TO THE LEGISLATURE OF ALASKA FROM THE ALASKA CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

Recommendation 1-2021, adopted March 11, 2021:

Access to Digital Technology and Virtual In-Reach in Alaska's Correctional System

The Alaska Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) recognizes the importance of access to digital technology for timely, efficient, and appropriate function of government, business, and the everyday lives of citizens. Within the criminal justice system, technology is critical for communication, access to records, effective probation and parole, and delivery of programming to justice-involved Alaskans.

Current internal systems related to inmate programming within the Alaska Department of Corrections (ADOC) are antiquated and constrained by state law restrictions, lack of funding, and outdated infrastructure. Community contract and volunteer providers report they cannot fully assist ADOC with the reentry support processes ADOC is required to implement under AS 33.30.011. The ACJC supports ADOC's efforts to improve and expand access to digital technology within Alaska's correctional system.

Institutional facilitation of community based in-reach programs provide ADOC inmates with access to essential programming to promote stability, productivity, and reduce recidivism. This programming encompasses education and training, behavioral health treatment and recovery, life skills, faith-based and culturally relevant activities, family and parenting programs, and more. Programming also allows incarcerated individuals to learn the practical technological skills necessary for integration into stable community life, such as establishing employment, housing, communication, and connecting with community providers.

Recidivism rates in Alaska have declined in recent years. To sustain this trend, technological solutions are needed to address ADOC's specific challenges. For instance, pandemic response measures have required a reduction to the full array of internal programming, supports, and services previously available to inmates before the pandemic; and the March 2020 suspension of visitation also suspended community in-reach programs and activities provided by contractors and volunteers. Specific technological solutions are being identified; but some require statutory changes, and some require funding and/or infrastructure resources to implement. These solutions could provide more effective programming and communication opportunities post-pandemic. Examples might include "virtual in-reach" through controlled video conferencing; coordination with Department of Administration to access IDs and licenses before release; closed-circuit institutional television for broadcasting outside-produced programming; and virtual communication and support for reentry service providers serving rural and smaller communities.

Recommendation:

The ACJC recommends the Alaska State Legislature make statutory changes and budget allocations necessary for expanded use of technology utilizing limited access through a secure platform within ADOC for programming, communication, visitation, and reentry services that allows ADOC to more effectively work with state and community partners and improve inmate access to supports and services that have shown to promote success and reduce recidivism. This might include:

- Updating Alaska state statutes related to inmate access to technology.
- Modernizing definitions and policies related to inmate access to technology.
- Providing funding for expanded ADOC infrastructure, staff, and programming.