

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

Recommendation 5-2020, adopted September 10, 2020:

Recommendation Regarding Computer Access for Inmates

The Commission recommends that the legislature authorize the use of computers and other modern technologies with the Department of Corrections to facilitate an inmate's rehabilitation or the inmate's compliance with a reentry plan or case plan developed under AS 33.30.011, including use related to employment, education, vocational training, access to legal reference materials, visitation, or health care.

The Commission recognizes the importance of expanding access to computers for inmates in Alaska Department of Corrections custody for rehabilitation, reentry and recidivism reduction in several ways.

First, successful completion of mental health and/or substance use treatment is likely to reduce recidivism. Treatment can be economically and effectively delivered to many inmates online and through CCTV systems.

Second, returning citizens struggle with the use of modern technology such as computers, touch screens, tablets and cell phones as they endeavor to navigate and integrate into the community. Long term inmates who have been incarcerated for years and decades have literally been left behind from technology that they will be required to use to seek employment, apply for health care, food stamps and other emergent benefits which assist with reentry. They are released into our communities with little functional knowledge about modern and appropriate use of everyday technologies. Teaching inmates how to use computers and other modern technologies to access engage in educational and vocational opportunities, access resources, communicate around release planning, learn computer skills that have become nearly mandatory by most employers, or otherwise retain familiarity with computers and technology will help to improve rehabilitation, reentry and recidivism reduction outcomes.

Finally, access to computers allows inmates to apply for Medicaid and other government benefits prior to their release to community. Medicaid regulations do not allow reimbursement for any treatment rendered to people who are incarcerated. Waiting until after prison release to apply for Medicaid causes delays in health care and behavioral health treatment, frustrating the goals of rehabilitation, reentry and reducing recidivism.

Access to computers for inmates should be free because most people who are incarcerated are low to no income.