

**SENATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
SENATOR MICHAEL WOBBERMA, CHAIR
MARCH 23, 2023**

**TOM ERHARDT, DIRECTOR, PAROLE AND PROBATION
PRESENTING TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
3026**

Chairman Wobbema and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, my name is Tom Erhardt, and I am the Director of Parole and Probation, a division of the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR). I stand before you today to provide testimony in support of House Concurrent Resolution 3026, which would direct Legislative Management to consider studying re-entry outcomes for incarcerated adults and youth.

North Dakota has a history of engaging in re-entry improvement efforts. In 2003, the DOCR applied to the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) for technical assistance to implement the Transition from Prison to Community Initiative (TPCI). Formal assistance from NIC ended in 2009. The DOCR and other stakeholders involved in the TPC initiative adopted the philosophy of recidivism reduction and focused efforts on implementing research-based strategies to reduce recidivism. Recidivism was defined as reducing the number of people released from prison who return to prison within 12, 24, and 36 months following their release.

In 2007, the DOCR invited federal, state, local, and community based agency leaders from to work on re-entry issues. These leaders studied several issues and commissioned a Steering Committee to develop strategies to address barriers to successful reentry.

North Dakota also adopted the TPC Model, focusing on different decision points within a person's incarceration and community supervision to make system improvements. Reentry planning starts upon arrival in prison where assessments, treatment, and education services are offered to incarcerated individuals. Release planning starts approximately 6 months prior to the release date. Individuals are released from prison to parole supervision for those eligible and granted, probation supervision for those sentenced ordered by the district court, or to expiration of sentence where no community supervision will take place.

As of February 27, 2023, there are 52 individuals incarcerated in the DOCR with a life without parole sentence, and 43 with a life with the possibility of parole sentence. That is 95 people. On February 27, 2023, the DOCR population count was 1,823. This means that 1,753 people, or 96 percent of the current prison population will be released back to our communities. HCR 3026 would help improve outcomes leading to more productive citizens and less crime in North Dakota. The re-entry goals the DOCR has recently established in our strategic plan are:

- By 2025, reduce the percentage of incarcerated people who return to prison to under 15 percent within one year, under 28 percent within two years, and under 35 percent within three years.
- Increase the percentage of residents who release from incarceration with an ID card from 65 percent to 75 percent.
- Increase the percentage of parole releases to stable housing (instead of transitional facilities) from 55 percent to 63 percent.
- Increase the percentage of individuals discharging from prison who have applied for Medicaid from 29 percent to 33 percent.
- Establish a baseline and increase the percentage of individuals released from prison who are employed within 90 days by 15 percent.
- Establish a baseline and reduce the percentage of adults on supervision who are homeless by 15 percent.

- Increase the percentage of residents eligible for Free Through Recovery releasing from prison who apply for Free Through Recovery from 28 percent to 32 percent.
- Establish a baseline and reduce the percentage of individuals who are in Free Through Recovery who return to prison, abscond supervision, or drop out of the program without completing their goals.
- Increase the percentage of incarcerated individuals who have at least one in-person visit from 9 percent to 11 percent.
- Establish a baseline and increase the percentage of incarcerated individuals with a valid driver's license or other reliable transportation by 15 percent.

In summary, the DOCR has taken the approach that re-entry starts upon arrival, and successful re-entry for incarcerated people leads to less crime, fewer victims, and less taxpayer money spent on corrections. However, the DOCR cannot achieve successful re-entry for incarcerated adults without help from a wide range of stakeholders. A study of re-entry in North Dakota should provide policy and resources for all stakeholders to support not only the goals the DOCR has established and consider new goals to enhance the public safety of our great State. Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I ask you to adopt the recommendation for this study on re-entry outcomes for incarcerated adults and youth. I will stand for any questions.