



Realize cost savings and significantly reduce recidivism and homelessness by laying the foundation for effective discharge practices from state institutions.

What problems does this legislation address?

For many former adult and juvenile prisoners, youth aging out of the foster care system and people disabled by chronic mental illness, it is difficult if not impossible to find housing after being discharged from state institutions. All too often, they end up homeless and any progress made toward rehabilitation and recovery is lost because they do not have a place to call home.

According to the Department of Corrections (DOC), in August of 2008, of the 28,671 former prisoners who were actively supervised on probation, 3,867 were known to be homeless. If the same percentage (13.48%) is applied to the 14,790 who are not actively supervised then the total number of homeless former prisoners under DOC's Community Corrections Division is about 5,870. According to the DOC 2006 GMAP report, a snapshot of offender data showed that 8% of actively supervised former prisoners re-offended, and 49% of those who reoffended did not have stable housing.

According to a national survey, 25% of foster youth reported that they had been homeless at least one night within 2.5 to 4 years after exiting foster care.¹ In 2005, 805 children exited the foster care system in Washington State due to aging, transfer of custody, death, and "no exit reason." So nearly 200 youth each year who age out of the foster care system in Washington will become homeless.

The 2007 State Mental Health Housing Plan published by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) suggests that in 2005, there were approximately 6,000 consumers of public mental health services who experienced homelessness during the year in the five largest Regional Support Networks alone.

Without safe, stable, supportive place to live, foster youth are set up to fail, former violent offenders are more likely to recidivate, and people with chronic mental illnesses will cost taxpayers a significant amount of money in emergency medical, psychiatric and law enforcement interventions.²

How does this legislation address those problems?

This legislation accomplishes two things. One, it requires the Department of Corrections and the Department of Social and Health Services to track the housing status of people being released from their care or custody who receive ongoing supervision or care. We know this is a problem in Washington, but we don't know exact numbers. This legislation would give us that data.

And two, it requires the Department of Corrections and the Department of Social and Health Services to identify the strategies and resources necessary to ensure that people exiting state institutions are not discharged into homelessness, but rather, are given the opportunity to succeed in stable housing that is identified and secured prior to release. The plan would also identify a timeline for future implementation.

How much will it cost?

The cost for this legislation is minimal. Current data collections systems can be easily and inexpensively modified to include a tracking mechanism for housing status; and the expense of the planning requirement is also minimal.

This legislation would also allow pre-existing housing plans to meet the planning requirement, as long as the existing plans are updated with implementation strategies.

How will this legislation help us achieve our goal of ending homelessness?

Preventing homelessness is the most effective way to end homelessness, and is much less costly than assisting households to regain housing. Ensuring that former prisoners, youth aging out of the foster care system and people with chronic mental illness are stably housed upon release from state institutions will significantly reduce the burden on the homeless system, allowing more resources to serve those who lose their homes as a result of the current economic recession.

¹ Cook, R. (1991). A national evaluation of title IV-E foster care independent living programs for youth. Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc.

² Washington State Institute for Public Policy, November 2009. *Impacts of Housing Supports: Persons with Mental Illness and Former Offenders*.

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