

Good Morning Mr. Chairman & Committee Members

My name is Faye Slice

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on HB25, and I urge you to pass this bill.

I was released from prison in 2013, after 11 years of incarceration. Since I had no home, and no financial or community resources, I was sent to live at the Poverello homeless shelter in Missoula. With five years to serve on probation, moving to another state was not an option for me.

I had only the clothes on my back, and \$143 saved from my .30 cent an hour prison job. That measly savings was quickly eaten up by the costs of obtaining a state ID, a cheap cell phone, hygiene items, and second hand clothing.

Although, I was able to obtain employment as a painting contractor within two weeks, I lacked the substantial work history, credit history, and rental history that landlords and property managers required for rental applications. The added stigma of homelessness created more barriers to housing, because rental agencies assume homelessness is a sign of failure, therefore not a good rental risk. I could not pass the application process.

I have PTSD, panic disorder, and chronic depression. After several months, I was unable to cope with the chaos of the homeless shelter, and unable to obtain housing, so I bought an old \$900 car, and lived in the Walmart parking lot. I preferred the security and safety of prison to the constant anxiety of homelessness.

I became severely depressed, and begged probation officers to send me back to prison to serve out my probationary sentence. They refused. It took me more than 9 months to secure stable, permanent housing.

People without housing are marginalized and stigmatized as irresponsible. People without housing spend all of their physical and mental energies on keeping warm, finding safe shelter, obtaining food, and locating a shower. People without housing have no remaining energy for participating in the community, or being productive citizens.

This bill makes fiscal sense: it costs \$90 a day to house someone in prison, and less than \$5 a day to supervise someone on probation or parole. More than 90% of all inmates will be released from prison at some point.

If those who have no community or financial resources serve out their entire prison sentence, they are still homeless upon discharge. This bill decides if we want them released into the possibility of becoming productive law abiding citizens, or into the certainty of marginalized homelessness and likely recidivism.

Without housing, it is difficult to secure employment, and without employment, housing. This downward spiral all too often leads straight back to prison.

HB25 would afford returning citizens a much needed safety net to reintegrate into their communities and become productive citizens.

Please vote to pass this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

FAQ

What is PARTNERS FOR REINTEGRATION?

Local organization and individuals helping people who were previously incarcerated successfully reintegrate back into the Missoula community

Why is this an issue?

More than 90% of people in prison will eventually be released back into society, and are facing significant obstacles upon release.

What are the obstacles?

Housing, employment, access to treatment, education, and family support are the main issues returning citizens face after release from prison.

Why help them?

Not having these services available is a significant reason why previously incarcerated individuals commit more crimes. It is also morally the right thing to do. Finally, as the inside graphic shows, it is far less expensive to provide these services than to send someone back to prison.

How do these services help?

These services empower returning citizens to provide for themselves to become productive members of the community.

How can the Missoula Community help solve the problem?

By being supportive of returning citizens, particularly in the areas of housing and employment.

Aren't previously incarcerated individuals a risk to help?

Returning citizens usually have a re-entry plan before release from prison that addresses public safety concerns. Moreover, most are on probation, and are being monitored by a probation officers. Most returning citizens prefer to be lawful, and avoid being returned to prison.

Are there other issues returning citizens face?

The stigma attached to being a felon and previously incarcerated can be difficult to overcome. There is a general tendency for the public to prejudice these people based on their criminal past, instead of encouraging them to reform their lives, and live a productive future.

MISSOULA PARTNERS FOR REINTEGRATION

VISION: a community that is welcoming and inclusive for citizens returning from incarceration who want to succeed, by enhancing their access to housing, jobs, treatment, social connections and relationships, and by working to change community practices, policies and stigmatizing perceptions and misconceptions.

MISSION: develop shared goals and collaboration among congregations, social agencies, businesses, and previously incarcerated individuals, in partnership with Department of Corrections (Missoula office), in order to:

- encourage reintegration into the Missoula community
- reduce prisoner recidivism in Missoula County
- improve public safety

Partners for Reintegration

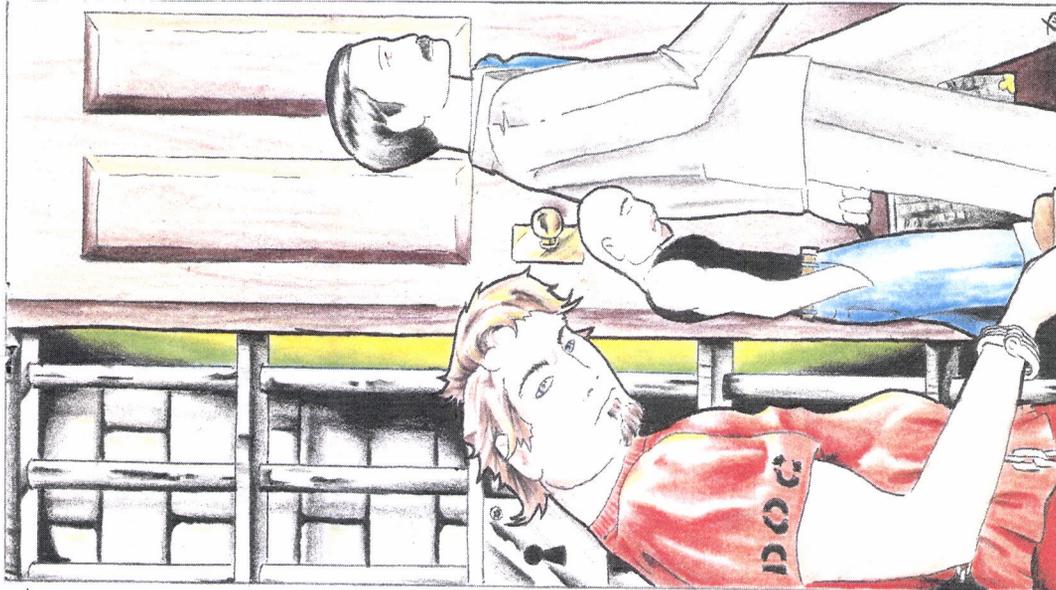
Partners holds quarterly community meetings in Missoula and maintains an e-mail list for notices of meetings, task groups, advocacy events.

To join the email list or find out more, you can contact our volunteer administrator at:

pfrmissoula@hotmail.com.

Cover Art by Levi Daniels.

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MISSOULA PARTNERS FOR REINTEGRATION

Missoula Incarcerated



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 \$\$\$ = \$12,172,000

SOCIAL COSTS OF PRISON

Missoula County residents account for 358 of incarcerated persons in Montana.

Missoula's cost of the incarcerated represents:

- \$98-\$104/day/inmate
- Nearly \$40,000/year per incarcerated person
- 307 non-violent offenders who qualify for placement in appropriate prison alternative programs
- Childcare vouchers unavailable
- Housing assistance for needy families unavailable
- College tuition for low income students could be funded
- K-12 elementary teachers could be hired
- For every dollar diverted from K-12 education, \$4 is spent on incarceration
- Children with an incarcerated parent are 50% more likely than peers to end up in prison
- Foster care and social services for inmates' children
- Little or no restitution payments to victims

Alternative Correctional Programs:

- Electronic Supervision \$9.75/day
- Probation \$4.62/day
- Pre-release Center \$52-\$64
- In-patient Treatment \$80-\$146
- Reparations for restorative justice