



Montana Department of Corrections

Director's Office

Steve Bullock, Governor
Reginald D. Michael, Director

Montana State Prison: Visiting Program Facts and Figures

Designed to “encourage family ties and supportive relationships important to the stability of offenders while incarcerated and upon release,” visiting policies at Montana State Prison (MSP) entered the 21st Century in 2019.

After decades of providing visitation of inmates by families and friends on a first-come, first-served basis, MSP decided to pilot an online visitation reservation system to serve the estimated 7,000 family and friends who visit the facility annually. The facility is in its fifth month of the pilot program.

How does it work?

- MSP staff evaluates and approves family and friends' applications to visit inmates.
- Approved visitors register an account with CenturyLink online or by phone, free of charge.
- Visitors schedule visits up to 30 days in advance by going online or calling the toll-free number. Visits must be scheduled seven days in advance.
- Visitors may reserve one, two-hour slot each week. Unreserved slots are filled on a first-call basis once the online registration has closed, which is seven days before the visit.
- Families and friends may also schedule video visitation with inmates. There is a small fee for this.

Why did we do this?

- To increase overall visiting opportunities (from two days to four a week), and decrease wait times.
- Efficiency in scheduling.
- Greater security for prison staff. (We know who will be coming into the facility in advance and can perform appropriate screening in advance.)
- Video visitation provides a more affordable option for visitors who would otherwise need to travel to MSP for visits.

Successes related to the change:

- Able to proceed with visitation when internet/computers go down. Previously, visitation would have been canceled because staff members couldn't perform appropriate background checks of visitors.
- Visitors are not turned away due to visiting rooms being over capacity as happened with the first-come, first-served method.
- Video visitation can take place even when staffing levels are low.
- Since implementation of the new system, MSP has managed 1,291 contact visits, 1,766 video visits, and 226 special visits and “pencil ins” — a total of 3,283 visits.

Areas for improvement:

- As with any change, there has been a learning curve for visitors. DOC continues to address that.
- Cancellation of visitation continues to occur under certain circumstances (inadequate staffing levels, lockdowns, etc.).
- Inmate grievances related to visiting in FY2019: Eight formal grievances out of a total 1,395 grievances filed, 12 informal grievances out of a total 3,669 grievances filed.

Steps to address concerns:

- Instructional materials online and in hard copy to help visitors understand process.
- Investigating additional methods of alerting scheduled visitors when visitation is canceled including text messages and posting on DOC social media pages.
- Looking at ways to increase notification time when visitation is canceled.
- Offering compensatory incentives to MSP staff (who are already on mandatory overtime) to encourage them to accept additional shifts to cover visitation. It is important to note that visitation is considered a priority item when coordinating staffing.

Bottom line:

Visiting at MSP cannot take place when staffing levels don't allow for it — safety and security at the facility must be maintained. While the DOC is working hard to fill open positions at the facility, this remains a challenge that will continue to affect visitation into the foreseeable future.

New programming demonstrates DOC commitment to keeping Montana families connected:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

DATE, 2019.

CONTACT:

Carolynn Bright, Communications Director
(406) 444-0409

U.S. Department of Justice grant, new Montana DOC program to help reunite children with incarcerated parents sooner

Montana children will have a greater chance of connecting with their incarcerated parents thanks to a \$673,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

The funds — to be delivered through the 2019 Second Chance Act Addressing the Needs of Incarcerated Parents and Their Minor Children program — will be used to expand upon the Montana State Prison's existing Nurturing Parenting Program. MSP houses around 1,600 men, many of whom have minor children. The new program will provide additional evidence-based services to build parenting skills, and reconnect and support families as they strengthen relationships in cases where a parent-child relationship is appropriate.

The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) will hire a project coordinator to facilitate the program and coordinate a work group, comprised of state agency and community partners, to craft policy, implement the program, and develop resources for incarcerated inmates and their families. As part of the program, DOC will also provide Adverse Childhood Experiences training and Mental Health First Aid.

"This program will help children cope with the challenges they face having an incarcerated parent, which will hopefully improve their overall health and well-being. Solid family connections also help reduce the chance that inmates will slip back into criminal behaviors when they are released from prison," said Marisa Britton-Bostwick, education director at MSP. "This grant will allow us to serve between 120 and 144 families through innovative efforts, including a licensed counselor-led, three-day, family CAMPP (Connecting Adults and Minors through Positive Parenting) experience at MSP."

#