



# FLORIDA POLICY PROJECT

BEST PRACTICES, BETTER OUTCOMES

## **Improving Reentry in Florida.**

Reducing Crime, Reducing Costs, and Transforming Lives.

October 6, 2023

[FloridaPolicyProject.com](https://FloridaPolicyProject.com)

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Crime rates in Florida have been cut in half over the past two decades. (1) Despite this, incarceration rates have remained stable.

Much of the stability in incarceration rates is the result of many of the same people cycling in and out of prison. Each year Florida releases and admits approximately the same number of people to prison.

In 2022, Florida released just over 24,000 people. (2)

More than 90% of the 82,000 people incarcerated in Florida prisons will eventually return to our communities.

Over 60% of people released from Florida prisons will be rearrested within 3 years of release. (3)

20-25% of people released in any given year will be reincarcerated in Florida within three years of release.

THREE YEAR REINCARCERATION RATE			
	MONTHS SINCE RELEASE		
RELEASE YEAR	12 MONTHS	24 MONTHS	36 MONTHS
2013	9%	18%	25%
2014	8%	17%	24%
2015	9%	18%	25%
2016	8%	18%	25%
2017	9%	18%	24%
2018	8%	16%	21%

  

THREE YEAR REARREST RATE			
	MONTHS SINCE RELEASE		
RELEASE YEAR	12 MONTHS	24 MONTHS	36 MONTHS
2013	38%	54%	61%
2014	37%	52%	60%
2015	37%	52%	60%
2016	37%	53%	61%
2017	38%	54%	61%
2018	39%	54%	61%

If one of the goals of incarceration is to prevent people from re-offending and being reincarcerated, Florida must look at improving its correctional programming to reduce recidivism and keep its communities safe.

There are six evidenced-based best practices legislators should focus their effort on to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes:

1. Employment related programs are associated with reductions in recidivism from 13-55% and can save taxpayers as much as \$17 for every \$1 spent on the programs. (4)
2. Education programming can reduce recidivism upon release by up to 13% and every dollar spent can save taxpayers \$5 to \$12. (5)
3. Substance abuse treatment can reduce recidivism by as much as 10% and may save \$5 in taxes for every \$1 spent on treatment. (6)
4. Mental health programming can reduce recidivism by 40-50% for people in need of treatment and may save \$2-\$6 for each \$1 spent. (7)
5. Staying connected with friends and family through visitation may reduce recidivism by as much as 13%. (8)
6. Transitional services that continue to provide programming into the community may reduce recidivism by as much as 9%. (9)

The tables that follow provide more detail on these best practices including evidence-based programs that have been rigorously evaluated, the potential outcomes of these programs for reducing recidivism and costs, Florida's current approach to each area of programming, and recommendations for legislators regarding each program. (10)

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PRACTICE	PROGRAM	POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	CURRENT APPROACH	RECOMMENDED ACTION
EMPLOYMENT	Work Release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13% reduction in recidivism.</li> </ul>	Currently in use in FL <b>but only during final months of sentence and excludes higher risk inmates.</b>	Fund a pilot program and evaluation of expanded eligibility of work release for certain higher risk inmates.
	Correctional Industries with post-release job assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 50% reduction in reincarceration.</li> <li>• 72% increase in 1-year employment.</li> <li>• \$17 in benefit for each \$1 invested.</li> </ul>	FL currently contracts with PRIDE which provides training but <b>only 3% (2,525) of inmates were trained by PRIDE.</b>	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after Minnesota's EMPLOY program which provides training and post-release employment assistance.
EDUCATION	<p><b>Adult Basic Education</b></p> <p>64% of FL inmates need general education.</p> <p>Only 4% enrolled on average.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13% reduction in recidivism.</li> <li>• \$5 in cost savings on reincarceration for every \$1 spent.</li> </ul>	<b>2.6% (\$84.5m) of FL's total correctional budget (\$3.3b) goes to education programming.</b>	Increase the DOC budget for educational programming commensurate with inmate needs.
	<p><b>Post-Secondary Education</b></p> <p>One-way online courses or in-person courses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6% lower 1-year rearrest rates for participants</li> </ul>	Some facilities in FL provide access to higher education but <b>no known state funded rigorously evaluated</b> programs are currently offered in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after New Mexico's approach partnering with the state college / university systems.
SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAM	<p><b>Therapeutic Communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 17% of FL inmates who need SA treatment have access to programming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8% lower incarceration after 5-years for participants.</li> </ul>	Some therapeutic communities (TCs) are in use in FL but there are <b>no known rigorously evaluated</b> programs currently offered in FL and fewer than 1300 inmates live in TCs in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after California's approach to therapeutic communities. Fund and evaluate innovative evidence-based solutions to substance abuse.

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PRACTICE	PROGRAM	POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	CURRENT APPROACH	RECOMMENDED ACTION
<b>MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT</b>	Serious Mental Illness Transition Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants over 40% less likely to recidivate.</li> </ul>	<b>No similar rigorously evaluated</b> program currently offered in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after Washington’s Mentally Ill Offender Transition Program. Fund and evaluate innovative evidence-based solutions to mental illness.
	Cognitive Behavior Therapy (Enhanced Thinking Skills)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants 52% less likely to be reconvicted 2-years post-release.</li> <li>Every \$1 spent on CBT associated with \$6+ in cost savings.</li> </ul>	<b>No similar rigorously evaluated</b> program currently offered in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after the Enhanced Thinking Skills Program developed in the UK. Fund and evaluate innovative evidence-based solutions to behavioral mental health issues.
<b>STAYING CONNECTED</b>	<b>Visitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People who receive visits 13% less likely to be reconvicted.</li> <li>25% less likely to be rearrested.</li> </ul>	This program is in effect in FL. Staff limitations and visitation processes act as barriers for increased use.	Provide additional funding to DOC to reduce staffing issues. Simplify the visitation process.
	<b>Mediated Visits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants 13% less likely to be rearrested, 15% less likely to be reconvicted, 12% less likely to return to prison.</li> </ul>	<b>No similar rigorously evaluated</b> program currently offered in FL.	Fund a pilot program and evaluation modeled after Maryland’s Reentry Mediation Program.
	<b>Video Visitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited impact.</li> </ul>	Not widely used in FL.	Fund and evaluate pilot studies of the use and availability of video visitation.
<b>TRANSITIONAL SERVICE</b>	<p>Continued Service Delivery from Prison to Community. Various Programs Focus on one or more of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing</li> <li>Substance abuse treatment</li> <li>Employment</li> <li>Life Skills</li> <li>Mental Health Treatment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 9% reduction in recidivism.</li> </ul>	FL allocated over \$8 million for a program (Operation New Hope) that provides transition assistance. The program has yet to be rigorously evaluated. The scope of the program is limited to certain service areas and participants.	Fund an evaluation of Operation New Hope and increase funding should it prove effective or invest in pilot programs and evaluations modeling successful programs from other states like Wisconsin’s Safe Street Prisoner Release Initiative.

## END NOTES

1. Data from: U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2019. Uniform Crime Report. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/>
2. Data from: U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2023. Corrections Statistical Analysis Tool. <https://csat.bjs.ojp.gov/>
3. Data from: Florida Department of Corrections. 2022. Florida Recidivism Report: Releases from 2008 to 2020.
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9. Bouffard, J. & Bergeron, L. 2006. Reentry Works: The Implementation and Effectiveness of a Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 44, 1–29; Lowenkamp, C.T. & Latessa, E.J. 2005. Increasing the Effectiveness of Correctional Programming through the Risk Principle: Identifying Offenders for Residential Placement. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 4, 263–90; Zhang, S., Roberts, R., & Callanan, V. 2006. Preventing Parolees From Returning to Prison Through Community-Based Reintegration. *Crime & Delinquency*, 52, 551–71; Cook, P.J., Kang, S., Braga, A.A., Ludwig, J., & O’Brien, M.E. 2014. An Experimental Evaluation of a Comprehensive Employment-Oriented Prisoner Re-entry Program. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 31, 355–82.
10. Only programs rated promising or effective according to the Office of Justice Programs rigorous evaluation criteria are included (see [crimesolutions.ojp.gov](http://crimesolutions.ojp.gov)). Additional effective programs may exist but have yet to be evaluated according to these criteria.