South Dakota Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force

CSG Justice Center Overarching Recommendations on Rehabilitation and Reentry for CRTF Adoption

Executive Order 2025-07 established the Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force (CRTF) and directs it to evaluate programming and treatment needs and identify opportunities for expansion. It also charges the CRTF with studying reentry models and best practices, recognizing the need "to help inmates safely reenter their communities." The following recommendations build on the CSG Justice Center's programming assessment findings presented to the task force in June and the reentry assessment findings presented in August. Together, these investments in public safety will help ensure that correctional programs are delivered in ways proven to reduce recidivism and increase supports that help people succeed after release from prison.

These recommendations will take time to implement effectively. The task force began by asking what programming should look like once South Dakota has new prison space, and space remains a real limit in current facilities. Some recommendations can move now, and others should be phased in over the medium and long term as budgets allow and new facilities open. Overall, the goal is for people in prison to use their time productively through programming, in-facility work, or work release, so they return to their communities ready to succeed.

1. DOC Administrative Changes

The CRTF should endorse the following administrative changes and ask DOC to report publicly each year in its annual statistical report on implementation progress and the quantitative measures in Part 1.5.

1.1 Increase program capacity and quality.

Improvements to which programs are offered and to who gets into them will not hold without the staff, structure, and oversight needed to deliver programs consistently.

Recommendation: DOC should consolidate accountability for program quality within the Rehabilitation and Reentry Division and build internal capacity to maintain it.

- Build a rehabilitation and reentry division under one accountable leader, with program facilitators reporting to the people responsible for program quality.
- Stand up the quality assurance and facilitator development team to ensure programs follow recidivism-reduction research.
- Build a rehabilitative culture among custody staff, so they see programming as part of the security mission, not a competing demand.
- Continue expanding peer-led programming, with training and oversight, so that it extends capacity rather than replacing evidence-based programming.

- Strengthen DOC's internal program committee as the cross-division body responsible for the program catalog, curriculum pathways, peer-led and volunteer programs, and the earned-credit structure, coordinating across education, behavioral health, reentry, and custody.
- Set shared data and reporting standards so that program participation and outcomes are measured consistently across facilities over time.

1.2 Increase access and standardize the waitlist process.

Access is uneven across facilities and populations, and despite significant increases in programming in recent years, not enough people receive important rehabilitative programs.

Recommendation: DOC should make program placement transparent and rule-based and close gaps in what is offered.

- Complete the centralized waitlist and placement system and communicate written referral criteria to the people on the list.
- Streamline the program catalog to reduce the number of programs when several programs address the same need.
- Fill identified gaps: literacy and education for all levels of learners, domestic violence programming, tribally responsive programming, structured employment readiness, and options for people serving long sentences.
- Conduct facility-level audits to resolve scheduling and operational barriers that cut into program time.

1.3 Sequence programming to start earlier in the stay.

Programs reduce reoffending only when people complete them, and a logical sequence established at intake spreads programming across a person's full term rather than compressing it into the months before release.

Recommendation: DOC should sequence programming from intake to release and build options that fit people's available time.

- Sequence each person's programming based on assessed risk and need to ensure they receive rehabilitative programming throughout their sentence. Build program pathways that fit the length of stay.
- Coordinate each person's program plan across education, behavioral health, and reentry so programming is not delivered in silos.
- Create a dedicated track for people returning on a parole violation, who are frequently placed in full-length programs they completed during a prior term.
- Task the program committee with adopting and monitoring earned-credit changes alongside the program pathways.

1.4 Improve readiness to return to the community.

Almost everyone in a South Dakota prison will come home at some point, most of them on parole, making reentry planning and community supports critical to reducing recidivism.

Recommendation: DOC should ensure that every person leaves prison with the documents, benefits, transportation, and appointments they need to stay stable in the first months after release.

- Start reentry planning at admission by integrating it into intake assessments.
- Ensure that every person leaves prison with vital documents, a completed benefits enrollment, a transportation plan, and scheduled appointments.
- Connect prison work and job training, including work release, to employment after release.
- Establish a formal referral process among prison staff, parole supervision, and community providers that specifies what information each partner shares and within what timeframe to ensure warm handoffs upon release.
- Begin Medicaid enrollment and substance use treatment referrals, including medication-assisted treatment, prior to release.
- Expand flexible transportation options, including vouchers, volunteer driver programs, and local transit partnerships, especially in rural areas.
- Create incentives for landlords to rent to people returning from prison by establishing a risk mitigation fund that provides additional housing opportunities.
- Use release and service data to identify where state reentry services are thinnest and prioritize investments accordingly.

1.5 Track program and reentry measures to benchmark progress.

DOC should include the following measures in its annual statistical report so policymakers and the public can see progress on key measures. These should be reported over time, using 2025 data as the baseline:

Program measures:

- People in prison who received any DOC-instructed programming
- People in prison who successfully completed any DOC-instructed programming
- People released who completed at least one DOC-instructed program
- People released at the highest risk of recidivating who received no DOC-instructed programming
- One-year return-to-prison rate among people who completed programming, compared with the overall return rate, by program type

Reentry measures:

- People released with vital documents
- Housing upon release by type
- People on parole employed in the first three months of release

The department should also continue working toward linking specific programs to reoffending outcomes over time. A clear program-by-program answer is not available today, and even with complete data, isolating a single program's effect is genuinely difficult because people participate in multiple programs and are not randomly assigned to them. The realistic path is to measure completion and dosage now, use the pre- and post-assessments staff already collect, connect program data to recidivism as the data system matures, and reserve rigorous evaluation for the highest-priority programs.

2. Budget Requests

The following requires appropriation.

2.1 Add program, prison security, and parole staff and pay market rate.

Prison programs cannot run without staff to deliver them and corrections officers to transport people to them. The programming assessment found staffing gaps among program facilitators, including clinical, education, and reentry staff, as well as the correctional officers who staff program posts. Staffing is the most important investment the state can make in rehabilitation, and it is also the largest. Some positions are needed now, and others should be phased in over several budget cycles as program space becomes available, including as new facilities open.

The CSG Justice Center found that people often do not make it to class because security staff are stretched too thin. Each new security post requires about 2.7 FTE to cover all shifts, days off, and absences. These positions do not require new classroom space. They ensure people can reach the programs that already exist, so adding them at each facility where the assessment found gaps would increase program participation right away.

Leadership and quality assurance positions are also needed now to successfully implement the administrative changes in this document. DOC has already filled the director of rehabilitation and reentry position by reassigning someone from an existing position, but the quality assurance team is not yet staffed. Funding these positions directly ensures they add overall capacity to provide more and better programs rather than shifting existing positions and creating holes elsewhere. Additional parole agents are also needed now to strengthen reentry supports, since most people leaving prison are released to parole supervision. Additional program staff, including behavioral health clinicians, teachers, and reentry coaches who facilitate programs, should be phased in. DOC should start with positions that can deliver programs in existing space and add more as new facilities open.

Authorizing a position, filling it, and retaining staff in that position are all distinct activities. In the Department of Labor and Regulation's 2025 employer survey,[1] 84% of South Dakota employers said their greatest workforce challenge was finding qualified candidates or filling positions at all. The DOC competes in that same market for counselors, teachers, and local jail correctional officers. Therefore, over time, DOC should move toward hiring new positions at market rate and increasing current staff pay to align with it. Raising current program facilitators and behavioral health salaries to market rate would cost an additional **$821,720 annually**.

Recommendation: In the next budget cycle, fund correctional officers for program posts, the director of rehabilitation and reentry, a quality assurance team, program facilitators where classroom space is available, and additional parole agents. Phase in additional program staff, starting with positions that fit current program space and expanding as new facilities open. Over time, move toward market-rate pay for existing program facilitators and behavioral health staff.

2.2 Fund programming supports.

Program access in South Dakota's prisons increased from 27% to 44% over 3 years, and 77% of program outcomes are now positive. Aligned with the administrative programming recommendations described in Part 1.1 above, the following funding will help improve rehabilitation behind the wall.

Item	What it would buy	Amount
Quality assurance training	Training the new quality assurance team in a structured, evidence-based method for reviewing programs, so DOC can verify programs are delivered as designed and are reducing recidivism	$50,000 one-time
In-prison peer support and transitional services contracts	Competitive contracts with community organizations to deliver peer support training, programs, and transitional services	$700,000 annual
Total		**$750,000**

The first budget item enables the new quality assurance team to verify that programs are delivered in line with recidivism-reduction research. As a result of this investment, DOC will be able to review each of its programs against a national standard, tell leadership specifically how each program needs to change, and measure whether quality improves over time. Because the training certifies DOC staff to conduct these reviews themselves, the state will build permanent internal capacity rather than paying for an outside evaluation each time it wants to know whether a program is working.

[1] South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation, Employer Survey 2025 Report (Pierre, 2025), 3, https://dlr.sd.gov/publications/documents/Employer-Survey-2025-Report.pdf.

The second budget item establishes a reliable funding stream to increase program capacity outside DOC. Peer-led programming already extends stretched staff's reach informally, and competitive contracting would make that capacity consistent, accountable, and measurable. Competitive contracting also lets DOC select the providers and programs that best meet its needs, consistent with state procurement requirements.

Recommendation: Fund $750,000 in additional programs and quality assurance; $50,000 of which is a one-time investment.

2.3 Fund supports to increase reentry success.

Eighty percent of men and 91% of women leave South Dakota prisons on parole, returning to communities across the state. Of the people who go back to prison, roughly 7 in 10 are returned on a technical violation rather than a new crime. The reentry assessment identified two barriers that come up repeatedly and that a relatively small amount of money can move. People leaving prison struggle to find a landlord willing to rent to them, which leaves them without the stable address that employment and supervision both depend on. And they struggle to get to work, treatment, and appointments in the first months post-release. These recommendations align with those from Part 1.4 above.

Item	What it would buy	Amount
Landlord risk mitigation fund	Covers damages or unpaid rent so more landlords will rent to people leaving prison	$150,000 annual
Transportation support fund	Bus passes in Sioux Falls and Rapid City and gas or ride vouchers elsewhere, focused on the first 90 days after release	$250,000 annual
Total		**$400,000**

Recommendation: Fund $400,000 in reentry supports annually.

3. Legislative Changes

This section covers what would require legislation and what the legislature could choose to place in statute.

3.1 Ensure DOC can adjust earned discharge credits (EDCs) as implementation progresses to boost successful outcomes.

Earned discharge credits reward both program completion and work, two key ways South Dakota ensures that people make productive use of their time in prison. EDCs are the strongest incentive the system has to encourage people to complete important rehabilitative programs. As DOC

implements critical administrative changes, it must be able to adjust EDCs to be responsive to current needs and priorities.

Recommendation: Let the department set credit values and award work credit monthly under administrative rules it promulgates, so it can adjust as programs change without returning to the legislature. This will allow the department to set credit values according to program effort. SDCL 24-15A-50.1 now fixes those values in statute: 90 days per program completion, 90 days per 360 hours of work, and a 180-day annual cap on work credit.

3.2 Consider placing key changes in statute.

CSG Justice Center staff are recommending many administrative changes that do not require legislation, but the CRTF may want to consider recommending that key changes be placed in statute to protect sustainability.

Item	Status today
The Rehabilitation and Reentry Division	Created administratively in 2026
The quality assurance and facilitator development function	Proposed, funded through the FY28 request
Annual public reporting	DOC plans to add the measures in Part 1.5 to its annual statistical report

Recommendation: Members should vote on whether to place any of these in statute. The tradeoff is durability versus flexibility.

4. Sustain and Expand Impact

The CRTF was created to examine programming in the prison system, and under Executive Order 2025-07 it expires on January 1, 2027. The CRTF's final report will mark the completion of its work. Several issues the task force identified extend beyond in-prison rehabilitation and the entities represented on the task force, and they require continued attention after the task force sunsets.

4.1 Continue cross-system work on parole and reentry.

Thirty-five percent of the 2021 release cohort returned to prison for a technical violation, more than twice the rate for new crimes. Fifty-four agents supervise more than 3,150 people on parole statewide.

Returns to prison from parole supervision occur in part because reentry coordination often breaks down during the transition from prison to community, where resources for people reentering from prison are unevenly distributed and fragmented across the state. Although they serve the same population, parole, housing, workforce, education, behavioral health, and social services are operating in silos. No single body coordinates these systems, and no statewide reentry goals exist

so policymakers and the public can benchmark progress toward reducing recidivism and improving public safety.

Recommendation: South Dakota should continue this work through a cross-system effort that brings together agencies and partners responsible for parole supervision, housing, education and employment, and behavioral health services, including partners not represented on the CRTF. That effort should establish clear public goals and report progress toward them and the state should assess the parole supervision system and make administrative improvements where needed. Reentry 2030 is a national framework for establishing reentry goals and statewide strategic plans, and other states have launched Reentry 2030 initiatives by executive order or proclamation. The DOC has pending federal grant applications that would help fund this work (see Part 4.2), which could be structured as a single body, coordinated working groups, or through another approach.

The CRTF reentry assessment identified specific work across key reentry domains. Each area below requires coordination among state agencies, community providers, and Tribal partners, with clear leadership roles, shared goals, and public reporting on whether they are met. If South Dakota is unsuccessful in securing federal funding, it remains critical for the state to move forward with a statewide reentry coordination effort. CSG Justice Center staff can help coordinate this work and, if desired by state leaders, help South Dakota create a statewide reentry strategic plan with additional funding.

Goal area	What the reentry assessment identified	Likely lead
Education and employment	Enhance literacy education and expand vocational training aligned to regional labor market needs. Standardize pre-release employment referrals and continuity of career services after release. Build statewide employer engagement and second-chance hiring. Ensure people know which legal barriers affect their field and the mechanisms that relieve them. Track employment outcomes beyond initial job placement.	Department of Labor and Regulation, with Department of Education, DOC, the technical colleges, and Tribal workforce programs
Housing	Expand transitional housing capacity for people with higher needs. Increase landlord engagement and incentive programs. Explore rental assistance models. Develop a statewide reentry housing strategy that aligns corrections, housing, local and Tribal governments, and providers.	South Dakota Housing, with DOC and local and Tribal housing authorities
Behavioral health	Expand community treatment capacity for serious mental illness. Increase access in rural and Tribal communities. Align funding with individualized clinical needs. Build a behavioral health workforce trained to serve this population. Consider mobile multidisciplinary treatment teams for the transition period. Consider adopting an outcomes-based	State behavioral health authority, with DOC and community providers

Goal area	What the reentry assessment identified	Likely lead
	reimbursement model for community behavioral health and peer support services, like North Dakota's Free Through Recovery program, which would address the shortage of behavioral health providers in rural areas, and increase community services in the months after release.	
Parole supervision	Strengthen parole supervision practices and the handoff from prison to parole agents for the highest-risk population.	Department of Corrections, with the Board of Pardons and Paroles
Cross-cutting	Formalize cross-agency data-sharing agreements. Set and publish statewide outcome measures across these domains. Co-design culturally responsive services with Tribal partners. Include people with lived experience.	DOC or a coordinating body

4.2 Pending federal grant applications may sustain this work.

As mentioned above, South Dakota has federal applications pending for two projects. The first, submitted to BJA's FY25 Justice Reinvestment Initiative: Strengthening State and Local Operations to Reduce Crime and Recidivism grant, would fund cross-system work to improve parole outcomes and coordinate reentry across housing, treatment, employment, and county partners, along with field technology that helps parole agents to prevent and respond to crime. The second, a healthcare career pathways project for incarcerated women in partnership with Sanford Health, would build the training, employer partnerships, and data capacity needed to improve reentry outcomes for incarcerated women. DOC submitted this project to BJA's Second Chance Act Improving Reentry Education and Employment Outcomes grant for both FY25 and FY26 funding opportunities. DOC has requested federal funding authority for these applications in its FY28 budget request, so if a grant is awarded, these items would not require state funding.

Recommendation: The CRTF should endorse DOC's request for federal funding authority in the FY28 budget, enabling the state to accept these awards without delay. Regardless of the grant outcomes, South Dakota should move forward with statewide reentry coordination and DOC should complete a parole operations and needs assessment and use its findings to improve parole practices statewide, as recommended in 4.1.