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Extending the Early Release Voucher Program

Background

The Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) has a program that funds \$500 vouchers for 3 months for people who qualify for early release. Without an address to release to or funds to pay for rent, many people will end up staying in state facilities longer, costing taxpayers far more and denying the person a chance to begin putting themselves on a track toward getting a job, recovering their certifications, or connecting with family.

Efficiency and Compassion

A paper by Zachary Hamilton at Washington State University called, [*Removing Release Impediments and Reducing Correctional Costs: Evaluation of Washington State's Housing Voucher Program*](#), reported a quantitative analysis that the program both saved money and contributed to people successfully avoiding going back to jail.

The findings demonstrated that housing vouchers represent an efficient alternative to incarceration that can reduce costs and increase offender reintegration with few discernible drawbacks to public safety, as compared to current standard practices. Furthermore, programs such as this one are encouraging to States looking to extend early release programs due to current fiscal demands and/or prison overcrowding.

The voucher program is both efficient, saving the state money, and compassionate giving people a chance to reintegrate themselves back into regular life. Something harder to quantify but equally important is the benefit to the broader community when a person becomes productive and is able to achieve their goals for themselves and their families.

Extending and Fully Funding

The legislature should:

1. Extend the voucher to 12 months;
2. Appropriate funding for the program based on past years; and
3. Create an allowance for an adjustment of the vouchers based on Fair Market Rents like section 8

Extension without funding won't do all that much. And for more expensive markets there ought to be an allowance to mirror the rent structure in the Section 8 program. **The study found that many participants no longer need the voucher after they gain employment, so not all participants would need a full 12 months.**