



Re-entry Services for Justice-Involved Women

Vermont Works for Women (VWW) provides a continuum of employment and career services for women who have a history with or are currently involved with the justice system. Since 2001, VWW has partnered with the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide work-readiness services. Women can begin accessing our career resource center and personalized career coaching while incarcerated at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF) in South Burlington, VT. Post release, VWW continues to support women with integrating into their communities by navigating the job search process, problem solving obstacles and accessing supports.

In 2020, VWW expanded its community re-entry support from Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties into Rutland and Windham counties due to funding from the CARES Act. The funding for the two regional re-entry support specialist positions was temporary, ending in December 2020. Please contact VWW for testimony, participant stories, or shared expertise in any related matters.

Justice-involved women, due to their gender and other intersecting factors, face tremendous barriers to economic independence after being released from prison.

Gender, race and trauma-responsive re-entry services and supports for women leaving incarceration, funded by the State of Vermont, are essential to their successful reintegration into the community.

- 90 percent of justice-involved women in Vermont have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. “A majority of women arrive to prison with and because of extensive histories of complex trauma. Among incarcerated women, trauma — and its co-occurring mental health conditions and substance use disorders — remains largely or entirely untreated in prison,” according to ACLU of Vermont’s Blueprint for Smart Justice Report. Helping women access mental health and treatment services instead becomes part of the re-entry process.
- Justice-involved women experience lower rates of employment post release and less financial support from family than their male counterparts, according to Urban Institute’s Health and Prisoner Reentry Report. A majority of justice-involved women cite employment, education and life skills services as their greatest area of need upon re-entry, followed closely by transition services, according to the National Institute of Justice.
- Most women in prison (62 percent nationally) are mothers of minor children, and are more likely than fathers in prison to be the primary caretakers, according to Wendy Sawyer, Research Director at the Prison Policy Initiative.

VWW calls on the State to implement and allocate sustained funding toward gender, race and trauma-responsive re-entry services and supports provided by community organizations with a proven track record. These supports should start with pre-release planning and connect to post-release coaching and wraparound support services in the community to help stabilize women and families, and break the cycle of criminal justice involvement.

VWW also calls on the State to establish and implement a training and best practices program for gender-responsiveness in the women’s prison and train all CRCF staff on gender-responsive corrections practices as well as institute mandatory, annual sexual harassment training for all DOC staff, as recommended by the firm Downs Rachlin Martin, PLLC in their recent report following the independent investigation into the prevalence of sexual abuse, harassment, misconduct and exploitation at CRCF.



Almost 80 percent of women cite employment, education and life skills services as their greatest area of need upon re-entry.

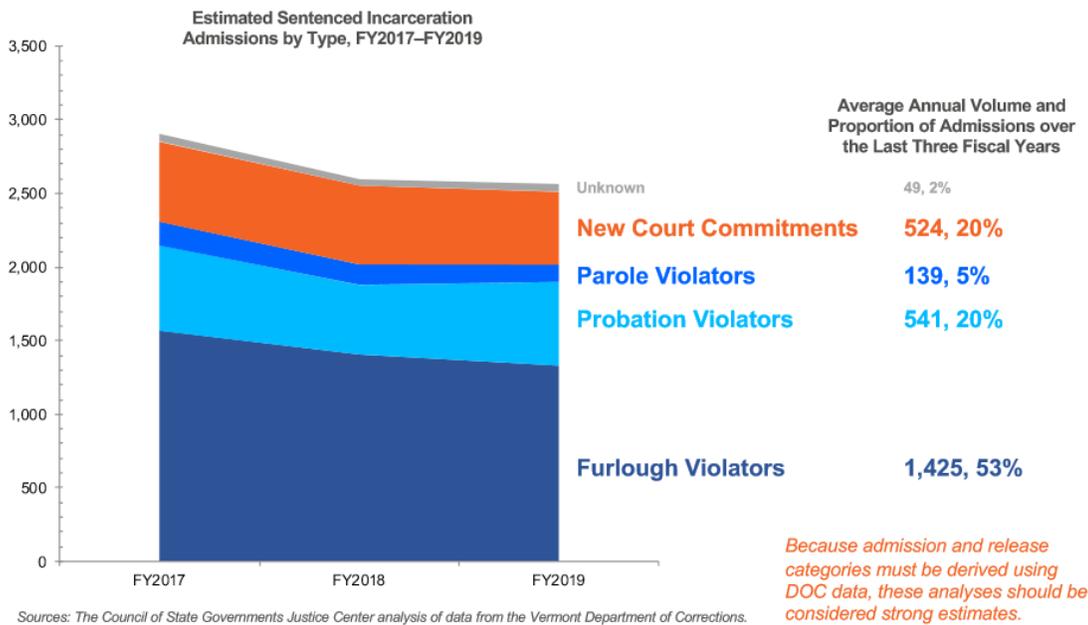
Vermont must increase the availability of transitional housing, with wraparound supports, for women.

As of October 2020, almost 20 percent of women at CRCF are incarcerated past their minimum release date due to a lack of housing approved by the DOC.

In spite of housing being a condition of release, three transitional residences closed their doors this year, leaving women with a limited number of beds at Northern Lights, Phoenix House's RISE and Jenna's House.

VWW calls on the Vermont Department of Corrections to proactively provide state-issued IDs to women pre-release, thereby eliminating one of the major barriers for women seeking employment.

The law already dictates that women eligible for release have the right to a state-issued ID. However, women must submit a request, and many are not aware of their right to identification as well as the process they must engage in to receive one. The result is that some women leave the facility without an ID and must work to apply for one in the community, where they often face transportation and other accessibility barriers, before they can begin to apply for employment.



As of December 2020, 84 women are incarcerated at CRCF. Almost 80 percent of prison admissions are for community supervision violations, such as losing one's employment or approved housing, according to The Council of State Governments 2020 Report.

While state-funded gender, race and trauma-responsive re-entry services and supports would support justice-involved women to successfully reintegrate back into their communities and achieve economic independence, there is also a collective benefit. The strategies outlined above can reduce community supervision violations and incarcerated populations in Vermont overall, improving the lives of hundreds of Vermonters and saving taxpayer dollars.



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