

# TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR ALABAMA'S FORMER INMATES

Certified Public Manager® Program

Solutions Alabama 2019



**AUM**

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY  
AT MONTGOMERY**

**CONTINUING EDUCATION &  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Transitional Housing Project Team Members .....	3
Acknowledgements .....	4
Introduction .....	5
Former Inmate’s Basic Needs .....	7
Resources Provided by Alabama .....	15
Resources Provided by Other States and the Federal Government.....	21
Recommendations .....	28
References .....	31

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS



Alabama Department of Corrections

Lori McCulloch

Tom Woodfin



Alabama Department of Insurance

Shawn Stewart



Alabama Department of Revenue

Kimberly Bethea

Wanda Robbins



Alabama Law Enforcement Agency

Christy Jones



Retirement Systems of Alabama

Brent Speer

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The transitional housing project team would like to acknowledge and thank the following people and organizations for providing their assistance and support throughout this project.

Mrs. Katherine Waldon, Chamber of Commerce West Alabama, Workforce Development  
Project Manager

Mr. Steve Watson, Alabama Department of Corrections, Associate Commissioner for Plans and  
Programs

Mr. Stan Robinson, Alabama Department of Corrections, Re-Entry Director

Mr. Michael Gilbert, The Foundry Ministries

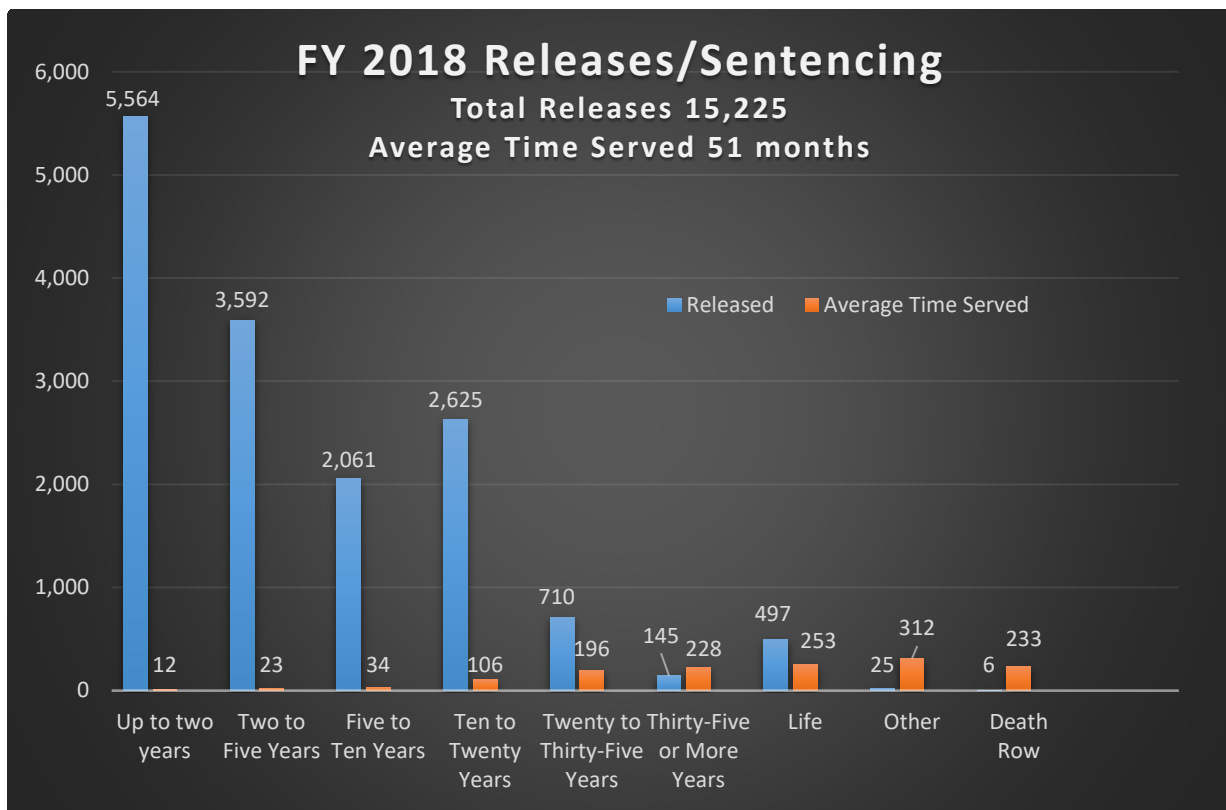
Mr. Jerome Wells, Without Walls Counseling P.C., CEO and Licensed Professional Counselor

Ms. Melinda Ricketts, A Cut Above the Rest, Co-founder

Randy Walker, Church of the Highlands, Pastoral Staff

## INTRODUCTION

According to the Alabama Department of Corrections' (ADOC) 2018 Annual Report, there were 26,790 individuals in Corrections' jurisdictional custody. Over the past decade, 10,000-15,000 individuals have been admitted into ADOC's jurisdiction annually with the largest percentage of those sentenced for non-violent drug possession, manufacturing, trafficking or distribution convictions. There will be a large number of non-violent inmates released each year. In 2018, 15,225 inmates were released from ADOC's jurisdictional custody with approximately seventy-four percent (11,217) having served less than ten years. These newly released inmates often leave prison without much assistance; however, they are expected to thrive as productive, law-abiding members of society.



Upon release, former inmates receive a bus ticket and \$10 to the county in which they were originally arrested. "The moment ex-prisoners step off the bus in your community, a daunting

challenge stares them smack in the face—where to find a safe place to sleep that night” and many end up in homeless shelters ([prisonfellowship.org](http://prisonfellowship.org)).

Our team’s research began in determining a former inmate’s primary needs to secure living arrangements. Our team found that having a safe place to live is essential to a successful re-entry into society; however, through research and interviews, we have concluded that one of the greatest initial challenges a newly released inmate faces is not having the necessary documentation and identification necessary to obtain housing and employment. Research indicates individuals released from incarceration face many barriers. If not overcome, these barriers may drastically increase their chance of re-entering the criminal justice system. The proposed recommendations will reduce recidivism and assist a former inmate in transitioning back into society successfully.

## FORMER INMATE'S BASIC NEEDS

Regardless of whether a person has a criminal background, every person requires some of the same basic needs to secure resources needed to obtain housing and live in society. These include the following:

### **Housing**

Similar to employment and income, housing is essential to successfully return to communities. Unfortunately, many former inmates struggle to find a place to live that is affordable, partly due to discrimination of property owners, housing authorities that do not allow former inmates with certain convictions, credit checks, high security deposits and a shortage of affordable housing. In order to obtain housing, the former inmate must have a valid ID, social security card or number, and proof of income.

Prior to release, an inmate is given access to a list of “residential facilities” that they can choose to apply for housing and transitional assistance upon their release from prison. Associate Commissioner Steve Watson, Alabama Department of Corrections Plans and Programs, indicated it was not only hard for inmates to find suitable housing, but also communities that will allow or support transitional housing in their area. Many communities take the position “not in my backyard (NIMBY).” Therefore, most transitional housing facilities are usually located in less than optimal neighborhoods and are operated through non-profit and religious entities. The lack of available and affordable housing can lead to feelings of hopelessness, greatly increasing the likelihood of reverting to a previous criminal lifestyle to survive.

HOUSING INSECURITY

---

HOMELESSNESS

<b>Unsheltered Homelessness</b>	<b>Sheltered Homelessness</b>	<b>Marginal Housing</b>
Homeless or no fixed residence	Living in a shelter	Living in a rooming house, hotel, or motel
105 per 10,000	98 per 10,000	367 per 10,000

Source: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html#recommendations>

From the Department of Corrections’ list of residential facilities and online research, there were 187 facilities identified throughout Alabama that provide housing for former inmates, the homeless, and those in recovery. Of the facilities identified through research, forty-seven percent designate themselves as transitional facilities for former inmates; thirty-six percent are homeless shelters and eighteen percent are recovery facilities. Homeless shelters and homeless veteran shelters will accept former inmates; however, acceptance will depend on the reason for incarceration. Family homeless shelters are the strictest on who is allowed to stay, due to concerns for the women and children who seek shelter there. Recovery shelters generally do not provide transitional housing for former inmates, even though some former inmates will still need the recovery programs on the outside of prison to succeed. Most shelters will not or cannot accept a former inmate who is a sex offender.

Mr. Jerome Wells, CEO and Licensed Professional Counselor of Without Walls Counseling P.C., counsels federal prison sex offenders and individuals with addictive type behaviors. Those counseled are generally from Dismas Charities in Montgomery, a residential halfway house for federal inmates. At Dismas, the former inmate is required to complete a three month stay. Dismas provides transportation and medical services. According to Mr. Wells, it is difficult for sex offenders to find suitable housing and Alabama refuses to allow a contract for a sex offender to stay in a halfway house. Mr. Wells stated the federal government has re-entry services to ensure



a former inmate has access to resources to get identification cards and other services before leaving prison.

Mr. Michael Gilbert, a former inmate, is employed at The Foundry Ministries located in Bessemer, AL. The Foundry is faith-based and has a six month re-entry program which is designed to help men successfully transition after leaving prison. He explained that prison life and re-entry is a revolving door. It is hard to get back into society without help and it is difficult to find re-entry programs that really want to help. Individuals that come to the Foundry have no intake fee and have thirty days to find a job. They are allowed to keep their first paycheck to purchase necessities. Many have fines to pay off or need money to pay for identification cards.

Without a secure place to live and way to earn money, the likelihood of a successful transition into a community is grim.

### **Identification Card**

A picture ID is a necessity for a multitude of reasons: employment, banking, voting, obtaining some social services and to prove identification if questioned by law enforcement. Upon arrest, the county jail takes possession of the arrestee's property. If the individual is released for any reason, the property is restored upon release. If the individual is taken into custody again, he/she has the opportunity to reduce their on-person property, thereby reducing property held by authorities. If the arrestee is held in the county jail for a lengthy period, the county will require the property be mailed or released to a friend or family member. In the event that this property makes its way to an Alabama Department of Corrections' facility, it is again encouraged that the inmate mail any personal property to a trusted source to hold until their release. If all of the above fails, the inmate's driver license and social security card are physically held and restored to the inmate upon release. Depending on the expiration date, the driver license may not be valid at the time of release.

The Code of Alabama 1975 §41-27-3.2 states: "The Secretary of the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency, in coordination with the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections, shall have the authority to promulgate rules to establish a program by January 1, 2018, to issue

a non-driver identification card to a resident upon his or her release from the Department of Corrections.” Although there is not currently an ALEA issued non-driver identification card provided, the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) does provide the inmate an Alabama Department of Corrections Release - Temporary Identification Card upon their release.

This temporary ID card includes the person’s full name, date of birth, race, sex, height, weight, picture ID and an expiration date. The ADOC Release – Temporary ID card does not include a signature and therefore, may not be an acceptable ID for all purposes needed, such as cashing a check and obtaining a social security



card. If a former inmate wishes to obtain a driver license or a non-driver identification card, he/she must go to the Alabama Driver License Office and follow all procedures, including paying the required fee of \$36.25 for either card.

Mr. Gilbert recommends, before release, an inmate go through a slow integration period over a six-week period to provide the basic transitional necessities, if needed: an identification card, driver license, social security card and birth certificate. Not having those vital pieces of identification upon release delays the former inmate’s transition on the outside.

### **Birth Certificates**

A birth certificate may be needed to obtain other forms of identification for employment or future education. The certificate can be obtained online, in person or through the mail; however, most requests from inmates are received through the mail. The cost of an Alabama birth certificate is \$15 for the first copy and \$6 for each additional copy. There is an additional \$15 fee to expedite the request. A fee is not charged for a birth certificate if there is a subpoena involved.

One primary ID is required to obtain a birth certificate. If an inmate has no other primary ID, the following are acceptable primary IDs:

- Ex-Felon Temporary ID
- Federal Inmate ID issued by the U.S. Dept. of Justice w/ following documentation:
  - Supporting documents from the institution if the inmate is still in custody
  - A letter of release from the institution if the inmate has been released.

## **Social Security Card**

A social security card is necessary to obtain a job, open bank accounts, and apply for social security benefits.

There is no cost to obtain a social security card from the Social Security Administration Office (SSA). To obtain a replacement social security card, at least one of the following acceptable proof of identifications is required: a U.S. driver license, a U.S. state issued non-driver identification card or a U.S. passport. A birth certificate, social security card stub or a social security record will not be accepted as proof of identity. The document must show the biographical information such as the date of birth, age, or parents' names. SSA will not accept the Alabama Department of Corrections' Temporary Release Identification card. If the inmate does not have a driver license, a non-driver identification card or a passport, the correctional facility will need to send a letter along with the social security card application to certify their identity.

In accordance with §14-10-1, Code of Alabama 1975, the "Department of Corrections shall provide minimum documentation for identification, including a social security card, necessary to obtain employment." To expedite the request process, the correctional facilities have established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the local SSA office. Currently, the (MOU) has expired. Through the MOU agreement, the correctional facility can obtain an inmate's social security card and, if applicable, reinstate their social security (SS) benefits upon release. The MOU is a formal agreement between the two agencies, ADOC and SSA, with their agreed upon expectations. In accordance with the MOU, the SSA agrees to process the request and issues the social security card back to the correctional facility. The ADOC agrees to follow internal procedures to verify identification at intake, throughout the classification and re-entry process

to ensure that it is the stated person. The ADOC will assist the inmate with filling out the application and will certify the individual's identity. Upon receipt of the issued social security card, the ADOC agrees to hold the card in a secure location until the inmate is released, at which time the social security card will be included in their release packet.

## **Income**

Employment and income are necessary to obtain food, housing, clothing, transportation and medical care. Many employers are reluctant to hire former inmates or the former inmates do not have the necessary skills for the current job market making their return to society much more difficult. Although providing an exact unemployment figure for former inmates is not feasible, the Prison Policy Initiative has estimated that the unemployment rate for former inmates is over twenty-seven percent or nearly five times higher than the U.S. unemployment rate. The data used to calculate this estimate was derived from the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Former Prisoner Survey (NFPS) conducted from January 2008 through October 2008 and included 17,738 adults who were under parole from a random sample of parole offices across the United States. Although using only the data from individuals on parole is not a perfect tool to measure unemployment for all former inmates, previous research has suggested that parole has minimal effect on post-release employment. Prior to conviction, inmates may have received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). However, these benefits are not payable for any months in which an individual has been convicted and confined for more than thirty consecutive days. Regaining these benefits require a little work. If the prison has a pre-release agreement with the SSA, the inmate or prison representative may contact SSA ninety days before release. However, if there is not a pre-release agreement, an inmate will be required to contact SSA after their release and schedule an appointment to take their official prison release documents to see if they are still eligible for benefits.



There is significant amount of data that indicates having employment greatly reduces a former inmate’s likelihood of returning to prison. However, once a potential employer is aware of a past conviction, many will remove that applicant from consideration. In efforts to help these individuals find jobs and increase their chance of becoming productive members of society, many states, cities and/or counties have adopted the “ban the box” policy. “Ban the Box” is a campaign that encourages states to remove the checkbox from job applications asking if the applicant has ever been convicted of a felony. This is currently an automatic disqualification for some businesses. Thirty-five states have adopted statewide laws or policies and twelve have even expanded it to cover private employers. Each state is slightly different, but basically, they do not allow a conviction history question on job applications and delay background checks until later in the hiring process which provides applicants more of a fair chance. There are exceptions for certain types of employment, not limited to law enforcement and working with children. Fair chance policies can benefit everyone. The former inmates have a way to support themselves, their families and pay tax dollars decreasing the chance of them returning to the criminal justice system. Several large companies have adopted the “ban the box” policy: Starbucks, Facebook, Home Depot, Target and Wal-Mart.

Although Alabama has not passed legislation related to “ban the box,” it has been discussed for several years in conjunction with prison reform. Most recently in 2018, a bill was introduced which was passed by the Senate, but not the House.

Former Birmingham Mayor William A. Bell issued an executive order to adopt a “ban the box” policy for the City of Birmingham and stated, “There is no such thing as a disposable person. We must take the time and make the effort to offer second chances to the thousands of people impacted by these statistics.” Birmingham is the only city in Alabama with a “ban the box” policy.

### **Clothing**

The Code of Alabama 1975 §14-10-1 states: “Each state inmate, who is determined to require clothing and transportation shall, at the expiration of his term of custody, be discharged from the custody and shall be furnished with clothes and with the least expensive mode of public transportation to the point where the inmate is to report for parole and probation supervision, or to the point of sentencing, to be paid from the Department of Corrections general operating funds. Clothing shall be of decent and reasonable quality for employment.” An inmate may waive their entitlement to clothes and/or transportation.

According to the Administrative Regulation 411, page 6 paragraph V. B., “clothing will consist of the following: pants, shirt, belt, socks, shoes, and underwear.” While in prison, a jacket will be issued from October 1<sup>st</sup> to April 15<sup>th</sup>. The ADOC is only legally required to issue one set of clothing per person for life regardless whether the inmate is serving multiple convictions simultaneously, consecutively, or recidivously. Upon release, an inmate will receive a polo shirt and a pair of pants. If an inmate’s family has provided release clothing, then it is not necessary for ADOC to issue these clothes.

## RESOURCES PROVIDED BY ALABAMA

Alabama has undergone a few changes to improve a former inmate's re-entry into society. Some of these changes are still being developed.

### **Alabama Department of Corrections**

According to the ADOC, re-entry begins at the point of entry. ADOC has created a pre-release program that is voluntary and targets inmates who are within thirty to ninety days of one of the following release sentences: end of sentence, split sentence or parole.

The ADOC pre-release program offers information to inmates about life enrichment, available community resources and re-entry services. This program provides inmates with life skills to successfully transition back into society. A package of information is provided to the inmate on how to obtain the following:

- Access immediate food, clothing and shelter
- Obtain a driver license or personal identification card
- Access faith-based mentoring and support
- Access substance abuse treatment and mental health services
- Obtain medical and/or dental care
- Look for job placement, vocational training and career development
- Re-establish parental rights and child custody

The pre-release program aims to provide transitional case management services, which identify an inmate's basic and technical needs with the appropriate resources prior to release. Mr. Stan Robinson, Alabama Department of Corrections Re-Entry Directory, stated "Money and community acceptance are the biggest roadblocks for transitional housing." A small percentage of former inmates are homeless. Sometimes going home may be worse than prison. The

correctional facilities provide job training and certificate programs to help inmates upon their release. This is all geared to assist an inmate with transitioning successfully.

If an inmate's primary needs are addressed before transitioning, he or she will have greater success in obtaining employment and maintaining a productive lifestyle. The current ADOC pre-release program model aims to:

- Increase public safety
- Decrease prison overcrowding and recidivism rates
- Reunite parents and children
- Offer community referral linkages to inmates and ex-offenders
- Decrease public health and social disparities within the offender population

According to ADOC's 2018 Annual Report, 2,456 inmates completed the one or two week pre-release program at ADOC correctional facilities, helping them to prepare for their transition back into society. ADOC also has a more robust re-entry program at Limestone Correctional Facility. This is a 180-day re-entry program in which participants receive in depth re-entry coaching and skills-building classes. This program is focused on individuals returning to the Jefferson County area and provides more individualized cognitive behavioral therapy, anger management and group counseling. Through the group counseling, some will become eligible to receive individualized counseling. Project IMPACT, a faith-based family counseling organization, facilitates the program every Friday, and is able to provide the financial assistance to help participants obtain birth certificates prior to release through grant funds received. There were 328 individuals that completed this re-entry program in 2018.

ADOC continues to expand the educational, vocational and re-entry efforts. A risk and needs assessment tool is being implemented. This tool is administered to inmates upon prison entry to assess the criminal's risk factors and specific needs with the goal of reducing recidivism. The assessment is still in the pilot phase and has only been established at two correctional facilities. Thus far, no data is available to indicate the results of this assessment.



ADOC has partnered with three state educational institutions: Auburn University, J.F. Ingram State Technical College and Calhoun Community College that offer inmates a chance to earn a college degree and vocational certification through the federally funded Second Chance Pell Grant Pilot Program. The Second Chance Pell Grant Pilot Program will allow eligible inmates to receive Pell Grants and pursue postsecondary education with the goal of helping them get jobs and support their families when they are released.

### **LifeLink**

In July 2018, the ADOC entered into an agreement with LifeLink to strengthen the re-entry capability of the agency. LifeLink is a rehabilitation program service provider in partnership with the ADOC. It is currently operating at Bibb County Correctional Facility as a full-time inmate training program featuring essential life skills, pro-social, cognitive and vocational career skills training. Classes are instructed by a full-time staff, numerous volunteers and trained inmate facilitators/tutors. Numerous community stakeholders have joined together to provide job opportunities and other necessary re-entry support for those inmates who complete the program, including: manufacturing and industry employers, Church of the Highlands, Alabama Community College System, four year colleges and universities, Alabama Industrial Development Training, Alabama Department of Human Resources, Alabama Department of Rehabilitations Services, Alabama Career Centers, Department of Veteran Affairs, faith-based organizations and non-profit organizations.

The training program CORE is an acronym for the four categories of the Lifelink approach: Community, Opportunity, Restoration, and Education. LifeLink CORE is financially supported through tax-deductible contributions from a variety of partners. CORE is a two-year, tri-semester, training program which conducts classes inside the designated residential dormitory. Two classrooms are utilized to conduct eight total daily classes, five days each week with more than 100 students.

Cognitive behavioral approaches to targeting criminogenic needs are the foundation for rehabilitation. Instruction classes such as Critical Thinking, Cognitive Behavioral Treatment, Re-

entry Concept/ Planning, and Adjusting to Workplace Cultures address various criminogenic factors. In addition, business soft skills, financial and business planning, and entrepreneurial skills are components of the training. Vocational skills currently being delivered, or in the planning phase, include Commercial Driver License (CDL) Operators, Construction Trade Skills, Warehouse Management and Forklift Certification, Shelton State Community College's AIDT Ready to Work (RTW) Program, and The University of Alabama Culverhouse School of Business Learning Initiative and Financial Training (LIFT) Program. Finally, students are encouraged to develop and strengthen spiritual foundations by engaging in the variety of faith-based ministries offered at Bibb County Correctional Facility.

Upon graduation, students are relocated as interns into another dormitory serving as pre-CORE preparatory housing. They are released from prison to enter the workforce with an industry employer partner and enter a structured transitional community. Current efforts are underway to expand vocational opportunities by utilizing certified instructors to teach a variety of vocational skills and certifications. The LifeLink CORE program does not discriminate against any inmate joining CORE as long as they meet the program's criteria specific to behavior, disciplinary history and potential date for release.

### **Bibb County's Prison Re-Entry Program (PREP)**

With an extremely low unemployment rate in Tuscaloosa County, but an ever-rising need for capable and reliable employees, leaders in business and industry have turned to alternate means for finding workers, creating the Prison Re-Entry Program (PREP) program. Working in conjunction with the CORE program, this prisoner in-house re-entry project was created to prepare inmates to enter the workforce upon release. Thus, addressing the workforce's shortages and thereby reducing recidivism.

This project is driven by employers who need employees. PHIFER Incorporated, a manufacturing company in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, has been the lead agency and will provide support services including, but not limited to, housing, transportation and cell phones for the individuals they will hire. Through this program, former inmates are paroled from Bibb County Correctional Facility

into a fully furnished house where they will live rent and utility free for the first six months while they transition into gainful employment and life outside of prison. The former inmates live independently and learn to take care of themselves again. The city has placed a bus stop near the house for their transportation needs. After the first six months of working and living in this house, the former inmate will move into a second phase house. The house is a little further away to stress the value of transportation, but still accessible to public transportation. The rent and utilities will be split among occupants, preparing them for independent society living. After nine to twelve months in this transitional living space, there is an apartment complex willing to lease rental units to these former inmates where they will be responsible for their own rent and utilities. In this manner, they will still have a support group as they prepare to move into their own home. Several other employers are in line to participate in this program.

### **Pardons and Paroles**

The Alabama Board of Pardons and Parole (ABPP) and its employees recognize their responsibilities to promote public safety and provide the best possible opportunities for its parolee and probationer population to become successful.

ABPP has four Day Reporting Centers (DRCs) spread throughout the state which are non-residential, three-phase programs offering medium to high risk probationers and parolees access to services including: drug and substance abuse related services, cognitive behavioral therapy, educational training, and employment assistance. Participants are required to work on community service projects. The ABPP's 2018 Annual Report states "The DRC model promotes a holistic approach to reducing crime through focusing efforts on prevention, enforcement, and re-entry." The ABPP has established agreements with "A Cut Above the Rest" to provide job training in construction. During fiscal year 2018, seventy-four participants graduated from this program. These graduates are monitored for three years after graduation to establish the success of these programs with stable housing, employment and criminal records.

LIFE (Life skills influenced by Freedom and Education) Tech Transition Center is ABPP's intensive re-entry and rehabilitation program available for male parolees who were considered unsuitable

for regular parole but are allowed to parole with the condition that they successfully complete this program. It is a thirty-week program residential transition center customized for the former inmate's needs, including: accountability and therapeutic groups, addiction education, individual counseling sessions, organized recreation, substance abuse treatment, parenting education, conflict resolution, employability skills and many others. Educational classes are also provided to fit the individual's specific needs and can include GED preparation and testing, computer skills, job readiness, carpentry, welding, painting, electricity, small engine repair or horticulture. Approximately 500 male parolees a year can receive services helping to make the transition from prison to society more successful. Residents are assigned a parole officer who will enforce parole conditions and rules. Once successfully completed, the former inmates will be transferred to regular parole and monitored to ensure a continuance of substance abuse treatment if needed, and assistance in finding employment and a home so they have the best chance of being productive citizens. 'The recidivism rate for graduates, over the past three years, is slightly above thirteen percent, making the center one of the state's most successful programs with the goal of reducing the number of prior offenders returning to prison. Of the 945 program completers currently being tracked, seventy-four percent are employed or receiving Supplemental Security Income.' (ABPP FY 2018 Annual Report)

ABPP also joins in collaborative efforts with other stakeholders across the state to promote safety and provide the best possible opportunities for successful re-entry.

## RESOURCES PROVIDED BY OTHER STATES AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

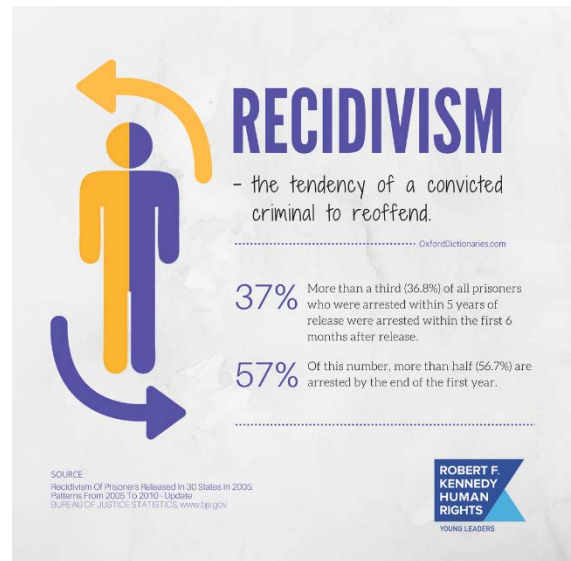
In 2005, the Bureau of Justice Statistics performed a study tracking 405,000 inmates released in thirty different states. The results of this study indicated sixty-eight percent would be rearrested for a new crime within three years, and an alarming seventy-seven percent would be rearrested within five years. The national study published in 2003 by the Urban Institute states that seven out of ten men will be rearrested within three years, and five of the seven would ultimately land back in prison. These results

are due to difficulties faced by the former inmate to fit back in with society and have a normal life (*Recidivism in the United States—An Overview by Jeremiah Agenyi May 31, 2017*).

In April 2008, Congress passed the Second Chance Act, a first-of-its-kind legislation aimed at providing federal assistance to reduce recidivism and increase public safety, as well as to reduce correctional facilities' costs for state and local governments. The focus has been placed on four areas: employment, housing, substance abuse/mental health treatment and families. There are many grants available each year for re-entry type programs. Each requires a collaborative approach where multiple agencies and/or non-profit agencies work together to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people returning from prison.

### Florida

The Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) operates three re-entry facilities and centers throughout the state. These facilities are funded by the state's general fund and federal grants in an effort to reduce their recidivism rates. The last reported recidivism rate from the Southern Legislative Conference Report listed Florida lower than Alabama, below twenty-five percent.



Florida Statute 977.7065 mandates that all inmates expecting release must complete a 100-hour transition course that teaches job readiness and life management skills. Compass 100 was initiated in 2017 as a Career Readiness Initiative. Through the program, the participant creates individualized re-entry plans with assistance and guidance from a career development specialist to aid in obtaining employment upon release.

In 2014, the Florida Legislature passed CS/CS/HB 53 requiring any Florida-born inmate to be provided a certified copy of their birth certificate and a Florida identification card or driver license, if valid. Once the former inmate is released from one of the FDC re-entry locations, the Bureau of Readiness and Community Transition contracts with Post Release Transitional Housing organizations to assist the released inmate with post-release transitional housing services. Through this service, the former inmate is assisted in finding employment, housing and methods of receiving additional treatment.

Lastly, Florida has developed a Transition Assistant Passport (TAP) to enable a smooth transition to the community. TAP is a pocket-sized booklet used as a resource tool to aide as a guide during the released inmate's transition period.

## **Georgia**

Georgia has the fourth largest inmate population in the nation; however, through legislative changes and state-wide initiatives their recidivism rate is below Alabama's at twenty-seven percent. Georgia initiated the Re-entry Partnership Housing (RPH) Program, which is a collaborative effort between several state agencies, which provides housing to qualified individuals who are on parole or probation supervision without valid residence plans.

Georgia Center for Opportunity's (GCO) Prisoner Re-entry Initiative listed numerous ideas to increase the former inmate's chances for employment: proposing all former inmates have the proper identification needed upon being released, lifting the driver license suspension for those who have not committed a driving-related crime, lifting professional license restrictions for those who have a felony conviction that is unrelated to the profession sought, and offering incentives

to employers that hire former inmates by bonding programs, tax credits or deductions, and liability protection.

Upon the recommendations from the GCO, changes were implemented to Georgia's laws and policies. In April 2014, Georgia passed SB 365 which gives a judge discretion to not automatically suspend a driver license for drug offenders who committed a non-driving-related offense, as well as protects employers from liability in hiring a person with a criminal record. During the 2015 legislative session, the Georgia Legislature passed HB 328 which provides offenders who have completed a drug court program to be eligible for obtaining a professional license.

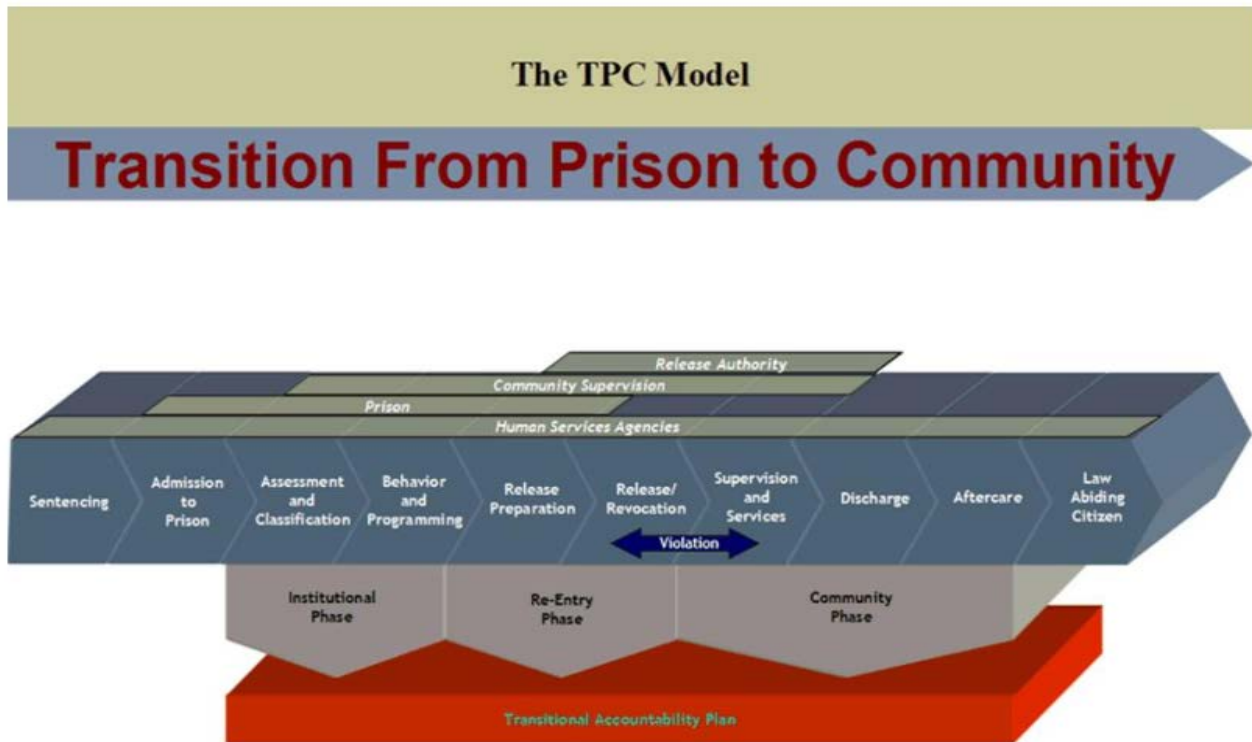
Georgia was the first southern state to join the "ban the box" campaign, which requires employers to remove the checkbox on job applications that applicants mark to indicate they have a criminal history.

## **Louisiana**

Louisiana is considered to have the highest incarceration rate (per capita) in the nation. In 2008 their recidivism rate was forty-eight percent, and although still high, Louisiana has managed to drop the rate to below thirty-five percent in 2018. The basis for this change was when the Louisiana Department of Corrections (LDC) began focusing on standardizing and expanding their re-entry program. The LDC implemented the Louisiana Risk/Needs Assessment and established the Re-entry Accountability Plans (ReAPs) and Probation & Parole Supervision Plans to identify specific risks and needs of each assessed inmate. Each ReAP is individualized by the institution staff to assist the inmate with classification, job assignment, education, vocation, identification, therapeutic programs, medical and mental health, faith-based programming, victim awareness, family support and stabilization. As the inmate progresses within the program, his or her plan is updated.

Recommended as the best practice by the National Institute of Corrections, the LDC has incorporated the Transition from Prison to Community Model. The model establishes a range of assessments that are designed to address the "criminogenic risks and needs" of offenders.

Criminogenic needs are the needs that must be addressed to negate the risk of recidivism. Louisiana’s approach to the model is that re-entry needs to be done in three phases: getting ready, going home and staying home.



Getting ready starts at the time the inmate is institutionalized and encourages the inmate to use their time while in custody for positive changes.

The going home phase of the program begins within three years of the discharge date. At this time, the transitional specialist and re-entry committee review the ReAP to recommend programs for the inmate to take as well as enter the department’s pre-release program. Every eligible inmate released from state prison, regional re-entry program, or a local jail pre-release program participates in the Standardized Pre-Release Curriculum 2010. This curriculum addresses topics such as work readiness, employment preparation, money management, and victim awareness. However, the major part of this program assists an inmate with obtaining identification, social security cards and birth certificates at the time of release. Having these forms of identification aid the inmate in gaining employment release. Also, all state prisons have



an annual “resource fair” for offenders who are within six months of release in which offenders can complete job applications with employers. The LDC also partners with the Louisiana Workforce Commission to have the Job One Mobile unit travel to state prisons to add offenders into their database and help them complete a resume ([www.slcatlanta.org](http://www.slcatlanta.org)).

The last phase of re-entry model is staying home. This phase begins the moment the inmate is released from prison and will continue until he or she is discharged from community supervision. The goal of this phase is to return the former inmate to a community in which he or she can be productive.

## **Mississippi**

Mississippi is another state that has implemented a transitional program to reduce recidivism. Unlike some of the other southern states, Mississippi’s recidivism rate is still slightly higher than Alabama’s, but below thirty-two percent. The Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDC) has assisted offenders with no approved housing to temporarily live at one of the four MDC Community Work Centers. The transitional housing is located at Wilkinson, Noxubee, Madison, and Flowood Community Work Centers and available to those on house arrest or who have earned release supervision. Commissioner Pelicia E. Hall stated, “People who have been confined for a while need extra time to transition back to their communities. In order to manage our budget and meet the needs of the agency, we must be more creative and innovative in our thinking.” Noxubee, which houses males, and Flowood, which houses females, offers cognitive behavioral therapy and life skills. Mississippi State University has also started a pilot program at Noxubee to educate inmates. Thus far, twenty-four inmates have graduated.

## **South Carolina**

The South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) has expanded their re-entry efforts in order to reduce recidivism rates over the last several years. According to figure report to the Southern States Correction Report, South Carolina has a recidivism rate of less than twenty-three

percent, which is far below Alabama’s. Currently, they have one statewide re-entry program located at Manning Re-entry/Work Release Center for male inmates and Camille Griffin Graham Correctional Institute for female inmates. Inmates eligible for level one placement participate in the program starting six months prior to their scheduled release date. During the six-month period, the inmate will be able to participate in educational services for completion of his or her GED, employable skills, life skills and vocational trade programs. The SCDC allows outside agencies such as Department of Employment and Workforce, Catholic charities, and Goodwill to assist the inmates in job placement upon release.

In January 2018, SCDC started a third re-entry program located at Kershaw Correctional Institution for male offenders that are not currently qualified for placement at their level one site. All twenty-two facilities within South Carolina have put forth effort to incorporate re-entry programs with the mindset of preparing the inmate for release at the time of initial incarceration.

	Provides ID	Re-entry Program	Survival Manual	Employer Tax Incentive	Ban the Box
Georgia	✓	✓		✓	✓
South Carolina		✓			
Louisiana	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Florida	✓	✓	✓		
Mississippi		✓			
Alabama		✓			*

\*Ban the Box has only been implemented by the City of Birmingham.

## **The Federal Government**

The Federal Bureau of Prisons is responsible for the custody and care of approximately 180,696 federal inmates with a thirty-four percent recidivism rate.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons has Residential Re-entry Centers (RRCs), also known as halfway houses located nationwide, with four located in Alabama. The RRCs provide assistance to federal inmates who are nearing release and re-entering the community by offering assistance in obtaining employment through a network of local employers, employment job fairs, and training classes in resume writing and interview techniques. Ordinarily, offenders are expected to be employed forty hours a week within fifteen calendar days after their arrival at the RRC. If necessary, former inmates are also assisted in locating suitable housing. They will be release from the RRC and obtain an opportunity to access medical and mental health care and treatment. The intent is to assist the offender in maintaining continuity of medical and mental health care and treatment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Through research, the transitional housing team was led to the following recommendations:

1. *Develop and maintain a process to obtain necessary identification prior to release.* More than one non-profit agency stated that the lack of a driver license, birth certificate and social security card were the first obstacles a former inmate has to overcome upon release. In order to help released inmates have a successful transition back into society, several states have passed legislation allowing men and women to receive personal identifying documents prior to their release. Without a picture ID, birth certificate and social security card, it is difficult if not impossible to obtain employment, housing, healthcare, bank accounts, or even to vote.

a. In accordance with §14-10-1, Code of Alabama 1975, the “Department of Corrections (DOC) shall provide minimum documentation for identification, including a social security card, necessary to obtain employment.” We recommend the ADOC renew and maintain a MOU with the SSA Office providing necessary identification of the inmate. This renewal will ensure a social security card can be provided to the inmate before his/her release. There is no charge for a social security card so this could be handled as a convenience for the inmate to help support successful re-entry.

b. We recommend there be an agreement (MOU) between ADOC and the Alabama Department of Public Health to provide birth certificates to Alabama born inmates prior to his/her release. We recommend the fee be waived for one copy of the birth certificate which could possibly be offset by Second Chance Act grant funds.

c. We recommend an agreement between ADOC and Alabama Law Enforcement (ALEA) for issuance of a driver or non-driver license. This is a valid, acceptable, picture ID that can be used anywhere for legal identification. Again, there may be a possibility of partnering agencies applying for a federal Second Chance Act grant to assist with this, thereby reducing the burden on the state.

*2. Make it mandatory that all inmates go through the ADOC Pre-Release and Re-Entry Program.* All releasing inmates should be required to go through a pre-release/re-entry program that is more robust than the current two week pre-release offered at ADOC facilities. This program should start at least six months prior to release so that there is efficient time to apply for and receive the inmate's personal documents. During this time there should be counselors that work with each individual, one-on-one, providing assistance on the issues that will cause the most struggles after release whether that be housing, family connections, substance abuse or mental health care, etc. ADOC should also work with faith-based and/or non-profits agencies to develop a survival manual that can be handed to each individual providing them with resources throughout the community to obtain: food, clothing and shelter, mentoring and/or support services, medical and/or dental care, substance abuse treatment and mental health services, job placement, vocational training and career development, and re-establishing parental right and child custody.

*3. ADOC and ABPP should partner with Workforce Development (and local businesses) to find jobs for inmates being released who have received skilled trade certification or degrees while incarcerated.* ABPP is already doing this to some extent, but it could be expanded to include ADOC. Current ADOC inmates have the opportunity to take college classes, community college class, vocational training, etc. and could leave prison with many employable skills. There should be more emphasis on building a partnership with workforce development to assist these individuals in finding jobs. This may be a partnership that could apply for Second Chance Act grants.

*4. The state legislature should discuss possible tax incentives for employers who will partner with ADOC and ABPP to hire releasing inmates.* The Alabama Legislature needs to consider a bill similar to SB 295 signed in 2019 providing tax credits to employers who hire former inmates. Partnerships with manufacturers could be beneficial to both former inmates who need jobs and the manufacturers who need a skilled workforce especially with unemployment being at an all-time low. There are many vocational trades already being taught in the prisons, but more specific training could be developed based on the needs of the local employers.

5. *“Ban the Box.”* Removing the question about a prior conviction from a job application has proven to provide more of an equal opportunity for individuals with a criminal history to find employment. Details regarding at what point in the hiring process the question can be asked, as well as what type of occupations would not allow employment with a past criminal history, can be determined through possible legislation.

## REFERENCES

- “ABOUT PRISONER REENTRY.” *Georgia Center For Opportunity*,  
[Georgiaopportunity.org/employment/prisoner-reentry](http://Georgiaopportunity.org/employment/prisoner-reentry), Accessed 10 July 2019.
- “Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles.” *Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles*,  
[www.pardons.state.al.us](http://www.pardons.state.al.us)
- “City of Birmingham Bans the Box on Employment Applications.” *The United States Department of Justice*, 1 Apr. 2016, [www.justice.gov/usao-ndal/pr/city-birmingham-bans-box-employment-applications](http://www.justice.gov/usao-ndal/pr/city-birmingham-bans-box-employment-applications)
- Code Of Alabama*, [alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/alison/CodeOfAlabama/1975/Coatoc.htm](http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/alison/CodeOfAlabama/1975/Coatoc.htm)
- Couloute, Lucius, and Dan Kopf. “Out of Prison & Out of Work.” *Out of Prison & Out of Work Prison Policy Initiative*, [www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html](http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html), Accessed 10 July 2019.
- “Home Page - Alabama Dept of Corrections.” *Home Page - Alabama Dept of Corrections*,  
[www.doc.state.al.us](http://www.doc.state.al.us)
- Alabama Department of Corrections’ *Administrative Regulation* 411 page 6 paragraph V. B
- “Legislative Acts.” *Legislative Acts | Alabama Secretary of State*,  
[arc-sos.state.al.us/CGI/actnumber.mbr/input](http://arc-sos.state.al.us/CGI/actnumber.mbr/input)
- Moseley, Brandon. “Ivey Provides Update on Alabama's Workforce Development Efforts.” *Alabama Political Reporter*, 4 July 2019, [www.alreporter.com/2019/07/03/ivey-provides-update-on-alabamas-workforce-development-efforts](http://www.alreporter.com/2019/07/03/ivey-provides-update-on-alabamas-workforce-development-efforts)
- “Serving the South.” *SLC*, [www.slcatlanta.org/research/cor](http://www.slcatlanta.org/research/cor)
- “‘Ban the Box’ Is a Fair Chance For Workers With Records.” *National Employment Law Project*,  
[www.nelp.org/publication/ban-box-fair-chance-workers-records](http://www.nelp.org/publication/ban-box-fair-chance-workers-records)  
<https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/vitalrecords/birth-certificates.html>  
<https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10133.pdf>
- Recidivism in the United States—An Overview by Jeremiah Agenyi May 31, 2017*

“Prison Re-entry Program.” West Alabama Works! [westalabamaworks.com/prisoner-re-entry-program](http://westalabamaworks.com/prisoner-re-entry-program)

“Recidivism in the United States- An Overview.” Atlas Corps. [atleacorps.org/recidivism-unitedstates-overview](http://atleacorps.org/recidivism-unitedstates-overview)

State Board of Pardons and Paroles: Reentry Services <https://pap.georgia.gov/reentry-services>

Reentry Partnership Housing Program <https://www.dca.ga.gov/safe-affordable-housing/homeless-special-needs-housing/reentry-partnership-housing-rph>

Louisiana Reentry Overview <https://doc.louisiana.gov/reentry-overview>

Mississippi Department of Corrections <https://www.mdoc.ms.gov/Pages/MDOC-Seeks-to-Help-Offenders-without-an-Approved-Place-to-Stay.aspx>