

Housed Out of Facility (HOF): Impact on Families

OVERVIEW

Housed Out of Facility (HOF) is one strategy the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MN DOC) uses to address over-crowding issues currently facing Minnesota prisons.¹ When the number of MN DOC inmates exceeds facility capacity, MN DOC moves inmates to select county jails. Currently, the MN DOC uses the following standards for identifying inmates eligible for HOF: 1) Inmates are medium or minimum security; and 2) Each inmate must be individually screened.²

In general, to be eligible for HOF, inmates cannot be participating in a chemical dependency program, have a severe mental or physical health problem, and they must be discipline free. Prisoners may be housed in a county jail up to one year. Jails are not designed to house offenders for long periods of time. They have significantly fewer resources and programming, meaning long periods of isolation and less steps towards rehabilitation. **This means that HOF effectively “punishes” good offenders by sending them to county jails.**



FAMILY IMPACT ANALYSIS

A Family Impact Analysis is one approach to examining policies with the goal of understanding the policy’s impact on families specifically. While unintended, HOF policies negatively impact an inmate’s children and family. Initially, we aimed to conduct a Family Impact Analysis on HOF policies to better understand the specific consequences for children and families. However, the lack of formal, documented policies made a complete analysis impossible. Below, we outline several potential implications of HOF for children and families.

Visiting: County jails do not have contact visiting like Minnesota state prisons. As a result, children with incarcerated parents who are selected for HOF must visit their parents through Plexiglas or via video. For children who have previously visited their incarcerated parent in prison - particularly those who have had child-friendly visits as part of Minnesota Correctional Facility

“I had been deeply involved in the parenting program, receiving regular visits, volunteering for assisting visits and mentoring other pregnant offenders. When I was moved out of the facility my involvement was abruptly disrupted, as were my visits with my children. In addition to that, I was also withdrawn from a college math course, and a restorative justice group.”

-Incarcerated mother, currently HOF

(MCF)-Shakopee’s Extended Visiting program - this transition from contact to no contact may be very difficult and may have negative consequences for children and families. Travel to county jails presents additional challenges

for families. If an inmate is selected for HOF and placed in a rural county jail, their family may face additional barriers with the time and expense of travel, potentially reducing or eliminating visits.

Programming: The MN DOC's mission is to "reduce recidivism by promoting offender change through proven strategies during safe and secure incarceration and effective community supervision."³ Removing an inmate from prison when the inmate is involved in programming goes against this mission. For example, mothers participating in MCF-Shakopee's parenting program who are selected

for HOF are disrupted. Additionally, if a parent was involved in employment or educational programming, they may be relying on those programs for employment options upon release. As a result, HOF may unintentionally reduce incarcerated parents' tools for successful reintegration and reconnection with their child.

Employment: A majority of county jails provide no employment opportunities for incarcerated individuals. As a result, inmates may have limited financial resources to support maintaining contact through phone calls or letters..

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Create transparent standards documenting eligibility and selection criteria for HOF status.
- Once clear standards have been defined, conduct a thorough Family Impact Analysis on HOF policies.
- When determining HOF eligibility, consider pregnancy and parenting status, and the inmate's visiting history with their children.
- Expand and increase use of alternatives to incarceration, including:
 - Local sanctions (e.g., electronic home monitoring)
 - Challenge Incarceration Program
 - Conditional release ("work release")

"The kids are well aware of the sudden change... they are constantly asking why they "can't see mommy" and honestly, I have run out of responses that are suitable for their young minds... I believe that had the department really considered the children left behind and the impacts of their decision, there is no way that anyone could condone ripping a mother from the lives of her children even if she is in prison."

-Caregiver for two young children whose incarcerated mother is currently HOF



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¹<http://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/10/29/minnesota-prisons-are-full-build-more-prisons-or-release-more-inmates>

²Specific screening criteria have not been outlined in DOC policy.

³<http://www.doc.state.mn.us/pages/>