



## **Report to the Legislature**

# **Incarcerated Parents**

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**Children of Incarcerated Parents:  
A Collaborative Interim Report from  
the Department of Corrections and the Department of Social and  
Health Services Children's Administration**

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## **Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Interim Report**

With the passage of HB 1426, Children of Incarcerated Parents, the 2005 Washington legislature directed the state Departments of Corrections and Social and Health Services to co-lead a collaborative interagency exploration of the needs of children whose parents are incarcerated in this state. The fourfold charge includes the following items:

- Identification of existing state services and programs, as well as recognized community based services and programs, for children whose parents are incarcerated;
- Identification of methods to improve collaboration and coordination of existing service and programs;
- Recommendations concerning new services and programs for children whose parents are incarcerated, involving both interagency and community based efforts;
- Identification of evidenced-based practices and areas for further research to support the long-term provision of services and programs for children whose parents are incarcerated, including the following:
  - (i) Identification and ongoing collection of data relating to incarcerated individuals in the state who have children under eighteen years of age; and
  - (ii) Identification and sharing of information relating to children of incarcerated parents who are involved in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems, to the extent permissible under federal and state law.

Department of Corrections and Department of Social and Health Services appointed Ms. Betsy Rodgers, Program Manager for Children's Administration, and Ms. Belinda Stewart, Superintendent of Washington Correction Center for Women, to lead the identification and development of an oversight committee and the committee's subsequent work. Stewart and Rodgers expanded their steering group to include Ms. Dee Crocker, Washington Correction Center for Women and Dr. Kathleen Russell, Pacific Lutheran University. Ms Jane Parnell, Associate Superintendent at Washington Correction Center for Women, serves as facilitator for the oversight committee. Ms. Karen Campbell-Woods, University of Washington intern, and Ms. Karen Chapman, WCCW volunteer, provide administrative support to the steering and oversight groups.

The 26-member interdisciplinary oversight committee met for the first time on September 8 and 9, 2005 in the Columbia Center at Pacific Lutheran University to explore its task and organize its work.<sup>1</sup> Members of this committee must be recognized for their great commitment to children with incarcerated parents. Participation on the task force is

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<sup>1</sup> A list of oversight committee members is appended to this report. See Appendix 1.

voluntary, and members and their agencies have absorbed the costs associated with participation.

The oversight committee formed four subcommittees dealing with phases in the judicial and incarceration process. Each subcommittee has recruited additional members to assist in data gathering and analysis. The subcommittees focus on the need of and services to children in each of these areas:

- Pre-incarceration
- Confinement
- Re-entry/Reunification
- On-going Services

On November 8, the oversight committee gathered again, this time at the Administration of Courts office in SeaTac to hear reports from the subcommittees, to consider formative recommendations, and to plan its work for early 2006. A series of monthly meetings for the oversight committee have been scheduled to hear speakers, share data and craft fiscally responsible recommendations. The dates for these meetings are:

- January 27 at the Children's Services Office in Kent
- February 24 at the Children's Services Office in Kent
- March 24 at the Children's Services Office in Kent
- April TBA
- May TBA

Thus far, the subcommittees have independently recognized that services in Washington State dedicated to children whose parents are incarcerated are few in number, small in scope, and subsequently fragmented. While some local programs exist, they are not comprehensive and depend upon grant funding or private organizations. Even at the national level, though there are some pioneering states and organizations scrambling to develop services for these children, their caregivers, and their families, the programs are works in progress and have not been sufficiently evaluated to develop best practice standards. Evaluation efforts are further challenged by difficulties in collecting data about this transient population.

Data amassed by and generated for the oversight committee and its subcommittees fall into several categories. Pacific Lutheran University faculty, in cooperation with the Department of Corrections are sampling the offender population to learn more about children of offenders in the state of Washington. This information will be available in late spring for inclusion in the final report to the Legislature. Subcommittees are interviewing caregivers, prisoners, service providers, and adult children. Information about current services available in Washington State and other parts of the nation is being summarized in resource guide form, and a review of the literature will be appended to the final report as well.

The co-leads and the oversight committee will finalize the findings of the subcommittees and data from the Departments of Corrections and Social and Health Services in a report to the legislature that will be delivered on June 30, 2006.