

Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation and Reentry Annual Compliance Review of Specific Statutory and Policy Requirements

Department released 79 of 80 inmates we reviewed within earned release time frames but did not release 14 inmates to the transition program 3 months early and did not timely notify some victims of early inmate release, limiting their ability to object; and between 22 and 44 percent of inmate enrollments in self-improvement, education, and treatment programs ended in noncompletions, potentially impacting inmates' receipt of programs' intended benefits

Audit purpose

Pursuant to Arizona Revised Statutes §41-1610.02, we are required to annually review the Department's compliance with statutory requirements related to earned release credit programs, the inmate transition program, and the drug and alcohol treatment program annual report; compliance with its statutory purpose to rehabilitate inmates by reporting programming information; and compliance with its own policies regarding industry-recommended reporting guidelines.

Key findings

The Department:

- Released 79 of 80 inmates we reviewed according to earned release credit program time frames.
- Correctly determined transition program eligibility for all 80 inmates we reviewed but did not release 2 of 48 eligible inmates to the transition program, and 12 of 48 inmates 3 months early as required due to factors both in and out of its control.
- Did not timely notify 1 of 3 victims we reviewed of their opportunity to object to inmates' early releases as required by statute in part because Department Orders are inconsistent with the statutory notification requirements.
- Continued to offer inmates self-improvement, education, and treatment programs during fiscal year 2023, and inmate enrollments increased by nearly 22 percent from the prior year; however, between 22 and 44 percent of enrollments ended in noncompletions, of which the majority were caused by inmate transfers, administrative discharges, and program cancellations, potentially resulting in inmates not receiving programs' intended benefits.
- Has implemented or is in the process of implementing recommendations from our 2021 Sunset Review and associated performance audits of the Department and 2023 Annual Compliance Review to provide and improve specific inmate programming completion rates, more timely release all eligible inmates to the transition program, and comply with the State's information technology security and conflict-of-interest requirements.

Key recommendations

The Department should:

- Continue to monitor, identify, and address delays in processes that are within the Department's control to help ensure eligible inmates are timely released 3 months early to the transition program, as statutorily required.
- Send victims of inmates who are scheduled to be released early to the transition program a notification of the planned early release at least 20 days prior to the inmate's scheduled release as statutorily required.
- Review self-improvement, education, and treatment program data and make needed changes to help reduce noncompletions.