

RCW 72.09.495 Incarcerated parents—Policies to encourage family contact and engagement. (1) The secretary of corrections shall review current department policies and assess the following:

(a) The impact of existing policies on the ability of offenders to maintain familial contact and engagement between inmates and children; and

(b) The adequacy and availability of programs targeted at inmates with children.

(2) The secretary shall adopt policies that encourage familial contact and engagement between inmates and their children with the goal of reducing recidivism and intergenerational incarceration. Programs and policies should take into consideration the children's need to maintain contact with his or her parent and the inmate's ability to develop plans to financially support their children, assist in reunification when appropriate, and encourage the improvement of parenting skills where needed.

(3) The department shall conduct the following activities to assist in implementing the requirements of subsection (1) of this section:

(a) Gather information and data on the families of inmates, particularly the children of incarcerated parents;

(b) Evaluate data to determine the impact on recidivism and intergenerational incarceration; and

(c) Participate in the children of incarcerated parents advisory committee and report information obtained under this section to the advisory committee. [2007 c 384 s 2.]

Intent—Finding—2007 c 384: "The legislature recognizes the significant impact on the lives and well-being of children and families when a parent is incarcerated. It is the intent of the legislature to support children and families, and maintain familial connections when appropriate, during the period a parent is incarcerated. Further, the legislature finds that there must be a greater emphasis placed on identifying state policies and programs impacting children with incarcerated parents. Additionally, greater effort must be made to ensure that the policies and programs of the state are supportive of the children, and meet their needs during the time the parent is incarcerated.

According to the final report of the children of incarcerated parents oversight committee, helping offenders build durable family relationships may reduce the likelihood that their children will go to prison later in life. Additionally, the report indicates that offenders who reconnect with their families in sustaining ways are less likely to reoffend. In all efforts to help offenders build these relationships with their children, the safety of the children will be paramount." [2007 c 384 s 1.]