

# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



## *The Effect of Community Context and Post-Release Housing Placements on Recidivism: Evidence from Minnesota*

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The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) recently examined the effect of post-release housing placements and neighborhood-level characteristics, along with individual-level offender and offense characteristics, on the risk of re-arrest and supervision revocation within the first year of release from prison. The study included all adult prisoners released from state correctional facilities to supervision in Minnesota neighborhoods in calendar year 2009. Post-release housing placements fell into one of five categories:

*Private Residential:* Single-family homes, apartments, or townhouses unaffiliated with any community providers or correctional agencies

*Transitional:* Halfway houses or short-term housing provided by correctional agencies or non-correctional community agencies

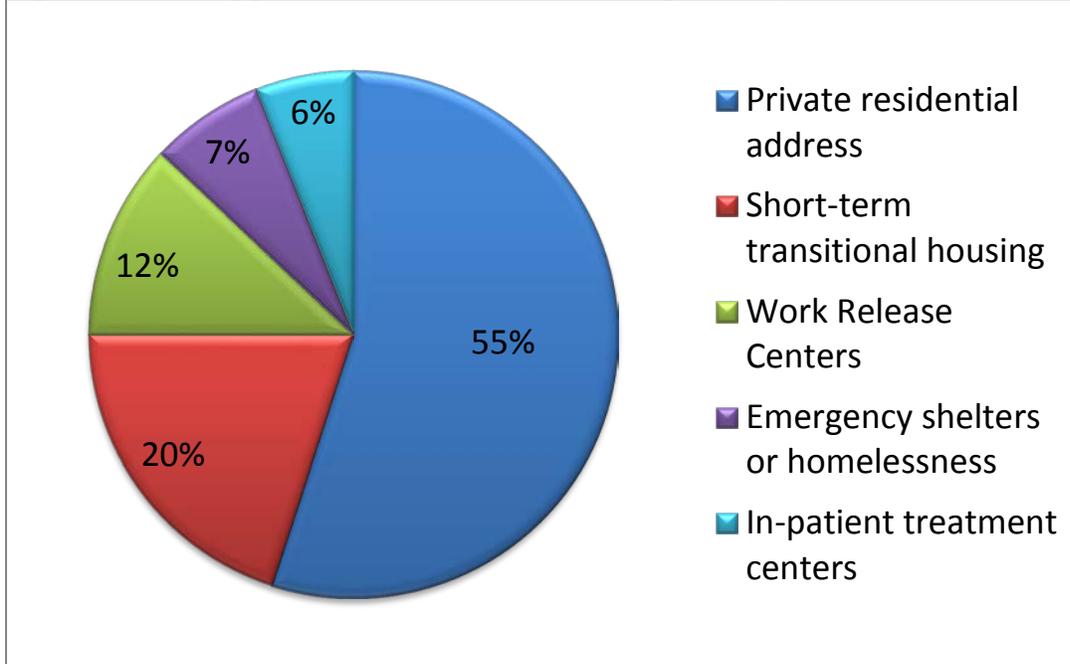
*Work Release Center:* DOC-leased housing provided to offenders who were on work release status at the time of release

*Shelter:* Short-term emergency-based housing, including homeless shelters and motels

*Treatment:* In-patient treatment facilities, including facilities that provide chemical dependency and sex offender treatment

Neighborhood characteristics included an index of economic disadvantage (e.g., neighborhood poverty, disrupted households, rented households), income segregation (i.e., number of wealthy households relative to low-income households, and vice versa), and urbanization (i.e., the extent to which neighborhood residents live in urbanized areas). These measures were based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

**Figure 1 – Housing placement for former Minnesota prisoners, 2009**

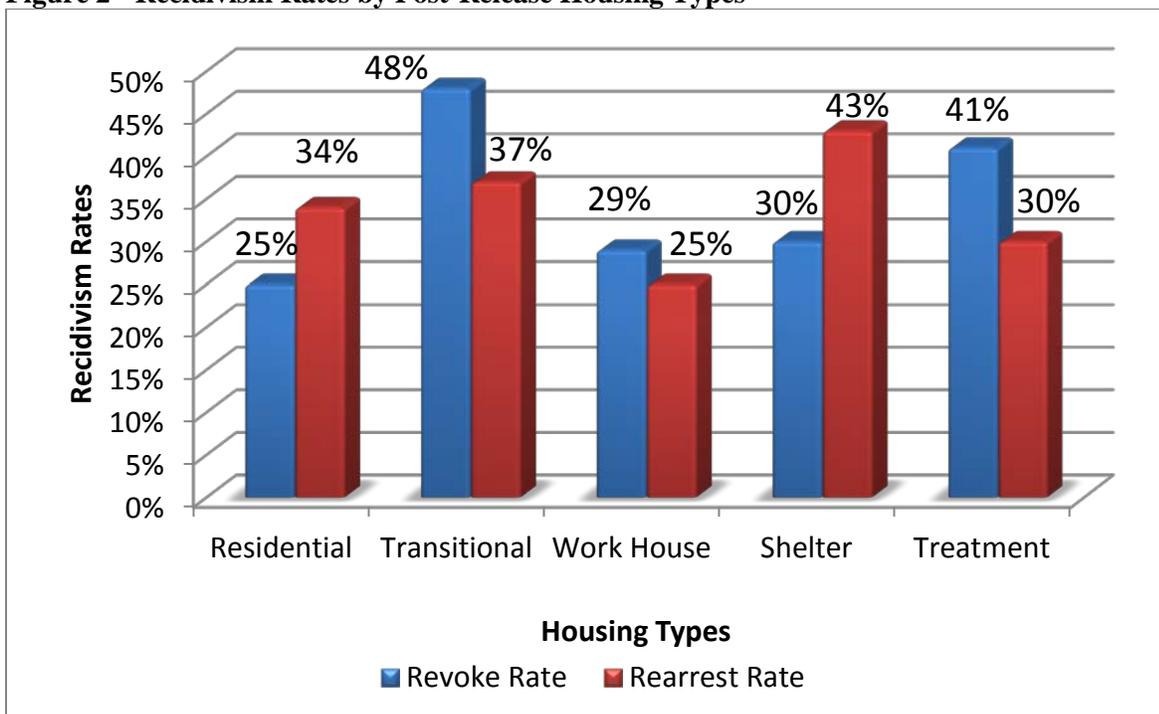


### KEY FINDINGS

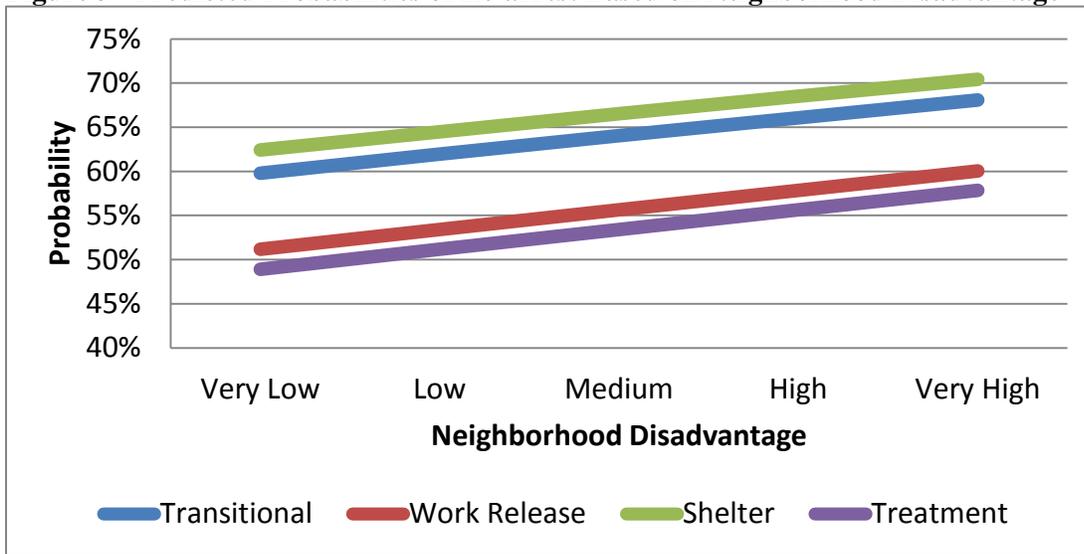
- A slight majority of the released prisoners included in this study went directly from prison to private residential addresses, living either independently or with family and friends (reference Figure 1). The second largest post-release housing type was transitional housing, which accounted for 20 percent of the sample.
- Recidivism rates varied based on the types of post-release housing types the former prisoners returned to (reference Figure 2).
  - Individuals released directly to private residential addresses had the lowest rate of supervision revocations, followed closely by ex-prisoners released directly to work release centers.
  - Just under half of individuals released directly to short-term transitional housing were returned to prison for violating the conditions of supervision within a year of release.
  - Former prisoners who were first released to emergency shelters or complete homelessness had the highest rates of re-arrest, while individuals released to work release centers had the lowest rates of re-arrest.
- Multivariate analyses that controlled for basic demographic, offense, and confinement information revealed the following:
  - Going directly from prison to transitional housing, work release centers, and in-patient treatment significantly increased the odds of a supervision revocation within the first year of release compared to being released to a private address.
  - Going directly from prison to a work release center decreased the odds of having a new arrest relative to release to a private address, whereas going directly to an emergency shelter or complete homelessness increased the odds of re-arrest.
- Additional multivariate analyses that included neighborhood-level characteristics showed that neighborhood-level disadvantage also influenced individual risk of recidivism.

- Returning from prison to a neighborhood that had higher levels of economic disadvantage increased the odds of re-arrest, but not supervision revocations.
- An individual released to a work release center in one of the least disadvantaged neighborhoods has a 51 percent probability of re-arrest, so barely higher than a 50-50 chance of re-arrest (reference Figure 3). That probability increases to 60 percent for that same individual in a much more disadvantaged neighborhood, which is an 18 percent increase in the predicted probability of re-arrest.
- While the data did show that risk of recidivism varied significantly across neighborhoods and that neighborhood disadvantage increased the odds of re-arrest, a large majority of that risk could be explained by individual-level characteristics.
  - That is, some neighborhoods might have had higher than average recidivism rates due more to the individual-level risk factors of the prisoners returning to those neighborhoods than due to the characteristics of those neighborhoods. Younger, male former prisoners with lengthier criminal histories who were under more intense levels of supervision upon release consistently had higher odds of re-arrest or revocation from supervision.

**Figure 2 - Recidivism Rates by Post-Release Housing Types**



**Figure 3 - Predicted Probabilities of Re-arrest Based on Neighborhood Disadvantage**



**Summary**

After the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections found that parolees released to correctional-based postrelease housing had higher rates of rearrest than parolees released to the streets, legislative leaders in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey concluded that halfway houses were failing. The fact that correctional-based housing (transitional housing and work release) significantly increased the risk of supervision revocation in the present study does not mean that this type of housing should not be used for newly released prisoners for two reasons. First, not only did transitional housing have a relatively small and nonsignificant relationship with rearrest, work release placements significantly reduced the odds of rearrest compared with private residential placements. Thus, some types of correctional-based housing may be beneficial to released prisoners depending on the programs being offered with the housing and the type of recidivism being measured. Second, transitional housing practices can vary from location to location both within, and between, states. Before concluding that certain housing placements are failing, prison administrators must carefully examine each venue and assess whether or not evidence-based practices are being followed.

Housing placements are likely a proxy for the level of social support a newly released prisoner receives in the community. Prisoners who are able to live independently or with family and friends likely have more resources available and higher levels of social support, which is integral to successful reintegration. On the other end of the spectrum, prisoners released to homeless shelters probably do not have supportive networks, and the lack of stable housing can disrupt important reentry activities, such as finding employment or participating in treatment.

Overall, these data highlight the impact that post-release housing placements can have on reentry. Institutional case managers and community corrections staff often have limited control over where offenders can be placed. Financial limitations, availability of certain types of housing, and restrictions on where certain types of offenders can live leave corrections staff with few housing options. Policy makers should work to ensure that correctional agencies have the resources needed to fit offenders to the most appropriate placements.