



State of Utah

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Utah Department of Corrections Announces Changes to Sex Offender Treatment Program

DRAPER – The Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) for inmates in Utah’s correctional facilities is undergoing significant changes in response to a performance audit. The Office of the Legislative Auditor released its report today, which bolsters the Utah Department of Corrections’ ongoing efforts to improve the effectiveness of treatment for offenders during incarceration.

The Department began an internal review of the SOTP in November 2016, after appointing a new Institutional Programming Division director, who specializes in sex offender treatment.

“We identified fundamental flaws in the way the SOTP was operating,” said Executive Director Rollin Cook. “Upon learning of the legislative audit we paused our internal review to wait for guidance on the direction of the program based on the audit’s findings. We appreciate the legislative auditor’s recommendations, which we plan to act upon quickly and will strengthen and inform the process we already began.”

Among the many changes planned in the next six months for the SOTP, the most notable is the replacement of the current program with an evidence-based program using cognitive-behavioral approaches combined with a relapse prevention approach. This approach is proven to be the most effective in reducing recidivism and risk for sexual re-offense and aiding in seamless community reintegration. The program will incorporate data collection to measure its effectiveness while focusing on reducing issues that lead to criminal behavior by targeting core treatment areas.

The SOTP will also include four separate evidence-based approaches to address unique needs within the sex offender population, including those with intellectual disabilities, moderate to high-risk offenders, those in need of aftercare/follow-up and, low-risk offenders who may not qualify for or need an intensive residential program.

“We believe this will increase the number of offenders in the SOTP to somewhat reduce the extensive waitlist for treatment,” said Institutional Programming Director Dr. Victor Kersey. “This will also help us address offenders’ specific risks and needs and move away from the antiquated one-size-fits-all approach to treatment.”

Other SOTP changes include:

- Conducting rigorous, real-time, and continuous risk assessments of the participants to ensure that the program is working effectively, which include following industry guidelines.
- New processes/criteria for entering, suspending and removing from treatment including removing punitive measures for treatment termination.
- Increased communication with the Board of Pardons and Parole and improved processes to reduce therapists' administrative tasks for reports so they can focus on treating offenders.
- Introducing on-site aftercare services for offenders to access ongoing counseling, psychotherapy, and meetings in a modified Therapeutic Community setting.
- Implementing a strategic plan with goals, objectives, performance measures and evaluations for the SOTP.
- Adjusting position titles and roles to match the industry standards, treatment team's duties and responsibilities.
- Working with the Department of Human Resource Management to determine competitive pay for psychologists.

Additionally, the SOTP Director has been reassigned to a different position within the agency. The SOTP Director position is open for recruitment.

Nearly one third of all inmates in the Utah correctional system are serving time for a sexual offense. Sex Offender Treatment is currently offered at the Utah State Prison in Draper, and to state inmates at the San Juan and Sanpete County Jails. Each of the programs will undergo an extensive program audit using an instrument created by the Division of Institutional Programming over the next two months to ensure that every effort is made to adhere to Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers and industry-standard guidelines and levels of care.

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