

Summary of the First Step Act

Ninety-seven percent of all prisoners will eventually be released. Unfortunately, nearly half of those will return to prison within three years. The failure of our prison system to rehabilitate criminals makes us all less safe.

We want those behind bars to return home as better versions of themselves. That is the goal of the First Step Act. The bill would provide incentives to get prisoners to do the hard work of self-improvement by addressing things like addiction, mental health, anger management, and job training. The incentives range from more phone time to increased commissary privileges to earlier release into halfway houses. For those inmates who have worked their way down to the lowest risk level, they can finish their sentences on home confinement.

The bipartisan legislation was written by Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA) and Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY). The White House has also been heavily involved behind the scenes, with the President vowing to sign it at the most recent prison reform summit last month.

What it will do:

- Create a “risk and needs assessment system” which will determine which recidivism reduction program inmates should participate in to have the greatest impact on reducing their risk of recidivism.
- Authorize the Bureau of Prisons to spend \$50 million on anti-recidivism programming.
- Increase the amount of time inmates can spend in pre-release custody (i.e., halfway houses and home confinement) by participating in anti-recidivism programs.
- Allow prisoners to earn 54 days of time off for good behavior. (This fixes a quirk in the law. Congress authorized 54 days in the 1984 Crime Bill, but the Justice Department only credits 47 days. By fixing this issue, the taxpayers will save \$128 million a year without sacrificing safety.)
- Prohibits the shackling of pregnant inmates while in labor and giving birth.
- Requires the Bureau of Prisons to locate inmates within 500 driving miles of their homes (subject to and while keeping in mind security levels and requirements) so that families can more easily visit and stay connected.
- Permit greater access by volunteers and mentors – especially faith-based organizations – to assist throughout the time in prison and their transition from incarceration to freedom.
- Require the BOP to assist inmates in obtaining forms of identification (social security cards, driver's licenses, and birth certificates).

By taking these common-sense steps – which have been proven to work in state correctional systems – the federal Bureau of Prisons can better prepare inmates for life outside the walls. This will cut re-offending, and thus, reduce overcrowding, lower spending, and make our neighborhoods safe again.