



State of Utah

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Utah corrections joins national initiative to continue reducing use of solitary confinement

The Utah Department of Corrections is one of five states [named this week by the Vera Institute of Justice](#) to join the [Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative](#), which assists correctional agencies in efforts to reduce the use of solitary confinement, also known as restricted housing. Vera will assess the policy changes UDC has made over the past 18 months to reduce the overall number of inmates in restricted housing and will provide strategies and assistance to implement additional improvements.

“We are proud to be among the states selected for technical assistance from Vera to advance our efforts to safely transition offenders into less restrictive housing through a structured program,” said Executive Director Rollin Cook. “Housing inmates in the least restrictive setting necessary helps ensure their safety and that of our staff and the public.”

Restrictive housing is used for managing inmates whose presence in the general population would pose a threat to staff, other inmates, themselves or to the orderly operations of the facility. Beginning in April 2015, UDC’s Division of Prison Operations introduced many changes to its restrictive housing policy, which reduced the number of inmates in restrictive housing from 14 percent of the prison population to six percent today. The UDC achieved this reduction through a number of strategies including an individualized review of placement criteria for inmates, providing structured levels to progress out of restrictive housing as an incentive for participating in programs, and providing initial and ongoing mental health assessments.

“We have significantly reduced our percentage of inmates in restricted housing and have provided inmates with opportunities for education, mental health treatment, and other programs in a safe and secure setting,” said Cook. “We are dedicated to improving these efforts and look forward to working with Vera to enhance our practices and learn from their expertise.”

The 21-month partnership will begin in early 2017 and is supported by a \$2.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance awarded to Vera. Five other jurisdictions have been participating in the initiative since April 2015. Utah, Louisiana,

Minnesota, Nevada, and Virginia were selected through a competitive process and were added to the initiative this week.

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