



CASE STUDY

How the Perry County Probation & Parole Reentry Education Program (PREP) Center & GEO Reentry Services Are Solving Alabama's Prison Crisis



Alabama has faced persistent challenges with correctional overcrowding, high recidivism, and widespread substance use disorders. In 2017, state prisons operated at 168% of capacity. Recidivism rates have hovered between 28% and 34% for over a decade, meaning nearly one in three formerly incarcerated Alabamians return to prison. The state also reports the highest opioid prescription rate in the nation, with significant increases in both non-fatal overdose incidents and emergency room admissions tied to drug use.

These aren't abstract statistics. They represent real costs to public safety, to families, and to Alabama's economy.

THE INTERVENTION: A COMPREHENSIVE, IN-CUSTODY REENTRY CENTER

In response, a former correctional facility was repurposed in 2022 as an in-custody reentry center for moderate- to high-risk men under community supervision. The center operates through a partnership between the Alabama Bureau of Pardons & Paroles, GEO Reentry Services, and J.F. Ingram State Technical College. The initiative integrates evidence-based treatment, mental health services, and technical training into one unified program, part of Bureau Director Cam Ward's broader Reentry 2030 initiative, a statewide blueprint that connects job training to employment and recovery to reintegration.

The PREP Center has received national recognition for its model, most recently as a finalist for the State Transformation in Action Recognition from the Council of State Governments.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE: A TARGETED, TWO-PHASE APPROACH

Participants are selected based on risk/need assessment scores, with eligibility criteria designed to maximize public safety and program impact. The minimum 90-day curriculum is divided into two phases:

Phase I (45 days): Assessment, substance use and mental health treatment, cognitive restructuring, and preparation for education and employment

Phase II (45 days): Maintenance of sobriety, ongoing treatment, technical training, aftercare planning, and job readiness

Services include cognitive behavioral treatment, individual and group counseling, life skills development, family engagement, and structured community service. Education and vocational offerings are provided on-site, including adult basic education, GED preparation, digital literacy, OSHA certification, forklift operation, ServSafe, and Commercial Driver License training, with a new CDL driving simulator recently added to expand access for participants pursuing careers in logistics and transportation.

The Bureau and Ingram State are also constructing a new 30,000-square-foot welding bay at the PREP Center. This expansion directly addresses Alabama's growing demand for skilled welders and positions PREP graduates to fill critical roles in the state's defense and advanced manufacturing sectors. The U.S. Navy's Maritime Industrial Base alone will require 250,000 skilled maritime trades personnel over the next decade, and the PREP Center has been identified as a potential pipeline to help meet that demand.

OUTCOMES: A ZERO PERCENT RECIDIVISM RATE

Research consistently shows that employment is the single most reliable predictor of success after incarceration. The PREP Center was built around that principle, and the results bear it out.

Since opening, the center has grown from cohorts of 10 participants to more than 50 per session. Nearly 500 individuals have graduated from the program, with the workforce development component producing over 400 job placements. Graduates leave with certifications, marketable skills, and employment—and none of them have returned to prison. The program's recidivism rate stands at zero percent.

That outcome is not incidental. It reflects what happens when supervision, behavioral health treatment, and workforce development are aligned within a single program, and when private sector partners become active stakeholders in the process.



As one graduate, Marcus T., put it:

"Before the program, I didn't see a future for myself. Now I have a trade, a job, and a reason to keep going. They didn't just give me a second chance; they gave me direction."

Industry partners benefit too. PREP graduates consistently receive feedback that they are more reliable and more skilled than many of their peers, making this a genuine workforce development pipeline, not a charity arrangement. Partners like Alabama Power, the Alabama Department of Mental Health, state workforce agencies, and the Alabama Community College System have all played key roles in making that pipeline work.

Beyond employment outcomes, the PREP Center has demonstrated measurable changes in the attitudes and behaviors that drive reoffending. Using the validated Texas Christian University Criminal Thinking Scales, moderate- to high-risk individuals, the group most likely to reoffend, showed an average 21% reduction in criminal thinking patterns, with all measured domains showing clinically significant improvement. The PREP Center model doesn't just prepare people for work; it actively changes the mindsets that lead back to prison.

A BLUEPRINT FOR SCALABLE REFORM

The PREP Center offers more than a local solution. Alabama's Bureau of Pardons & Paroles is already planning to replicate the model with a new facility in Thomasville dedicated exclusively to women, and the Bureau's network of Day Reporting Centers will be used to recruit additional nonviolent individuals on probation or parole for advanced training programs.

For states and localities facing similar pressures, the PREP Center's framework is straightforward: clear eligibility criteria, strong public-private partnership, and an unrelenting focus on measurable outcomes. When agencies align around evidence-based practices, and when employers, educators, and community leaders step in as active partners, reentry programs can address systemic challenges and deliver results that matter for individuals and communities alike.

The early numbers tell a compelling story. Rising graduation rates, 400+ job placements, zero recidivism, and a growing pipeline into high-demand industries. The PREP Center proves that when the right people come together around a shared mission, second chances become lasting success stories.