



# Governor signs House Bill 1479

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LINCOLN — Gov. Bruce Rauner is building on his efforts to improve outcomes for individuals who are incarcerated in Illinois.

He toured Logan Correctional Center, the female inmate facility in Lincoln, just before signing House Bill 1479 and solidifying the creation of a new women's division within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC).

House Bill 1479 comes on the heels of passage of House Bill 3904, the Women's Correctional Services Act. These historic pieces of legislation require the IDOC to appoint a chief administrator for the women's division, incorporate gender-responsive programming, and address the specific challenges that female offenders face.

"Men and women respond to incarceration differently. It's time we adjust our strategies and find solutions that set women up for success when they leave prison," Rauner said. "Many of these women are mothers. If we don't take steps to help put them on a better path, we will see their sons and daughters cycle through the prison system. We can't have that."

The department jump-started its efforts to restructure its operations for female offenders in 2015, after the Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform suggested it implement gender-responsive and trauma-informed treatment programs.

Now, incarcerated women are participating in courses tailored to help them overcome any physical, sexual or emotional abuse they may have experienced and get on a path to healing.

These pieces of legislation ensure IDOC staff is trained to work collaboratively with women to address their unique needs and improve safety and wellness throughout all women's correctional facilities.

“We recognize that making real change also means investing in our staff, giving them tools that help keep them safe on the job,” said IDOC Director John Baldwin. “We’re teaching them how to use their authority effectively, how to understand the needs of female offenders, and how to help the women restructure their thinking about challenging situations. Our staff had never received these types of training before 2015.”

"As chief sponsor of this national model legislation, I was proud to work with the Illinois Department of Corrections and The Women's Justice Initiative on such an unprecedented effort to improve safety and outcomes for justice-involved women in prisons and our communities,” said state Rep. Julianna Stratton, D-Chicago. “I commend my colleagues and the administration for coming together in such a bipartisan manner on behalf of this long overlooked population, which disproportionately impacts communities of color, and hope they will continue to be supportive throughout the implementation process.”

“Incarcerated women face a unique set of challenges, including higher rates of mental illness, histories of abuse, generational poverty and discrimination,” said state Sen. Toi Hutchinson, D-Chicago Heights, who was the chief sponsor of the bill in the Senate. “Putting an increased focus on these challenges eliminates antiquated policy that for too long has failed to ensure women receive the rehabilitation needed to become successful members of our society.”

"The creation of a women's division within the Department of Corrections is a major step forward for our state,” said Rep. Tim Butler, R-Springfield. “This division will focus resources to address the specific needs of women who are incarcerated and will make Illinois a leader on trauma-informed services specific to the female population in our correctional system. I applaud my colleagues who championed this legislation and Gov. Rauner for his commitment to reforming our criminal justice system.”

Criminal Justice Reform has been a staple of the Rauner administration. Rauner has worked with the General Assembly to remove barriers that prevented people convicted of crimes from receiving their professional licenses in healthcare industries and cosmetology. And, men and women who leave prison now have access to their birth certificates and state identification, making it easier to secure housing, find employment and open a bank account.

Within weeks of taking office, Rauner announced his goal of reducing the prison population by 25 percent by the year 2025. When Rauner was inaugurated in January 2015, the IDOC population stood at 48,214. As of mid-January of this year, the number is 41,050, a 14.8 percent drop.