



Residential Relocation and Recidivism

Background

In the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC), roughly half of individuals paroled from prison are released into **Community Corrections Centers (CCCs) or Community Contract Facilities (CCFs)**, also known as halfway houses. Prior research has consistently shown that reentrants released to CCCs/CCFs are more likely to return to prison than those released directly to a private residence or home.

Improving outcomes for CCC/CCF residents is a priority for the PA DOC. One strategy tested to improve these outcomes was **changing where someone lives after release**. Specifically, the PA DOC conducted a study to answer the following question: Would sending someone to a CCC/CCF in a new area—rather than back to their old neighborhood—lower their chances of reoffending?

While conventional wisdom in the field of reentry holds that returning reentrants to their home community leads to the best outcomes, there are reasons to think that relocation might help. A new environment can mean fewer negative influences and less temptation to return to old habits. One prior study in New Orleans found that state prisoners who were forced to relocate upon release due to Hurricane Katrina had lower recidivism rates than those who went home. On the other hand, being near family and familiar support systems can also be important for staying on the right path. So, which approach works better?

Study Design

To answer this question, the PA DOC partnered with Dr. Kiminori Nakamura (University of Maryland) to run a **randomized controlled trial (RCT)**, the gold standard for determining cause and effect.

The study focused on parolees released to CCCs/CCFs in **Philadelphia, Allegheny (Pittsburgh), and Dauphin (Harrisburg) counties** between 2013 and 2015. To be included in the study, individuals had to meet several criteria including volunteering to participate, returning to one of these three counties, and having no placement restrictions due to serious health issues or offense type.

A total of **647 parolees** were randomly assigned to one of two groups:

- **Same-County Group (336 people):** Paroled to a CCC/CCF in the same county where they lived before prison.
- **Relocated Group (311 people):** Paroled to a CCC/CCF in a different county than where they lived before.

Because participants were randomly placed into either group, the results provide strong confidence that any differences in outcomes are due to the relocation itself—not other factors.

Results

Relocating parolees to a new area led to a **small but noticeable drop in re-arrest rates**, but the benefit didn't last long-term.

- **Within 3 months:** Relocated reentrants were 3% less likely to be re-arrested than those who stayed in their home county.

- **Within 1 year:** That difference grew to 7%.
- **After 1 year:** The impact disappeared. Re-arrest rates were no longer different between the two groups.
- **Re-incarceration:** Moving had no effect on who ended up back in prison.

The benefits of relocation were strongest for reentrants with a history of drug use or weak social ties, suggesting they may benefit more from a fresh start.

Conclusion

Sending reentrants to a CCC/CCF in a different area can provide **short-term benefits**. It may help some individuals avoid getting re-arrested during the first months after release. This is especially beneficial for reentrants with a history of drug use or weak social ties. **Relocation alone is likely not enough** to make a lasting difference over the long-term, and may also not be enough to improve CCC/CCF recidivism rates. Any residential relocation policy should be used in combination with other reentry strategies.

Note: For additional details about this study, please review the [full report](#) on the PA DOC's website.

