



BACKGROUND

Beginning in calendar year 2024, MISS. CODE ANN. § 47-5-473 (1972) requires the PEER Committee to annually review the effectiveness of any pilot work release programs established by the Sheriffs of Harrison, Hinds, Lee, and Rankin counties, and provide a report to the Legislature by December 1st of each year. The statute provides specific requirements that programs must comply with, including providing data to PEER in six-month intervals.

The first and only work release program established under this CODE section was established by the Rankin County Sheriff in May 2021. While Harrison, Hinds, and Lee counties have not established a work release program, it is important to note that these counties are not at odds with any statutory requirements because they are authorized but not required to establish a program.

Definition of a Work Release Program

A work release program is a reentry program for adult offenders that allows low-risk offenders nearing the end of their sentences (i.e., less than one year) to work regular jobs in the community and earn wages to help pay restitution, court costs, child support, and help to offset costs of incarceration.

Program Participation

From January 2022 through September 2024, there have been a cumulative total of 52 offenders that have previously or are currently participating in the work release program. Of these 52 participants, 69% were male. Further, the majority of program participants were convicted on charges related to controlled substances (i.e., possession, sale/distribution, and controlled substance violations).

The average duration that an offender participates in the work release program prior to completion is 283 days or roughly 9.4 months.

Rankin County Compliance with State Law

While the Rankin County Sheriff's Department complies with many of the statutory requirements, it has not fully adhered to the eligibility requirement that an offender must be within one year of release.

From January 2022 through September 2024, 11 of the 52 offenders (21%) participated in the program for more than one year. Therefore, the Department does not comply with this program eligibility requirement established in state law and through its internal policy.

Statutory Requirements	Compliance (✓/✗)
Adopt and publish rules for the work release program.	✓
No more than 25 participants at a single time.	✓
No participating offenders convicted of a crime of violence.	✓
Collect and maintain monthly data elements for program participants.	✓
Participants shall establish a bank account and distribute wages accordingly.	✓
Participating employers shall pay no less than the federal minimum wage.	✓
Share all collected data with PEER in six-month intervals.	✗
Data shall be submitted to PEER in a sortable, electronic format.	✗
No offender having more than one year remaining on his or her sentence.	✗

Recommendations

In regard to its work release program, the Rankin County Sheriff's Department should:

- provide PEER with data reports in a sortable, electronic format in six-month intervals as required by MISS. CODE ANN. § 47-5-473;
- ensure that it adheres to the eligibility requirements that an offender be within his or her last year of sentence in order to participate in the program;
- establish a data dictionary and create a formal report template used to provide data to PEER;
- consider amending internal policy to specify and establish a formal process for how participant earning should be divided or distributed once a participant satisfies payment for all fines, restitution, or costs;
- establish a formal report that clearly documents the total number of participants who were arrested for a new criminal offense, convicted of a new crime while in the program, and the total number of participants who completed the program and were convicted of a new crime within three years of completing the program;
- establish objectives, goals, and performance measures that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based; and,
- track and maintain the costs related to operations of its program in order to serve as an example for other counties that are authorized to develop similar programs.