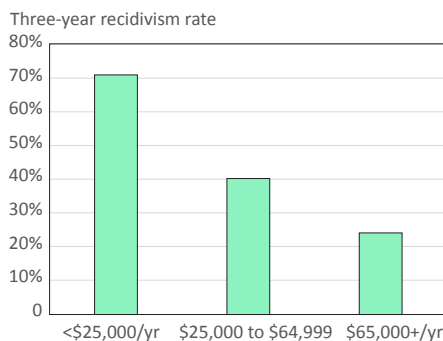


DOES WORKING REDUCE RECIDIVISM?

How jobs affect the likelihood of returning to prison

1 Wages and Recidivism

ALASKA FELONS RELEASED IN 2012



Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and Alaska Department of Corrections

By YUANCIE LEE

Former inmates face a number of obstacles when re-integrating into society and finding work after their release, and they are highly likely to return to prison. Of the 4,500 Alaska inmates who were released in 2012 after serving time for a felony, 43 percent were reincarcerated within the first year and 66 percent recidivated over the next three years.

About half the inmates we studied found a job at some point in the three years after their release. But simply finding a job usually wasn't enough — finding work fairly quickly and, more importantly, making at least \$25,000 a year considerably reduced the likelihood of returning to prison. (See exhibits 1 and 2.)

Who they are

This article covers 4,500 inmates who were released from an Alaska prison in 2012, all of whom had served time for a felony.

Seventy-nine percent of the released inmates were male, and men had a roughly 6 percent higher recidivism rate overall. Men fared better than women in both employment and average wages after their release, as the adjacent table shows, but women have narrowed the gap slightly in both areas in recent years.

These inmates were also young overall, with 61 percent

	Number	Rate of recidivism	% employed		Average wage	
			2012	2015	2012	2015
Female	908	62%	53%	47%	\$7,520	\$13,546
Male	3,400	68%	56%	48%	\$11,351	\$17,175

under age 35 when they were incarcerated. The younger inmates were more likely to find a job than the older inmates, but they also returned to prison at higher rates, with recidivism declining with each older age group. For example, 74 percent of the 16-to-25-year-olds returned to prison within three years compared to about half of those over age 56.

This analysis looks only at employment's effect on recidivism, but it's important to keep in mind that other factors also play a role — for example, substance abuse, mental health, poverty, extent of criminal history, demographics, and childhood abuse or neglect. For more information, see the sidebar on page 6.

Lower if they found employment quickly

Overall, inmates who worked at some point during the three years after their release returned to prison at a rate of 67 percent, about the same as the overall recidivism rate. But the rate for those who were able to find a job within a year — more than half of them — dropped to 64 percent, and then to 62 percent for the 45 percent who found a job within six months.

For those employed within six months, what they made during their first six months also affected their three-year recidivism rates. If they made less than \$12,500 in those first six months, their recidivism rate was 66 percent. If they were able to earn between \$12,500 and \$32,499, the rate dropped to 43 percent, and for the few who made more than \$32,500 it was 35 percent.

Recidivism rate:

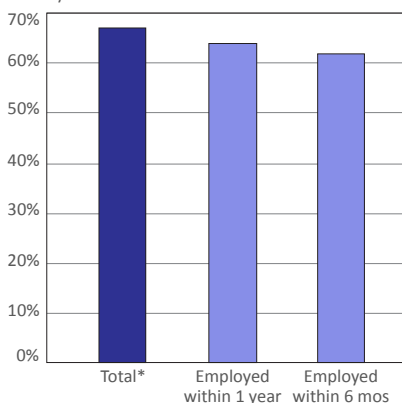
Percent who had been reincarcerated for any offense by 2015, including probation violations.

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Slightly Lower Rates For Those Who Found a Job Quickly

4,500 ALASKA FELONS RELEASED IN 2012

Three-year recidivism rate



*Alaska Department of Corrections' published overall rate is 63 percent for those released in fiscal year 2012. See the sidebar below for more about how these rates are calculated and why they differ slightly.

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and Alaska Department of Corrections

How long they kept job mattered

Keeping a job for at least a year was also tied to a lower likelihood of returning to prison, regardless of how long it took to get hired. Among those who got a job and kept it for a full year, 47 percent returned to prison at some point over the period.

Most earned less than \$25,000 per year

Former inmates who averaged less than \$25,000 a year in wages had a particularly high recidivism rate of 71 percent. Once their average annual wages

About this study

This analysis is possible because of a collaboration between the Alaska Department of Corrections and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The Department of Corrections identified 4,500 convicted felons who were released from an Alaska prison in 2012, and the Department of Labor incorporated employment and Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend data to determine how their employment and wages in the three years after release affected their likelihood of returning to prison.

The Department of Corrections' calculation of recidivism is more complex and uses slightly different methods than the simpler calculation done here to look at broad patterns and make comparisons. The Department of Corrections' published recidivism rate for this period — which should be

considered the official recidivism rate — is 63 percent, and the overall rate calculated for this article is 66 percent.

While all of the former inmates were serving time for a felony, these recidivism rates include anyone who was reincarcerated at some point over the three-year period for any offense, including misdemeanors and probation violations.

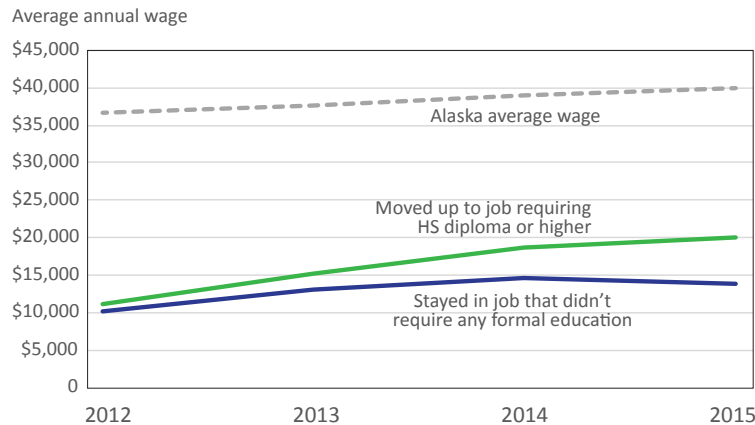
Data limitations

This analysis covers only those who worked for an employer in Alaska after release, so it excludes former inmates who became self-employed, such as fishermen and other contractors. It also excludes federal workers and those who left the state, although the latter number is likely small because a felony record makes it difficult to leave the state where the conviction occurred.

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Wage Growth by Requirements of Job

WHEN STARTING IN JOB WITH NO EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS



Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and Alaska Department of Corrections

Challenges for released inmates and efforts to reduce recidivism

Convicted felons face a number of barriers when released, and finding a job can be a big one. Employers can be reluctant to hire them, and a felony record disqualifies people from many jobs. In some cases, those with a felony conviction can obtain a waiver, but the extra step can further delay or discourage employment.

In 2015, the departments of Corrections, Health and Social Services, and Labor and Workforce Development partnered with the Alaska Court System, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority to develop a plan to reduce recidivism by helping former inmates find stable employment.

The plan includes job training, workshops, and placement services as well as better coordination with education and training providers, including those focusing on apprenticeships. To encourage employers to hire former inmates and reduce their risks, the state's Fidelity Bonding Program and Work Opportunity Tax Credit provide financial incentives.

topped \$25,000, the rate dropped sharply to 40 percent. The lowest recidivism rate was 24 percent for the few who made \$65,000 or more.

But the vast majority of the released inmates made less than \$25,000 a year over that period, with just under 9 percent topping the \$25,000 mark and 1 percent making \$65,000 or more.

Low-skill work meant less advancement

Similarly, the vast majority worked in jobs with few skill or education requirements after their release, with 66 percent in jobs with no formal education requirements and 94 percent working in occupations that required a high school diploma or less. (See Exhibit 4 for more on the occupations they held.)

The former inmates working in the jobs with the lowest requirements also tended not to advance much. By 2015, 44 percent of those who had found one of these jobs within two years of their release were still working in a job with no education requirements, and they weren't earning much more than they had in 2012. The average yearly wage for these inmates grew from just \$10,096 in 2012 to \$13,942 in 2015. (See Exhibit 3.) They were also especially likely to return to prison (73 percent).

Only 15 percent of those working a job with no education requirements in 2012 had moved up by 2015 to a job that required a high school education or higher. These workers increased their average wages by 80 percent over that time, from \$11,182 to

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Most Common First Occupations After Release from Prison

FELONS RELEASED IN 2012: ALASKA JOBS, WAGES, AND RECIDIVISM THROUGH 2015

First occupation within two years after release	Number employed	Recidivism rate, 3-yr	Quarterly avg wage
Construction Laborers	180	71%	\$5,435
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	165	64%	\$1,831
Combined Food Prep and Serving Workers, Incl Fast Food	138	73%	\$1,912
Dishwashers	106	76%	\$2,117
Cooks, Restaurant	101	73%	\$2,979
Cashiers	95	68%	\$2,203
Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers	90	71%	\$2,275
Waiters and Waitresses	78	59%	\$3,308
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids/Housekeeping Cleaners	76	68%	\$2,258
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	74	64%	\$1,689
Retail Salespersons	73	47%	\$3,560
Food Preparation Workers	70	71%	\$2,602
Carpenters	62	61%	\$6,469
Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	61	71%	\$2,565
Production Workers, All Other	45	69%	\$4,678
Food Preparation and Serving Related Workers, All Other	41	81%	\$2,362
Grounds Maintenance Workers, All Other	41	83%	\$1,440
First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep and Serving Workers	35	66%	\$2,292
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	35	69%	\$3,972
Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers	33	67%	\$2,070
Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers	33	82%	\$2,624
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	33	67%	\$5,097
Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants and Bartender Helpers	31	71%	\$2,050
Cooks, Fast Food	30	80%	\$2,003
Tire Repairers and Changers	27	56%	\$3,260
Hotel, Motel, and Resort Desk Clerks	24	54%	\$2,596
Helpers: Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers	23	57%	\$4,211
Construction and Related Workers, All Other	21	71%	\$6,102
Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	20	40%	\$11,966
Bakers	20	75%	\$929
Hosts and Hostesses, Restaurant, Lounge, and Coffee Shop	20	70%	\$1,515
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	19	42%	\$5,842
Sales and Related Workers, All Other	18	67%	\$2,122
Office and Administrative Support Workers, All Other	17	41%	\$5,957
Bartenders	17	53%	\$2,383
Cleaners of Vehicles and Equipment	17	59%	\$3,009
Counter Attendants, Cafeteria/Food Concession/Coffee Shop	17	59%	\$1,151
Operating Engrs and Other Construction Equipment Operators	16	63%	\$10,784
Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	16	56%	\$2,285
Automotive and Watercraft Service Attendants	15	87%	\$2,316
Cooks, Short Order	15	73%	\$3,098
Laundry and Dry-Cleaning Workers	15	73%	\$2,647
Material Moving Workers, All Other	15	60%	\$3,576
Roofers	15	73%	\$5,666
Roustabouts, Oil and Gas	15	53%	\$13,114
Electricians	14	50%	\$7,943
Gaming and Sports Book Writers and Runners	14	71%	\$1,399
Helpers: Carpenters	14	79%	\$3,457
Painters, Construction and Maintenance	14	50%	\$6,808
Customer Service Representatives	13	54%	\$4,392
Office Clerks, General	13	31%	\$2,809
Helpers, Construction Trades, All Other	13	62%	\$6,336

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and Alaska Department of Corrections

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Most Found Work in Anchorage or Near Prison

4,500 ALASKA FELONS RELEASED IN 2012

	Number who found a job	Employed		Average wage	
		2012	2015	2012	2015
Anchorage, Municipality	1,055	983	768	\$11,216	\$17,529
Bethel Census Area	171	149	137	\$8,849	\$10,886
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	152	136	116	\$11,383	\$17,783
Fairbanks North Star Borough	145	149	127	\$13,662	\$24,138
Nome Census Area	135	143	127	\$10,188	\$10,224
Kenai Peninsula Borough	125	125	91	\$12,299	\$23,090
Juneau, City and Borough	98	85	62	\$11,374	\$19,600
Kusilvak Census Area	69	69	57	\$6,437	\$9,683
North Slope Borough	49	54	49	\$22,609	\$36,300
Northwest Arctic Borough	45	41	40	\$8,278	\$9,967
Elsewhere in Alaska	180	188	165	\$11,042	\$17,866

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and Alaska Department of Corrections

\$20,133. They were also only 59 percent likely to return to prison.

Many lack the skills to find good jobs after release

Because so few found higher-paying, higher-skill jobs — just 50 of the 4,500 inmates reached the \$65,000 per year mark by 2015 — it's difficult to conclude these jobs translate directly to staying out of prison. But what is clear by the vast number who worked in low-skill, low-paying jobs is that prisoners tend to lack the skills and opportunities to get good jobs when they're released.

Of those who were employed during the two years before incarceration, only 7.1 percent had a job that required more than a high school diploma.

While Alaska inmates have varying levels of access to job training, a number of agencies have developed a recidivism plan to provide more training and employ-

ment services. (See the sidebar on page 6 for more information.)

Initial analysis a foundation for more in-depth studies

While this initial data combination showed that a job — but not just any job — played a role in a convicted felon's likelihood of returning to prison, it also laid the groundwork for a range of more comprehensive future analyses.

Additional years of data will allow us to track employment paths more accurately and in greater detail, and it will also allow us to analyze specific characteristics among those with different outcomes. For example, a future project could look at the 1,500 former inmates who didn't return to prison — about a third of them — to find out what, if anything, they had in common.

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