



People Not Prisons: Physical & Programmatic Priorities for Utah’s New Correctional Facility

The People Not Prisons Coalition is a loose coalition of advocacy groups working on behalf of people with mental health conditions, people recovering from substance use disorders, and men and women caught up in Utah’s criminal justice system. Our Coalition includes but is not limited to: Odyssey House; First Step House; Utah Support Advocates for Recovery Awareness (USARA); Utah Association of Addiction Treatment Providers (UAATP); Utah AFL-CIO; Disability Law Center; Utah Prison Support; ACLU of Utah; New Roads Behavioral Health; Utah Prisoner Advocate Network (UPAN); The Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City; and several individual criminal justice reform advocates from various Utah communities.

Since 2014, People Not Prisons and its various member groups have been advocating for a new, state-of-the-art prison facility that better meets the needs of inmates, staff, and public safety, while also fulfilling the state’s constitutional obligations and realizing Utah’s vision of systemic criminal justice reform.

As the Prison Relocation process slowly transitions to a Prison Development process, the coalition and its members assert that the design and programming of the new facility should have substantial input from advocacy groups and members of the communities where the new facility will be located. Whatever design, construction or architectural process is chosen by the state, it must include many points-of-entry for real public input and involvement. We strongly recommend that the state consider establishing a community oversight entity as part of the prison design process.

To that end, People Not Prisons has compiled a list of important considerations that should be taken into account in the design process of Utah’s next correctional facility. It is our belief in these possibilities that brought us to the Prison Relocation discussion in the first place, and it is our commitment to their realization that will drive our involvement in the Prison Development process.

GENERAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The new Utah correctional facility offers an opportunity to resolve serious deficiencies caused by the dilapidated, patchwork compound of buildings at the Draper site. Based on our experience with current conditions, we suggest the following be included in the new facility, to enhance the wellbeing of both inmates and staff, and in the interest of enhanced public safety:

- A separate and substantial law library.
- A separately-managed gender-responsive facility for female inmates.
- Adequate number of classrooms and program space, with adjoining bathroom facilities.
- Adequate on-site medical and mental health facilities, including:
 - Separate treatment spaces for female inmates, and
 - A working nursery for new mothers who are incarcerated.
- A separate facility for elder care and hospice.
- Space available for safe and confidential therapeutic interactions, including for inmates in isolation or restricted housing.
- Full ADA-compliant design, in particular with regards to programmatic access, communication support, shelving and storage spaces.
- Substantial outdoor recreational space (with access from each unit and/or section).
- Convenient electrical outlets for learning and vocational spaces.
- Some soundproofing between cells, particularly in Maximum Security sections.
- Individual control over lighting and ventilation where safe and possible.
- Extremely limited restricted housing space, to discourage use of segregated housing in non-emergency situations.

RELIGIOUS, EDUCATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL SERVICES

Spiritual, emotional and mental rehabilitation are important components of fruitful prison time. Our hope is that all individuals who are incarcerated in our staff have the opportunity to make amends, improvements and changes. Better treatment of inmates is correlated to less stress and physical danger for correctional staff, and also increases the likelihood that inmates, upon release, will be able to re-adjust to community life outside of prison.

- Sufficient vocational programming space for both female and male inmates.
- Worship areas for all religions represented by Utah State Prison inmates, including:
 - Native American sweat lodge and other outdoor worship spaces;
 - non-denominational chapel (large enough to accommodate multiple faiths for weekend services); and
 - small multi-faith room in each section for individual meditation and prayer.
- Classroom space safely outfitted for maximum security and other restricted inmates.
- Daily, substantial yard and gym access.
- Consistent access to educational and other programs, regardless of security level.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS & VISITATION

It is imperative that inmates are able to maintain healthy pro-social relationships with family and friends while incarcerated. Strong community connections are correlated with increased likelihood of success upon release, and also provide vital emotional support to family members (especially children and spouses) of incarcerated individuals. In keeping with Utah's expressed commitment to criminal justice reform and recidivism reduction, we suggest that visitation be given high priority in the design of the new correctional facility. To that end, the following improvements should be considered:

- No replacement of in-person contact visits with video visitation; video visitation should only be utilized when in-person contact visits are impossible due to health, distance, and economic barriers to travel.
- Extended visitation options for family and friends who travel long distances to visit.
- An easier process for visitation (less paperwork and fewer arbitrary rules that do not enhance safety).
- Vending machines to allow purchase of food and drink for visitors.
- Outdoor areas available for visitation, especially families with small children.
- Email kiosks available for inmate use.
- A process by which family and loved ones can send care packages, through approved third parties, including such items as: books, sweatpants, hygiene items and snacks.

ONGOING OVERSIGHT

To ensure that a reform-oriented philosophy endures at the new correctional facility, and regular input from surrounding communities and partner agencies encouraged, we suggest that the state consider institution of a Community Advisory Committee for the new Utah State Prison. This Committee could be comprised of community-based therapists (in mental health and substance abuse treatment fields), former inmates and family members of former inmates, prison reform advocates, community leaders from West Salt Lake neighborhoods, and others interested in improving prison oversight. A Community Advisory Committee would be responsible for, among other things:

- Passing along concerns about prison policies and practices that are in need of reform.
- Providing a forum for community input into prison-community relation issues.
- Acting as an official liaison with the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice and the Utah State Legislature on issues related to inmates' rights and recidivism reduction.
- Researching opportunities for facility and programmatic innovation for ongoing improvement.