

## Assessments and Charges in Washington Department of Corrections Facilities: A Review and Analysis

The 2023 Legislature directed WSIPP to review all assessments and charges imposed on individuals incarcerated in Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities and the effect of assessments and charges on their financial status.

### Background

Incarcerated individuals are often required to pay for additional items and services beyond those provided for free in DOC facilities. Motivated by questions about the associated costs incurred by individuals with limited earning potential, WSIPP was assigned to quantify their spending on items and services during incarceration, assess their financial status, and explore how DOC collects and uses the associated commissions and fees.

### Findings

**First**, while individuals initially received certain items, such as clothing and personal hygiene items, at no cost, they must purchase replacements for many of these items thereafter. In FY 2024, individuals spent nearly \$37 million on additional items and services, with over 93% of the spending concentrated in five major categories: commissary items, phone calls, electronic media services, and food and personal property packages. Additionally, the price comparison analysis indicates that commissary items were priced relatively low.

**Second**, mandatory deductions amounted to roughly 23% of wages and 32% of funds received during FYs 2022-24, and exemptions increased due to recent policy changes. Further, the average individual incurred nearly \$2,230 annually on items and services. On average, work assignment compensation could cover nearly 35% of these costs, with the remainder typically borne by family and/or paid via limited debt.

**Lastly**, DOC charged average gross profit margins ranging from 20% to 40% across these five major categories. Fees and commissions—primarily from phone calls, media services, and incarceration costs—were relatively small (less than 1%) compared to DOC's budget and were allocated to improvement activities and Correctional Industries' operational expenses.

### Future Work

Our findings motivate the need for further individual-level analyses to identify other factors—such as pricing structures set by approved vendors and the drivers of incarcerated individuals' demand for optional items and services—that influence their financial well-being.

### In FYs 2022-24, Estimated Costs Exceeded Estimated Compensation

Cost estimates:	
Average annual incarcerated individual spending	
DOC operated programs	\$1,074
Approved vendors operated programs	\$1,156
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,230</b>
Compensation estimates:	
Average annual compensation for work programs	
Individuals who worked in Class II-IV	\$785
All individuals	\$730

### Assignment Details

Assigned in 2023 Legislative Session  
[ESSB 5187](#), Operating Budget

[Full report available on WSIPP's website](#)

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