



State Policies and Procedures Regarding “Gate Money”

A Report Prepared for:
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

October 2007

Prepared by:
Kate J. Wilson, Senior Writer
Center for Public Policy Research
University of California, Davis

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Overview of Gate Money	1
State-by-State Comparisons of Gate Money Policies and Procedures	3
Debates Regarding Gate Money	12
Conclusions	14
References	15
Appendix A	17

State Policies and Procedures Regarding “Gate Money”

Center for Public Policy Research

University of California, Davis

Introduction

The term “gate money” refers to the predetermined amount of money given to eligible inmates upon discharge from state prison. From state to state, however, both the amount of money provided and the source of those monies differ. The purpose of the current report is to present descriptive information on the gate money policies and practices of California; to compare those policies and practices with those of other states; and to discuss what little published information is available on how these payment amounts are determined, the intended uses of the payments, how inmates actually utilize these funds, and—ultimately—whether the provision of gate money has an effect on the sizable, nationwide problem of recidivism.

Overview of Gate Money

For inmates in State prisons throughout the US, certain discharge procedures take place prior to their release by parole or sentence completion. Although these procedures vary, the goals are the same: to link inmates to crucial services such as job training, employment, health care, or drug treatment; to assist the inmate in finding safe and stable housing; to provide social support and a structure for daily living in the first days and week after release (often identified as a vulnerable time for ex-offenders); and to provide a safety net in case of relapse into criminal behavior or substance abuse (Freudenberg, 2006).

When looking at the issue of gate money, summarization is difficult, as policies differ both between states and based on the situation of the inmate (e.g., length of time served, the existence of adequate personal funds). The gate money model followed in Arizona,

however, is fairly common and can therefore serve as a reasonable starting point from which to compare other practices. Current law in Arizona dictates that discharged inmates receive all funds—*up to \$50*—that have been accumulating in a “dedicated discharge account” during the inmate’s time of incarceration (Middle Ground Prison Reform, 2003). Such discharge accounts are built up through regular 30% deductions from prisoners’ wages (if they have participated in a prison work program) or through gifts from families and friends. This account is frozen at \$50, and no interest accrues on these funds. If a prisoner has not worked, the state will “gift” him or her this money for the first release only. In addition to the \$50 and whatever money may be in private accounts (which are allowed), inmates are provided a set of clothes, and (if eligible) a bus or rail ticket to the closest stop outside state lines. According to one corrections expert in Arizona, few inmates leave with more than this \$50 (Donna Hamm, personal communication, October 13, 2007).

In California, State legislation dictates that prisoners paroled or discharged from any California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) institution or reentry facility are entitled to \$200 upon release (CDCR, 2007). It is the parole agent who is responsible for giving out these funds, yet agents do not need to grant their parolees the entire sum immediately. Instead, agents may distribute the \$200 in installments over a period of 60 days following release. Although practices vary, inmates typically receive \$50 to \$100 of the gate money at the time of their first parole officer meeting (Prison Law, 2007). Parolees who have served less than six consecutive months prior to release are also eligible for gate money, but are not necessarily eligible for the full \$200:

California penal code dictates that such inmates receive gate funds computed at a rate of \$1.10 per day served during the revocation term, up to a maximum of \$200 (15 CCR § 3075.2). Such decisions are left to the discretion of an inmate’s parole agent based on perceived need, and the perceived likelihood that such money will aid the inmate’s

rehabilitation. Unlike Arizona, however, California does not provide free clothing or transportation, the costs of which are deducted from the \$200.

Further details regarding gate money, personal accounts, and cash assistance procedures in California can be found in Appendix A. This information has been taken from the *Parolee Rights Handbook* published by the Prison Law Office of San Quentin, California, and includes embedded hyperlinks to all pertinent California State legislation.

State-by-State Comparisons of Gate Money Policies and Procedures

As part of their larger series, *The Lock-Up Society*, American RadioWorks reporter John Biewen spent more than a year following ex-inmates in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. The resulting radio broadcast and related online publications, entitled *Hard Time: Life After Prison*, utilize case studies, surveys, and other forms of field research to highlight the post-release difficulties inmates face. The broadcast and related reports also contain current state-by-state comparisons of gate money policies and procedures, as Biewen conducted a comprehensive survey of State corrections departments, specifically asking: "What do individuals leaving prison in your state get in terms of gate money, bus tickets and/or clothing?" Results of this portion of the American RadioWorks program can be found in Table 1 (p. 5).

To summarize the primary findings of the American RadioWorks state-by-state survey:

- The gate money provided by State prisons to released inmates ranges from \$0 to \$200, with an average gate money sum of \$54.*
- Nearly one-third of analyzed states provide no gate money to released inmates (13 of 45, or 30%). These states are: Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.
- California and Hawaii offer the largest gate money payments (\$200); Alaska provides a comparable amount of \$150.
- The majority of states maintain a system in which the money given to prisoners comes from their own savings, or, in cases where the inmate's savings have not reached the maximum allowable sum, the state will make up the difference.
- Gate money is almost always provided in the form of a check, particularly when the sum is over \$50, or when the funds being provided are coming from the inmate's personal account. Smaller amounts (e.g., \$10) for inmates ruled completely indigent are often given in the form of cash.
- Many states reported that gate money is determined on a case-by-case basis. Little information was provided on how and why these various determinations are made, but likely factors include inmates' personal savings, their participation in work release programs, and their reported level of social support upon release (i.e., whether they are being met by family or friends outside the gates). In many states, inmates are provided gate money on their *first* release from a State prison only.

* Although all states were surveyed, several states failed to specify the amount of gate money provided, or responded that gate money was variable (i.e., decided on a case-by-case basis or based on the inmate's level of indigence). As a result, the descriptive statistics provided here are based on information for 45 states only.

TABLE 1. GATE MONEY BY STATE*

State	Amount	Additional Comments and Procedures
Alabama	\$10	Inmates receive a suit of clothes, appropriate to the weather, \$10, and a bus ticket to their county of conviction.
Alaska	\$150	Personal property, \$150 gate money, if eligible, reporting instructions.
Arizona	\$50	The state withholds 25% of inmates' wages for their "Dedicated Discharge Accounts," up to \$50. Upon release, inmates receive this \$50, whatever money is in their private accounts, a set of clothes, and if they are eligible, a bus or rail ticket to the closest stop outside the state line. Eligibility depends on conditions of release and whether or not a prisoner has previously been released or paroled.
Arkansas	\$50	Personal property in jacket, \$50 check, bus ticket, if needed.
California	\$200	(With six or more months served) inmates are given \$200, less cost of clothing, and public transportation is provided by facility.
Colorado	\$100	Inmates receive a set of clothing (sweatpants and shirt), \$100, and a bus ticket to a Colorado state line. If they are on parole and have no family networks, the state assists them with finding housing.
Connecticut	\$50	Inmates who served 24 continuous months and are released without supervision may be eligible for up to \$50 in gate money. Facility administrators have discretion to deny gate money to "disciplinary or security problem inmates." Inmates with savings of \$50 or more are not eligible. Those with less are eligible for the difference between their balance and \$50. Transportation on a case-by-case basis.
Delaware	\$50	Gate money is determined on a case-by-case basis. Indigent inmates who have served more than 30 days receive \$50. If they are released in an urban area, the facility will provide them with bus fare. If they are released in a rural area, they are provided with cab fare.
Florida	\$100	Prisoners receive a one-way bus ticket within Florida and \$100.
Georgia	\$25	Inmates receive \$25 and a bus ticket.
Hawaii	\$200	Inmates may receive up to \$200, divisible into \$100 for cash spending money and \$100 for clothing. Inmates serving sentences of one year or longer are eligible. If an inmate is leaving the state, he/she receives no transportation assistance. Those traveling back to their county of conviction, may receive assistance with a plane ticket.

State	Amount	Additional Comments and Procedures
Idaho	\$0	Appropriate clothing for current weather, a bus ticket on occasion, brown bag lunch.
Illinois	\$50	Inmates will receive their own possessions, and a bus ticket to their parole site if needed. The administrator of the facility has discretion to dispense \$20-\$50 for meals.
Indiana	\$75	Inmates will receive weather-appropriate clothing if necessary. They will receive a bus ticket to the closest stop to their planned residence, if no family or friends can pick them up. Money from their accounts is mailed to their planned residence. If a prisoner's account is empty, he/she will receive up to \$75 at the discretion of the facility administrator.
Iowa	\$100	According to Iowa Code, inmates shall receive clothing and instate transportation according to release conditions. Those who are discharged or paroled will leave with \$100, either from their own savings or supplied by the state. Those on work-release receive \$50.
Kansas	\$100	Clothing and \$100 gate money.
Kentucky	--	Not specified.
Louisiana	\$10	Balance in inmate fund account or \$10, bus ticket home (if indigent), clothing, personal items, 3-day supply of medication (possibly).
Maine	\$50	Clothing, up to \$50, transportation to home or employment or to state border in cases of parole.
Maryland	\$0	Personal property and reporting instructions, if applicable.
Massachusetts	\$0	Massachusetts does not provide gate money, but if an inmate is determined indigent, the state works with local agencies to find housing and employment.
Michigan	Variable	Michigan provides clothing and a bus ticket within the state. Prisoners are released with the money from their accounts. In cases where an inmate has no money and no support network, the state provides a "reasonable maintenance" for 2 weeks, which covers housing, food, and personal necessities. This is a loan to be paid back in 180 days.

State	Amount	Additional Comments and Procedures
Minnesota	\$100	Clothing and \$100.
Mississippi	Up to \$100	For a continuous sentence of one year or less, \$15; for more than one and less than ten, \$25; for more than ten, \$75; for 20 or more, \$100. In addition, inmates receive a bus ticket either to their county of conviction or to a Mississippi state line.
Missouri	\$0	Inmates receive clothing and a bus ticket if necessary.
Montana	--	Not specified.
Nebraska	\$100	Gate money up to \$100; bus ticket to anywhere in the contiguous 48 states.
Nevada	\$100	At the director's discretion, a facility may also provide up to \$100, a set of clothes, and the cost of transportation anywhere in the US or to the offender's county of conviction. These costs may legally be taken from the inmate's account.
New Hampshire	\$100	Gate money of \$100 if from medium-security facility; nothing if from halfway-house.
New Jersey	\$0	Inmates have their own accounts throughout their incarceration, to which relatives can contribute, and they receive this money upon release.
New Mexico	\$50	\$50 and a bus ticket.
New York	\$40	All inmates receive \$40 and a bus ticket to their county of conviction.
North Carolina	\$0	Inmates receive their own personal property, any money in their accounts in cash, and their ID cards. If they don't have identification, they are issued a state ID. The state usually tries to arrange transfers before release dates so that prisoners are released close to home. When this is not possible, the state supplies a bus ticket home.

State	Amount	Additional Comments and Procedures
North Dakota	\$0	Prisoners in North Dakota receive no gate money. They are required to work during their sentence and the state takes money out of their paycheck to put into a "release aid account," which they receive when they are released. When inmates have not been able to work during their incarceration, they receive a bus ticket.
Ohio	Up to \$75	One set of clothing suitable for weather, plus three sets of underwear and socks and other accumulated clothing; from \$25-\$75 and personal, accumulated funds and property; applicable papers.
Oklahoma	\$50	Inmates receive the money from their accounts. If they are indigent, they receive \$50. If they have no one to pick them up, the state provides them with a bus ticket to their county of conviction.
Oregon	\$25	(If indigent), \$25, dress-outs if no clothing, bus voucher if needed.
Pennsylvania	\$0	Rules and regulation papers and additional information as needed for some inmates.
Rhode Island	\$0	Personal belongings and any money generated in inmate's account.
South Carolina	\$0	If necessary, inmates receive bus tickets within the state, and a set of clothes (which are mostly donated by churches).
South Dakota	\$50	Inmates receive a bus ticket or a ride to their county of commitment, but not if they've received such help before. On their first release, inmates leave with a minimum of \$50 - if their accounts contain less, the state makes up the difference. Inmates who have already received gate money will not receive it again.
Tennessee	Up to \$30	Least expensive transportation to county/city of planned residence within the state, if needed; up to \$30; state purchased used clothing.
Texas	\$100	Applicable certificates, plus \$100 gate money; bus ticket (if released to Parole and Mandatory Supervision).
Utah	\$100	Because of alleged abuse of the gate money system and due to the state budget crisis sweeping the nation, the Utah Department of Corrections recently announced the overhaul of its gate money program. A spokesman for the department said those with determined need will receive more than \$100, but that far fewer inmates will now be receiving the traditional \$100 gate money.

State	Amount	Additional Comments and Procedures
Vermont	\$0	Before the recent budget crisis that most states are now facing, the Vermont Department of Corrections had leases on apartments throughout the state, in which inmates could live during their transition back into the community. Budget cuts eliminated that program. Vermont has no formal gate money program, but the state does provide transportation to their community service-provider when necessary.
Virginia	--	Not specified.
Washington	\$40	ID and social security card, reporting instructions, transportation (if required) and \$40 gate money if released from total confinement.
West Virginia	\$0	Release procedures are at the discretion of the facilities, but mainly consist of a bus ticket to the county of conviction, money in the amount of such a ticket, or a ride to the bus station. Inmates who have not been paroled before may be eligible for up to \$300 from the Rosenblum Trust Fund, which is a private organization, not part of the DOC.
Wisconsin	\$0	The state withholds a percentage of inmates' earnings for a release account, payable to them upon their release. They also receive whatever money was in their regular account, and a bus ticket to their community if necessary. Some inmates can be picked up by their parole or probation officers.
Wyoming	Variable	Inmates at the main men's prison receive a bus ticket if they have no one to pick them up. If it is a long bus trip, they may receive some money for meals along the way. They may also receive clothing if they need it.

*Biewen, John. (2003, March). Hard Time: Life After Prison [Radio Broadcast]. *The Lock-Up Society*. St. Paul, MN: American RadioWorks. Retrieved October 10, 2007 from <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org>

Based on the 45 states for which gate money sums were provided, the following grid provides a convenient summary of Table 1:

Gate Money Ranges	Number of States (out of 45)
\$0	13
\$10-\$40	7
\$50-\$75	11
100-\$150	12
\$200	2

It should also be noted that the gate money figures used to calculate these ranges and averages were the reported *maximum* sums provided by each state. Thus the figures necessarily overestimate what the average prisoner truly sees.

Similar state-by-state information on gate money can be found in a 2004 report by the National Institute of Corrections (Linke & Ritchie, 2004), which aimed to “show the contrasts and variety of reentry approaches, provide information to officials and organizations involved in reentry and transition projects, and provide some baseline information to measure changes in transition and reentry efforts within state corrections systems” (p. 2). Information was collected during 2003 and 2004 via interviews with State corrections officials and supplemented with data from agency publications and online resources. The results of the report provide similar (but some additional) information compared to the RadioWorks report, including expanded details on the five large states to which California is often compared in issues of state governance: Florida, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, and Texas. Direct excerpts from the NIC report, namely from the “Inmate Release Process” sections for California and these five other states, are presented next:

California: Inmates are released from any of the state facilities. Inmates are provided \$200 “gate money,” transportation to the nearest bus station, and civilian clothes if necessary. Both clothing and transportation costs are deducted from the gate money total.

Florida: Offenders with less than \$100 in their inmate account and within six months of release are eligible to receive \$100 “gate money” if they are not released to a detaining agency. A bus ticket and clothing are provided as necessary. Gate money and personal funds are given to inmates in the form of a check.

Illinois: Inmates are released from any of Illinois' correctional facilities. Inmates receive a bus ticket to their release site within the state, \$10 "gate money" in addition to funds in their personal accounts, and civilian clothing if needed. If the inmate has personal funds, these monies are given in the form of a check; if the inmate is indigent, \$10 cash is provided upon release.

New York: All released inmates receive \$40 "gate money" plus funds in their personal accounts. They also are provided transportation to the county of conviction and civilian clothing if needed.

North Carolina: If inmates do not have funds in their personal accounts, they may be eligible as indigents for up to \$45 of "gate money" to cover transportation or other release expenses. Inmates must have served at least 24 months to be eligible for such assistance. Inmates may also be provided civilian clothing if needed. Gate money and personal funds are given to inmates in the form of a check.

Texas: Most male inmates are released from Huntsville and females from Gatesville, Texas. In Huntsville, a local Baptist Church has a *Welcome Back* Program that assists offenders with linkages to community programs and resources. Prison inmates can get \$50 plus a bus voucher upon release and another \$50 when they report to their parole officer. District Offices have "clothes closets" to assist those in need, and larger districts have District Resource Centers where programs and services are delivered, including referral to community resources. Gate money and personal funds are given to inmates in the form of a check, which can be immediately cashed at the bus station associated with their transportation voucher.

Debates Regarding Gate Money

On the surface, the question of how gate money is intended to be used is fairly straightforward: food, clothing, shelter, and other incidentals. The CDCR *Parolee Information Handbook* states the following:

You will be given gate money when you leave the prison. Do not waste this money. Gate money should be used for needs like food, a room, and travel. If you get released to a hold, you will not get your gate money until that hold is cleared, and you are again released. Talk to your parole agent about your gate money if this happens (CDCR, 2007, p. 4).

Because the majority of gate money payments are given in the form of a check, it may be difficult to cash for those leaving prison with no form of official identification. Some states do release a portion of an inmate's gate money in cash and the balance in check form, while still others provide the money in the form of a debit card or mail checks to inmates within 30 days of release (American Corrections Association, 2007). Initial meetings with parole officers typically take place the day of and/or the day after release, and many parole officers have the discretion to provide small emergency loans to parolees for basic necessities. Although, anecdotally, corrections officials and frontline workers fear gate money and other loans may go toward the purchase of drugs, no formal research was found to bolster or mitigate such fears.

Gate money is a topic often discussed by advocacy groups and grass roots organizations dedicated to corrections issues. A 2006 report by the California-based *Time for Change Foundation*, for example, presents the results of two large, qualitative studies conducted with paroled women in California (Carter, Ojukwu, & Miller, 2006). The majority of the surveyed women reported encountering serious difficulties in the weeks and months following release, particularly when it came to employment and housing. Over 80% of respondents did not have a job at the time of release, and 56%

reported that it had been more than a year since they had been employed full-time. Three out of four respondents also reported being homeless at some point; 41% reported current homelessness. Many of the women specifically cited a lack of immediately available funds as being a serious problem in the days following release.

As a result of these and other findings, the *Time for Change* report recommended an increase in the current \$200 allowance, most of which goes into clothing and medical needs, and is therefore unavailable for food and shelter in the days that follow. Also evident in the report is that the provision of necessities or housing *in lieu* of cash would be just as, if not more, helpful. Similar recommendations were made by the Arizona-based *Middle Ground Prison Reform* in their 2003 report, which aimed to make specific suggestions to the State legislature and Department of Corrections regarding issues of reentry. They recommended that inmates should be able to earn interest on money in their prison accounts (e.g., in a dedicated discharge account).

Some researchers, newsletters, and corrections organizations suggest that State funds may be better spent on more comprehensive pre- and post-release programming if the goal is to prevent recidivism. A 2006 research brief put out in *Corrections Today* (a publication of the American Corrections Association) reported the results of a survey of over 1,000 offenders and corrections staff (Braucht & Bailey-Smith, 2006). The survey revealed much about inmates' pre-release concerns and their own beliefs regarding the likely cause or causes their recidivism (if any). Gate money, however, did not seem to rank high on the list of inmate concerns.

Conclusions

“Understanding individual-level influences on transitions from prison to community is a complex conceptual and empirical task” (Visher & Travis, 2003, p. 98). Although prisoner advocates suggest that the procurement of basic necessities during the first few days of release is crucial for the initial emotional and logistical well-being of these ex-offenders, gate money is only one piece of the post-release picture.

In contacting corrections officials across the country, the authors of the NIC report cited earlier found that most states are “in various stages of change and...expect current planning to result in modifications to reentry and transition procedures in the near future.” Whether those changes include modifications in gate money policies is not known at this time.

Empirical research on the uses and effects of gate money is needed. Fortunately, research on gate money is forthcoming from a number of academic and nonprofit organizations, including Cornell University and the Urban Institute. As the current report has demonstrated, California is among the most generous states in terms of gate money. Yet it is unclear what the average prisoner retains of that \$200 after deductions are made for clothes, transportation, and other medical or victim reparation fees. A study on this issue could lend support for the change or continuation of current gate money policies.

References

- American Corrections Association. (2007). Reentry (survey summary). *Corrections compendium*, March/April, 9-30.
- Biewen, J. (2003, March). Hard time: Life after prison [Radio Broadcast]. *The lock-up society*. St. Paul, MN: American RadioWorks. Retrieved October 10, 2007 from <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org>.
- Braucht, G. S., & Bailey-Smith, K. (2006). Reentry surveys: A reality check. *Corrections today*, June. Alexandria, VA: American Corrections Association.
- California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2007). *Parolee information handbook*. Retrieved October 10th, 2007 from http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Offenders/Adult_Parole_Operations/ParoleeHandbook/.
- Carter, K., Ojukwu, D., & Miller, L. (2006). *Invisible barriers to women's health & well-being during and after incarceration*. San Bernadino, CA: Time for Change Foundation.
- Freudenberg, N. (2006). Coming home from jail: A review of health and social problems facing US jail populations and of opportunities for reentry interventions. *Jail reentry roundtable initiative*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center.
- Middle ground prison reform. (2003). *Dollars, sentences & long-term public safety: Managing a fiscal crisis with a goal of long-term public safety*. Tempe, AZ: Middle Ground Prison Reform.

Linke, L., & Ritchie, P. (2004). *Releasing inmates from prison*. Washington, DC: US

Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.

Visher, C. A., & Travis, J. (2003). Transitions from prison to community: Understanding individual pathways. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 89-113.

Appendix A

Penal Code Information Related to Personal Accounts, Gate Money, and Cash Assistance for Parolees

1. Trust Fund Accounts ([Penal Code § 2085](#))

Money brought to, earned, or received in prison can be kept in a trust account. Any money in a prisoner's trust account must be given to the prisoner upon release.

2. Gate Money ([Penal Code § 2713.1](#); [15 CCR § 3075.2\(d\)](#); [CDC Operations Manual § 81010.6](#))

In addition to any trust account funds, prisoners paroled or discharged from a CDC institution or reentry facility are entitled to \$200.00 upon release. The parole agent is responsible for giving out these funds, and need not grant a prisoner the entire lump sum immediately upon release.

The agent may distribute the \$200 in installments over a period of 60 days following release.

Although practice varies, paroled inmates typically receive at least \$50 to \$100 of the gate money immediately upon release, and many receive the entire \$200. Parole violators who have served less than six consecutive months prior to release are also eligible for gate money.

However, these parolees are not necessarily eligible for the full \$200. Instead, they will receive gate funds computed at a rate of \$1.10 per day served during the revocation term, up to a maximum of \$200.00.

A parolee who is released into a reentry facility may be given a maximum of one half of the \$200. A parolee who is released into the custody of another state or a local or federal agency, may not receive any gate money unless he or she later is released for and available for parole supervision. If a parolee needs to purchase a bus ticket or street clothes upon release from prison, the parolee must pay for it. The CDC does not provide extra gate money for clothing or transportation.

3. Cash Assistance Loans and Bank Drafts ([15 CCR § 3705](#) and [CDC Operations Manual § 81070.1](#))

There are also some emergency funds available to parolees through their parole agents. “Cash assistance funds” are loans, which CDC expects the parolee to pay back as soon as employment and personal circumstances permit. The loans are only granted to parolees when there is a critical need and assistance is not available from any other source. The loans are usually for amounts under \$50. The parole agent's supervisor must approve any loan over \$50 any series of loans totaling more than \$150 in a 30 day period.

The parole agent is also authorized to distribute funds for casework services, which include housing, food, and clothing. The agent may authorize a loan of up to \$500 to the parolee for over-the-counter purchases. The check may be written to either the parolee or the vendor from whom the parolee is purchasing items. Once again, the loans are granted on an emergency basis, and the parolee must pay the money back as soon as circumstances permit.

A parolee should keep in mind that the parole agent and agent’s supervisor have discretion over whether to grant a loan to a particular parolee. A parolee is not automatically entitled to a loan. A parole agent’s decision to grant or deny a loan depends whether there is a money available and on the circumstances, including the history and needs of the parolee.