

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

ReleasePay proves more reliable than paper checks or competitor cards

Kansas DOC praises ReleasePay functionality and customer service



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kansas Department of Corrections switched to ReleasePay for inmate exit cards after experiencing disappointing functionality and sub-par customer service with another disbursement vendor.

THE CHALLENGE

As manager of the Centralized Inmate Banking Unit for the Kansas Department of Corrections, Melissa Brooke serves as custodian for the financial accounts of approximately 8,500 offenders incarcerated in the state's nine correctional facilities.

"Our department handles everything related to money for residents," Brooke says. "We essentially act as their bank, although their funds are actually housed in a financial institution."

The inmate banking unit's role includes debiting inmate accounts when they want to send money to family members or purchase goods within their facility, such as books, magazines, media players, and food and personal items from the canteen. In addition, Brooke's department handles payments for court filings, child support, victim restitution, and other fines and fees, as well as processing incoming funds from friends and family members to residents' accounts.

75%

the reduction in time spent daily on processing release payments. KS DOC used to spend two hours each day — now the entire process takes a mere 30 minutes

\$3.00

the amount KS DOC was charged per card by their former disbursements vendor — an onerous fee that would eventually be charged to residents

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Brooke is also responsible for closing the financial accounts of inmates who are being released and issuing their final monetary disbursements. That includes any remaining funds in their inmate accounts, earnings from in-facility, private industry and, when applicable, release gratuities (a small sum of money that some offenders receive from the state upon release).

“Working with our previous disbursements vendor was a nightmare. [A resident would] be at the grocery store and have to put all their food back because the card wouldn't work, or they were at a hotel trying to book a room for their first night out and they couldn't get to any of their money. Something was always going wrong, and we didn't have a dedicated contact person. It was hard to resolve anything in a timely manner.”

— Melissa Brooke, Manager, Centralized Inmate Banking Unit, Kansas Dept. of Corrections

When offenders are released from KS DOC's custody, they have two options for this payment: a check or a debit card with the funds loaded onto it.

“It can be hard for them to accept a check, because most residents don't have a bank account set up when they're released,” Brooke explains. “And it's difficult for them to get one started, especially if they don't have a form of ID, like a driver's license. It's just a lot of extra work and stress for them to accept a check.”

She says they can get around this by having the bank that holds inmate funds cash the check. But even that poses a dilemma, as some offenders leave with tens of thousands of dollars — a dangerous amount of cash for anyone to carry on their person.

“I can't say enough great things about working with ReleasePay. The customer service has been amazing, and our representative is always available to work with my team and myself whenever we have a question or need to make a change to our process.”

— Melissa Brooke, Manager, Centralized Inmate Banking Unit, Kansas Dept. of Corrections

■ COMPETITOR CARDS CAUSE FRUSTRATION

The other option, giving offenders an exit debit card, is generally preferable for both administrators and residents alike. But Brooke says working with KS DOC's previous card vendor was “a nightmare.”

Brooke says that her office received frequent calls from former residents complaining that they were unable to activate their cards or that, even once the cards were activated, the funds still weren't available.

"They'd be at the grocery store and have to put all their food back because the card wouldn't work, or they were at a hotel trying to book a room for their first night out and they couldn't get to any of their money," Brooke says, adding that she and her team found the experience almost as frustrating as the former residents. "Something was always going wrong, and we didn't have a dedicated contact person there, so it was hard for us to resolve anything in a timely manner," she says.

The vendor also charged KS DOC \$3.00 per card, a cost that they had to pass along to the residents.

“It can be hard for them to accept a check, because most residents don't have a bank account set up when they're released. **[ReleasePay] just makes everything easier for the resident. I'm happy that I can play even a small part in making release less stressful for them, knowing that when they leave, they don't have to worry about what to do next. Their money is already right there on the card.**”

— Melissa Brooke, Manager, Centralized Inmate Banking Unit, Kansas Dept. of Corrections

■ MAKING THE SWITCH TO RELEASEPAY

Brooke had been working in the banking unit for seven years when she was promoted to manager.

"I knew when I was going to oversee the banking unit that I didn't want to stick with our current vendor," she says. "That was one of the first things I wanted to change, both for us and for the residents."

A colleague in Wichita told her they used ReleasePay for their work release program and suggested she consider the product for the KS DOC inmate exit payments. After a few initial meetings with the ReleasePay team, they made the switch in 2019.

"I can't say enough great things about working with ReleasePay," Brooke says. "The customer service has been amazing, and our representative is always available to work with my team and myself whenever we have a question or need to make a change to our process."

She appreciates that ReleasePay doesn't charge a per-card fee and says that the card activation process makes it easier for former residents, as well as cuts down on the number of calls her office receives from them after release. And ReleasePay's customer service makes it easy for users to turn off their cards and freeze their funds should they get lost or stolen.

"It just makes everything easier for the resident," Brooke says, "I'm happy that I can play even a small part in making release less stressful for them, knowing that when they leave, they don't have to worry about what to do next. Their money is already right there on the card."

It's made life less stressful for Brooke's team, as well. She says that before switching to the ReleasePay system, she would regularly spend two hours per day processing release payments. Now, that time's been cut down to about half an hour, not to mention the time they save now that they don't have to field calls from former residents about non-working cards or missing funds.

"We don't have to worry about it, because we know that residents who have been released are taken care of," she says. "It's an awesome partnership."

8,500

the approximate number
of offenders incarcerated
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correctional facilities
statewide

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— *Melissa Brooke, Manager, Centralized Inmate Banking Unit, Kansas Department of Corrections*

■ LEARN MORE ABOUT RELEASEPAY

From city, county jails, and detention centers, to transitional work programs and State Departments of Corrections, ReleasePay is the hassle-free way to pay participants and parolees accurately and on time.

Learn more about how ReleasePay can help your state, county, or municipality solve its most complex pay disbursement challenges by scheduling a call with one of our payment technology experts.