



RETHINKING “GATE MONEY”

BY KEITH ARMSTRONG

When individuals are released from prison, their successful reintegration into society depends on various factors, including money.

Providing adequate financial support and resources during this critical transition period can significantly improve their ability to rebuild their lives.

In this article, we will explore the importance of increasing taxpayer funds given to individuals upon release, otherwise known as “gate money,” address concerns about increasing taxpayer-funded support and propose a solution called “special controls” that can ensure funds are utilized appropriately for specific “reentry milestones.”

Public investment in reentry

“Gate money” is set by each state and is intended to assist individuals transitioning from prison to the outside world. It serves as a financial lifeline, helping to meet immediate needs such as food, housing, hygiene, clothing and transportation.

However, the current amount of gate money provided to released individuals is insufficient, leaving them financially vulnerable and impeding their chances of successful reentry.

In California, a person leaving prison receives \$200. This amount has stayed the same since 1973. In Texas, individuals receive two \$50 paper checks: once upon release and another when they meet their parole officer. In many states, people receive no money at all.

Furthermore, gross inefficiencies in distributing gate money costs taxpayers and individuals receiving the funds.

Gate Money checks

Checks are often cashed at a local bus station or liquor store for 10% of the amount.

Gate Money cards

Predatory fees charged by the bank and the issuer consume the available balance. Often, individuals withdraw cash off a card at an ATM (incurring fees) or trade the card at a pawn shop for half the value.

This is a direct waste of resources needed to support reentry.

Critics of Gate Money

While there may be differing perspectives on this matter, several arguments exist against providing gate money to individuals upon their release from prison. Here are a few reasons why some might argue against the provision of gate money.

Resource allocation

Critics argue allocating funds for gate money might divert limited resources from other critical areas, such as education, healthcare or social services. They contend taxpayer money could be better utilized by investing in programs that address the root causes of criminal behavior or support broader community needs.

Potential misuse of funds

Concerns are raised regarding the potential misuse of gate money. Critics argue individuals might use the funds for illicit activities, such as drug and alcohol purchases or other criminal behavior, which could undermine public safety and perpetuate cycles of criminality.

Lack of accountability

Some critics argue providing gate money without proper oversight or accountability enables individuals to make poor financial choices. They suggest individuals leaving prison should take personal responsibility for their financial well-being by seeking employment, utilizing community resources and accessing support programs rather than relying solely on financial assistance.

Responsible financial aid

By increasing the amount of gate money, we acknowledge individuals’ practical challenges upon release and provide them with a stronger foundation for reintegration. Adequate funds can help cover initial expenses, empower individuals to secure safe housing and employment and reconnect with their families and communities.

To address concerns about increasing gate money, implementing a solution called “spend controls” offers a sensible solution. Modern financial technology allows allowing or blocking based on spending categories, specific merchants, geo-locations, special point-of-service types (like an ATM or a gas pump) and so much more.

Spend controls involve establishing guidelines and restrictions on how the funds can be used, ensuring they are allocated for appropriate expenses that support each milestone during an individual’s reintegration.

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Identification of eligible expenses

Collaboration between correctional institutions, social service agencies and community organizations can help define a list of eligible expenses. These may include housing deposits, transportation costs, clothing, job training programs, educations pursuits and other essential needs.

Financial responsibility and empowerment

Spend controls can be accompanied by financial literacy programs and counseling services. These initiatives provide valuable education on budgeting, responsible spending and long-term financial planning. By fostering financial responsibility, we empower individuals to make informed decisions, break cycles of financial instability and build a solid financial future.

Investing taxpayer money wisely

Increasing gate money and implementing spend controls are essential steps toward reducing recidivism rates and maximizing the impact of taxpayer money. By investing in reentry initiatives, we allocate resources to programs and services that support individuals in successfully reintegrating into society. This approach promotes self-sufficiency, reduces the burden on the criminal justice system and saves taxpayer dollars that would otherwise be spent on the continued cost of incarcerating people.



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Conclusion

Increasing gate money and implementing spend controls represent a pragmatic approach to supporting individuals transitions from incarceration to society and would likely reduce the likelihood of returning to criminal behavior.

Investing updated amounts of taxpayer money in reentry initiatives is a wise and compassionate use of resources. By focusing on successful reentry, we contribute to individual transformation, build stronger communities and alleviate the financial burden of incarceration on taxpayers. By giving individuals a genuine chance at rehabilitation and reintegration, we foster a more just and equitable society for all.



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