

Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon
Governor

George A. Lombardi
Director



Missouri Department of Corrections
2729 Plaza Dr.
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102
Telephone: 573-522-1118
Fax: 573-751-4099

State of Missouri
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 4, 2016

For Further Information Contact:
David Owen, Communications Director
573-522-1118 or doc.media@doc.mo.gov

Puppies for Parole Program earns semifinalist honors in national award competition

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The Puppies for Parole Program was named a semifinalist in the 2015 Innovations in American Government Award competition sponsored by the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation in the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

“It is an honor to have the Puppies for Parole Program named as a semifinalist in the competition of such a prestigious award,” Missouri Department of Correction Director George A. Lombardi said. “This program helps teach offenders about compassion and altruistic behavior. So far, Puppies for Parole has surpassed those initial goals and has provided more than 3,500 trained, loving pets to hundreds of individuals.”

The Puppies for Parole Program, which began in February 2010 and has been implemented in 19 correctional centers operated by the Missouri Department of Corrections, was one of 226 applicants chosen to compete in the second round of the awards competition after submitting an initial application on the program. After submitting a second round application in the awards competition, the program was one of 19 applicants that earned semifinalist honors in the Criminal Justice and Public Safety category of the competition.

The Innovations in American Government Award competition was created in 1985 to allow county, city, state and federal government agencies from across the county present programs as models of good governance and inform research and academic study around key policy areas at Harvard University and other academic institutions. A group of five finalists are chosen during the competition and compete for the \$100,000 grand prize in grants to support dissemination efforts by presenting their programs to the National Selection Committee of the competition.

Since its inception, the Puppies for Parole Program has trained and adopted more than 3,500 dogs without the use of any taxpayer money. This unique program, which operates on donations and volunteers, is made possible through the partnership between the Missouri Department of Corrections, animal shelters and animal rescue groups throughout the state. Select offenders volunteer as dog trainers in the program to teach basic obedience and socialization skills to the rescued canines, making them more adoptable. Offender handlers in the program are enrolled in an apprenticeship program through the US Department of Labor. Through formal training, individualized study and hands-on training, offender handlers earn a certificate in animal handling, which is recognized in all 50 states.

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