

**From:** [REDACTED] (DOC) **On Behalf Of** Morgan, Richard L. (DOC)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 01, 2016 1:43 PM  
**To:** DOC DL ALL DOC <[DOCDLALLDOC@DOC1.WA.GOV](mailto:DOCDLALLDOC@DOC1.WA.GOV)>  
**Subject:** DOC All Staff Message: Phasing out the word “offender”

Good afternoon –

The Washington Department of Corrections is phasing out the use of the word “offender.” The Department switched from ‘inmate’ to ‘offender’ in the early 2000’s as a more general term to describe the men and women in our care and custody whether they were assigned to a prison, work release, or supervised in the field.

As a technical term describing the people for whom we are legally responsible, the word “offender” worked. It worked so well that it is embedded in nearly every policy, document, or system associated with our Department. However, the word “offender” has also contributed significantly to some unintended consequences. The word ‘offender’ has become a label that we apply to people and in our case, the people for which we are charged to provide services and everything associated with them. Unfortunately, what starts out as a technical term, used to generically describe the people in our care, becomes and is enforced as a stereotype. As a stereotype, “offender” is a label that impacts more than the person to whom it is applied. This label has now been so broadly used that it is not uncommon to see it used to describe others such as “offender families” and “offender employers or services.”

This is not a malicious act on the part of our Department or the public, but the term “offender” does have a negative connotation and significantly impacts a broad group of people and communities. This is something we can address. When I started work in corrections the term “resident” had been adopted to replace “convict” and “inmate.” Inmate was reinstated in the early 80’s to be followed by “offender.” Times change, and so does our language.

Effective November 1, 2016, we will be phasing out the word “offender.” This will take some time to fully accomplish, but you will begin to see the word “offender” replaced with “individuals” or other applicable terms such as “student” or “patient” where/when appropriate. Policies and other documents will be modified as they come up for review. We have many systems and proprietary tools that use the word “offender” and those will take much longer to address, but we need to start somewhere. It takes time to change habits but I encourage all of you to make an effort. Start by referring to individuals by their names (if you don’t already), practice replacing or removing the word ‘offender’ from your communication and presentations to others. Most importantly, take this as an opportunity to help others define themselves not for their criminal behavior, but for their future role in their communities.

Thank you for your efforts,

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