

CORRECTIONS TECHNOLOGY · LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS · 2026 ELECTIONS

# The Corrections Leadership Reset Is Coming. Are You Ready?

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Thirty-six states hold gubernatorial elections in 2026. More than twenty could see new corrections leadership. Every agency with a technology or construction project in flight is at risk—and the time to act is now, before the transition, not after.

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THE STAKES

# A Reckoning Nobody Planned For

Somewhere in America right now, a corrections commissioner is walking a state legislator through a half-finished offender management system, explaining why the project needs another eighteen months and forty million dollars. That commissioner believes in the project. That commissioner fought for the funding, sat through the procurement, chose the vendor, and sold the vision to a skeptical workforce.

That commissioner may not have a job in January.

<b>36</b> States holding gubernatorial elections in 2026	<b>20+</b> Could see new corrections leadership appointed	<b>15</b> Sitting governors are term-limited and cannot return	<b>\$B</b> In active OMS and construction projects at risk of stalling
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Thirty-six states hold gubernatorial elections this November. When the dust settles, we could see more than twenty new governors appointing new corrections leadership—the largest single turnover in state corrections leadership in a generation.

Every one of those agencies has technology projects in flight. Offender management systems, electronic health records, risk assessment platforms, body-worn camera programs, reentry case management tools. Some are in procurement. Some are mid-implementation. Some are months from go-live.

And every single one of them just became vulnerable.

*"I spent 30 years inside corrections, from correctional officer to Chief of Operations in Vermont. I have watched technology projects survive leadership transitions, and I have watched them die. The difference was never the technology. It was whether the project had been built to outlast the people who started it."*

— ALAN CORMIER, DIRECTOR OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, MI-CASE

## THE PROBLEM

# The Blind Spot Nobody Plans For

In corrections, we plan for everything. Riots. Pandemics. Escapes. Natural disasters. We have continuity-of-operations plans, emergency succession protocols, and incident command structures that we can stand up in hours.

But what happens when the person who has championed a \$25 million OMS implementation retires, gets reassigned, or gets replaced by a new governor's appointee? Most agencies will have no plan at all.

**The math doesn't work unless you plan for it.** A modern OMS implementation takes 18 to 36 months from contract to full go-live. A governor's term is maybe four years; some are only two. A corrections commissioner's average tenure is often shorter than that.

The consequences of getting it wrong go well beyond wasted money. A stalled implementation leaves frontline staff stuck on failing legacy systems. It leaves leadership without the data they need to manage their agencies. It leaves the public without the transparency and accountability they expect. And in states where technology projects are tied to legislative mandates—earned-time programs, risk assessment requirements, victim notification laws—a stalled project means the agency cannot comply with the law.

CONSTRUCTION

## Billions in Bricks and Mortar Are at Stake Too

Technology is not the only thing at risk. Across the country, state corrections agencies are in the middle of the largest wave of prison construction and facility modernization in decades—and nearly all of it will land on the desks of incoming leaders who had nothing to do with starting it.

STATE	PROJECT	INVESTMENT	STATUS
South Dakota	Men's correctional facility, Lincoln County	\$825M	In progress
Arkansas	3,000-bed prison, Franklin County	\$750M	Advancing despite 5 failed supermajority votes
Georgia	New facilities incl. \$320M design-phase prison	~\$600M	Committed in single budget cycle under Kemp
California	San Quentin rehabilitation campus transformation	\$239M	Completion phase
New Jersey	Women's facility + East Jersey State Prison future	\$90M+	Planning
New Hampshire	Men's prison replacement—most expensive project in state history	\$40M	Initial planning/design funded
Idaho / Hawaii / Texas	Women's prison; O'ahu detention center; first new juvenile facility in 25 years	TBD	Active

In many of these states, the technology and the construction are intertwined. A new facility needs a new OMS. A new OMS needs infrastructure that aligns with facility design. When one stalls, the other stalls with it.

## ROOT CAUSES

## Why New Leaders Kill Inherited Projects

Having sat across the table from new commissioners and deputy commissioners, the pattern is consistent: they almost never cancel technology projects or shelve construction plans out of malice. They do it for understandable reasons—nearly all of which are preventable.

### **They don't understand the project.**

A new director walks into an office with hundreds of issues competing for attention. The OMS implementation is one of them. If nobody explains — quickly, clearly, in operational language — what these projects are, why they matter, and where they stand, it becomes easy to defer. In corrections, "defer" often means "die slowly."

### **They want to put their stamp on things.**

Every new leader wants to establish their own priorities. A massive technology project or a half-billion-dollar facility started by a predecessor can feel like executing someone else's playbook. New leaders need to see how inherited projects serve *their* agenda, not the agenda of the person who left.

### **They inherit the project without inheriting the context.**

The outgoing director spent two years in procurement, heard 10 vendor presentations, sat through 20 steering committee meetings, and watched the team evaluate three platforms before choosing one. The new director gets a binder and a handshake. The institutional knowledge that informed every decision is gone overnight.

### **The vendor relationship feels inherited, not chosen.**

A technology partnership carefully built over months with one leader is, to the successor, just a contract they didn't sign with a company they didn't pick. That is a trust deficit that must be addressed proactively. It will not heal on its own.

**An uncomfortable truth for corrections technology vendors:** When new leadership arrives, the vendor is the most distrusted voice in the room. Vendors have an obvious financial interest in the project continuing—and everything they say is filtered through that lens. The best vendors understand this and adjust accordingly. During a leadership transition, the vendor's role is to support, not to lead.

2026 RACES

# The States to Watch

The scale of what is coming in 2027 is hard to overstate. Consider just a sample of the states where gubernatorial transitions could reshape corrections leadership and jeopardize projects already underway.

## FLORIDA

Governor DeSantis is term-limited. Florida's DOC is the third-largest state prison system in the country, managing more than 80,000 incarcerated individuals. Technology and infrastructure initiatives will face a new governor and likely a new secretary of corrections.

TERM-LIMITED

## GEORGIA

Governor Kemp is term-limited. His administration committed to one of the most ambitious correctional construction programs in recent memory—hundreds of millions in active construction contracts plus technology modernization in flight.

TERM-LIMITED

## MICHIGAN

An open and competitive race with both major-party primaries contested, plus an independent candidate. Any technology project or facility initiative under current DOC leadership will face an uncertain future regardless of outcome.

OPEN RACE

### MINNESOTA

Governor Walz withdrew from seeking a third term. The state is simultaneously implementing the Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act, closing its oldest prison, and modernizing its OMS. New leadership will inherit all three, mid-stream.

OPEN RACE · THREE ACTIVE INITIATIVES

### NEW HAMPSHIRE

A new governor last year has already appointed a new corrections commissioner. The state is in early design for a major new men's prison while managing a 47% staff vacancy rate and a \$10M budget cut. A lot of change for a new leader to absorb.

ALREADY TRANSITIONING

### ARKANSAS

Governor Sanders is running for reelection, but the \$750M Franklin County prison project has already faced five failed supermajority votes. Even with continuity, the political fragility of that project illustrates how vulnerable large corrections investments are to shifting priorities.

PROJECT POLITICALLY FRAGILE

### OHIO · PENNSYLVANIA · COLORADO · MARYLAND · MASSACHUSETTS · MAINE

All are holding gubernatorial elections. Some have incumbents running, but even reelected governors sometimes reshuffle corrections leadership at the start of a new term. None of the technology or construction projects currently underway should be treated as secure until new leadership confirms continuity in writing.

GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS · OUTCOME UNCERTAIN

Multiply this across 36 states, and the scale of potential disruption becomes clear. We are not talking about a few agencies navigating transitions. We are talking about a systemic risk to corrections progress nationwide—in technology, in infrastructure, and in the reforms that depend on both.

## STRATEGY

## How to Transition-Proof Your Investment

The good news: this is a solvable problem. Agencies that act now—before the election, before the transition, before the new appointee arrives—can dramatically increase the odds that their investments will survive and thrive under new leadership.

### 1 Anchor the Initiative to Something That Outlasts Any Leader

The single most effective protection for any corrections investment is to connect it to a requirement that doesn't change when the nameplate on the door does. Legislative mandates are the gold standard — if your OMS supports compliance with a sentencing reform law, a risk assessment requirement, or a victim notification statute, document that connection explicitly. A new commissioner can question a predecessor's technology preferences. They cannot question state law or a federal court order. Budget appropriations, strategic plans, and consent decrees work similarly.

### 2 Build a Governance Structure That Doesn't Depend on One Person

If your project's survival depends on the continued enthusiasm of one executive sponsor, it is a single point of failure. The most resilient projects have steering committees with broad representation: operations, IT, legal, community supervision, legislative affairs, and ideally external stakeholders. A functioning steering committee with documented decision history is the best insurance policy against transition risk. When the new commissioner asks "Why are we doing this?", the answer should come from two years of documented minutes — not from one person's memory.

### 3 Prepare the Transition Briefing Before You Need It

Do not wait until the outgoing leader has one foot out the door. The transition briefing should be a living document, updated quarterly, ready to hand over at any time. It should include the strategic rationale in operational language (not vendor language), current status, investment to date and cost of cancellation, connection to legislative mandates, upcoming decisions requiring executive attention, and an honest assessment of staff sentiment. The most powerful element: a personal statement from the outgoing leader explaining why they championed the project. One corrections professional speaking to another about operational necessity carries more weight than any consultant's slide deck.

## 4 Cultivate the Next Tier of Champions

Executive sponsors matter, but they are not the only voices that matter. Every technology project should have champions at the operational level: deputy wardens, district supervisors, IT directors, classification managers — people who can articulate the project's value from their own experience. These mid-level champions provide continuity regardless of who sits in the executive suite. They are also more credible to incoming leadership than the vendor team, because they have no financial interest in the project's continuation. Their endorsement is earned, not purchased.

### FOR INCOMING LEADERS

## A 30-Day Playbook for New Corrections Leaders Inheriting Technology Projects

For the new commissioner, director, or secretary who just inherited a technology project or construction program they did not start: welcome to the most consequential decision you did not know you would have to make. Here is what I would recommend, having been on both sides—as the corrections leader inheriting projects, and now as an advisor helping agencies navigate transitions.

### WEEK 1

#### Read the Briefing

If there isn't one, that tells you something about the project's organizational maturity—it doesn't tell you the project is wrong. Ask for a status summary from the agency project director. The absence of a briefing document is itself important information.

### WEEK 2

#### Visit a Facility

Do not sit in the conference room looking at slides. Go to a facility where the system is being used—or where the legacy system's failures are most visible—and talk to frontline staff. Ask a CO about their current technology. Ask a case manager how many systems they log into. Ask a records supervisor how long sentence calculations take. You will learn more in an afternoon than in a week of briefings.



**WEEK 3****Assess the Anchors**

Is this project tied to a legislative mandate? A budget appropriation? A federal requirement? A strategic plan? A court order? If yes, understand that cancellation carries consequences beyond the technology or the building itself. If no, ask why the project was initiated and whether the operational need still exists. In corrections, it almost always does.

**WEEK 4****Decide and Communicate**

The worst thing you can do is leave a project in limbo. Staff are watching. The vendor is watching. The legislature is watching. If you are continuing the project, say so publicly and take ownership. If you are modifying the scope, explain why. If you cancel it, do it quickly and clearly so the agency can redirect resources. Ambiguity kills projects more often than opposition does.

**CONCLUSION****The Bigger Picture**

Thirty years in corrections taught me that this profession runs on relationships and institutional knowledge. The people who keep our facilities safe, who manage our caseloads, who build our programs, and who implement our technology are the ones who carry the organization's memory. When they leave, that memory goes with them—unless we have deliberately built systems to capture and transfer it.

The technology does not care who the governor is. The offender management system does not know whether the commissioner who signed the contract is the same one who cuts the ribbon at go-live. These projects will work for anyone who commits to seeing them through. The question is whether we have built the organizational infrastructure to get them across the finish line regardless of who is leading the agency when they get there.

For the corrections professionals reading this: the time to start is now. Not after the election. Not after the transition. Now. Build the briefing, strengthen the governance, cultivate the champions, and anchor the projects to mandates that outlast any individual.

For the new leaders who will take office in January 2027: your predecessors started something important. Take the time to understand it before you decide its fate.



**Alan Cormier**

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# Is Your OMS Implementation Built to Outlast a Transition?

Mi-Case partners with corrections agencies to build implementations that survive— with governance structures, documentation practices, and champion networks designed to endure leadership change. Talk to us before your next election cycle, not after.

Start the Conversation → [mi-case.com](https://mi-case.com)

**100%**

Implementation success rate. Zero failed go-lives.

**27 mo.**

Fastest OMS implementation on record (Indiana, 2023)

**30 yrs**

Corrections operational experience guiding our implementation approach

**7 yr**

Maryland's contract extension after go-live—sustained satisfaction matters