



Reinventing Prisoner Re-Entry

Summary

The proposal is for the newly created Talent Investment Agency and the Michigan Department of Corrections to partner together to better prepare returning citizens for employment and successful re-entry. Together, they are tasked with:

- Reviewing data and identifying market employment demands
- Partnering with employers to determine the skills need to fill the job demand
- Providing local employment services behind the walls
- Partnering with private industry to develop and execute market-based vocational training
- Working with Michigan's Career Technical Education team and TIA to develop contextualized education programs for inmates, which will allow inmates to prepare for their GED and learn vocational skills simultaneously, and
- To provide wrap-around services for ex-offenders re-entering the workplace, up to and including the placement of a parole officer in companies that hire a significant number of ex-offenders.

Why It Matters

The majority of those incarcerated will be released, and when they are, it is in the best interest of the public to ensure that they are educated and employed. When offenders are unable to find or keep employment, it can increase the likelihood that he/she will re-offend. Further, lack of employment makes it increasingly difficult for an ex-offender to pay restitution to victims.

Beginning prisoner re-entry services earlier with a focus on employment programs, specifically designed to lower each offender's risk, is smart corrections policy. This change will help reduce recidivism rates even further and enhance public safety in our communities.

Background

Recidivism rates for annual parole releases have gradually improved over the past nine years, from a contemporary high of 45.7 percent of 1998 parolees being returned to prison within three years following release, to the current low of 29 percent being returned to prison within three years following release.

This means that three of every ten offenders released from prison in Michigan are still likely to return within three years. While we've made improvements with our prisoner reentry programs, we can do better. Recidivism is costly. Victims suffer at the hands of criminals who re-offend; families of those offenders suffer as their loved ones return to prison; and all of us pay the price of incarcerating repeat offenders over again. In total, recidivism costs MDOC over \$150 million per year. If the recidivism rate dropped from 29% down to 24%, Michigan tax payers would save approximately \$35 million in prison costs every year

A study done by the PEW Charitable Trusts found that past incarceration reduced subsequent wages by 11 percent, cut annual employment by nine weeks and reduced yearly earnings by 40 percent.¹ It further found that this resulted due to poor education and work-skill training prior to incarceration as well as the stigma placed on offenders as a result of incarceration.

Ensuring a successful re-entry of offenders is in the best interest of society. PEW also notes that an astounding 1 in 28 children in the United States today have a parent behind bars.² Many Michigan parents are behind bars as well. Without adequately preparing these parents to re-enter the workforce and their children's lives, their family and society will suffer.

¹ http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Collateral_Costs.pdf?n=8653 Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility, Pg. 11

² Id.