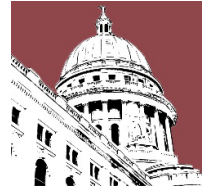

Wisconsin Legislative Council

MINUTES



STUDY COMMITTEE ON INCREASING OFFENDER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

411 South, State Capitol
Madison, WI
August 30, 2022
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Felzkowski called the meeting to order and determined that a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Sen. Mary Felzkowski, Chair; Rep. Michael Schraa, Vice Chair; Sen. Lena Taylor; Reps. Evan Goyke and Warren Petryk; and Public Members Jan Allman, Sadique Isahaku, Eli Rivera, and Elizabeth Roddy.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Rep. Shelia Stubbs and Public Member Reijo Wahlin.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Anne Sappenfield, Director; Katie Bender-Olson, Principal Attorney; and Peggy Hurley, Senior Staff Attorney.

APPEARANCES: Melissa Roberts, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Dr. Silvia Jackson, Reentry Director, Lisa Reible, Deputy Warden, Wisconsin Women's Correction System (WWCS), and Quala Champagne, Warden, Wisconsin Correctional Center System (WCCS), Department of Corrections (DOC); Lenard Simpson, Education Director, Justice-Involved Populations, Office of Student Success, and Brandon Trujillo, Policy Advisor, Policy and Government Relations Office, Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS); and Jenifer Cole, Legislative Liaison, Michele Carter, Division Administrator, Division of Employment and Training (DET), Steve Laesch, Deputy Division Administrator, DET, and Rebecca Kikkert, Director, DET Office of Special Initiatives, Department of Workforce Development (DWD).

OPENING REMARKS FROM ANNE SAPPENFIELD, DIRECTOR, LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Chair Felzkowski welcomed committee members and introduced Anne Sappenfield, Director of the Legislative Council staff. Ms. Sappenfield thanked the members for their service, addressed logistical items, and presented a video featuring Wisconsin legislators discussing the importance of study committees.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee members introduced themselves and briefly explained their backgrounds.

DISCUSSION OF MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED BY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STAFF

Katie Bender-Olson, Principal Attorney, advised committee members that meeting materials are posted on the committee's website, noted that the committee is subject to the Open Meetings Law, and described the study committee process.

PRESENTATION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Melissa Roberts, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Dr. Silvia Jackson, Reentry Director, Lisa Reible, Deputy Warden, WWCS, and Quala Champagne, Warden, WCCS

Ms. Roberts, Dr. Jackson, Ms. Reible, and Ms. Champagne provided an overview of DOC programs and services related to employment. The PowerPoint [presentation](#) is available on the committee's website.

The presentation described DOC reentry vocational training and employment initiatives, including mobile training labs, career technical education (CTE) academies, Windows to Work Program, and institution job centers. The presentation provided statistics on completion rates, program outcomes, and employment outcomes.

Ms. Reible also addressed the programming provided by the DOC Division of Adult Institutions (DAI) to individuals confined in state institutions. The programs included various primary treatment programs, one of which was employment programming. She also discussed the educational programming offered by DAI, which includes adult basic education, associate and bachelor degree programs, English Language Learners programming, and special education services, among others. The CTE offered by DAI includes 25 programs ranging from welding to culinary arts to cabinet making. The presentation also addressed the completion rates and waitlists for DAI programming.

Ms. Champagne explained the work release program and its locations, objectives, and services. She addressed the employer site selection process, off-site authorization for inmates, and employment numbers for individuals in custody. At the end of the presentation, Ms. Roberts provided DOC's recommended legislative proposals, which included expanding existing programs, updating expungement laws, increasing treatment and diversion programs, and allowing vocational earned release.

Following the presentation, committee members asked a series of questions regarding program completion rates, waitlists for DOC programming, participation in work release, and the reasons why individuals recidivate.

PRESENTATION BY THE WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

Lenard Simpson, Education Director, Justice-Involved Populations, Office of Student Success and Brandon Trujillo, Policy Advisor, Policy and Government Relations Office

Mr. Simpson and Mr. Trujillo provided an overview of WTCS employment training and placement programs. The PowerPoint [presentation](#) is available on the committee's website.

Mr. Trujillo provided background on WTCS and its 16 technical college districts, including system objectives and initiatives and general statistics for all WTCS students. Mr. Simpson then addressed programming offered by WTCS for the justice-involved population, which ranges from programs intended to increase employability skills to specific certifications and degrees. He noted that

educational programs for this population lead to decreased costs based on decreased rates of recidivism, fewer infractions from those still incarcerated, and enhanced inmate self-esteem.

The presenters offered examples of programs provided to justice-involved individuals in prisons and jails by technical colleges throughout Wisconsin, as well as examples of employers in the community that partner with these programs and hire their students and graduates. Mr. Simpson offered several suggestions for continued success of WTCS programs for justice-involved individuals, including increased collaboration between state agencies and employers, the inclusion of justice-involved individuals in planning programming, and increased cooperation between reentry partners and colleges. The presenters also discussed the increased use of federal Pell grants to fund post-secondary credits for justice-involved individuals.

Following the presentation, committee members asked about the costs for educating students, the impact of DOC anti-fraternization policies, apprenticeships, and barriers to increased educational opportunities for incarcerated students. Mr. Simpson noted that one barrier to increased opportunities is limited physical access to students, either within the institutions or on the WTCS campuses.

PRESENTATION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Jenifer Cole, Legislative Liaison, Michele Carter, Division Administrator, DET, Steve Laesch, Deputy Division Administrator, DET, and Rebecca Kikkert, Director, DET Office of Special Initiatives

Ms. Cole and Ms. Carter provided an overview of the DWD program and employer incentives aimed at the justice-involved population. Their PowerPoint [presentation](#) is available on the website.

The presenters addressed the correctional job labs that include 10 classrooms within facilities and one mobile job lab. They described the job lab locations, staffing, and services, including job readiness workshops, virtual interviews, assistance in creating job center accounts, and connecting veterans with DWD veteran services and individuals with disabilities with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Ms. Cole then discussed the mobile training labs, three of which are funded by DWD Fast Forward grant funds.

The presenters then discussed existing employer incentives for hiring individuals with arrest or conviction records. They explained fidelity bonding, which is a business insurance policy for employers to protect against any loss due to employee dishonesty. Next, the presenters addressed the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program, which provides federal income tax credits for employers who hire justice-involved individuals.

Next, Ms. Cole showed a video interview with an individual who achieved successful employment from CNC training obtained while incarcerated. She also discussed the Worker Connection Pilot Program in two workforce development areas within the state.

Finally, Ms. Cole provided DWD's recommended legislative proposals, which included creating a state income and franchise tax credit to supplement the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit and prohibiting employers from asking about conviction record of an applicant before he or she is selected for an interview.

Following the presentation, committee members asked questions relating to the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, fidelity bonding, the prevalence of questions about prior convictions on job applications, and Certificates of Qualification for Employment (CQEs).

DISCUSSION OF COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT

Chair Felzkowski initiated discussion regarding next steps for the committee. Committee members offered suggestions for speakers they would like to hear from at future meetings, including employers who work with justice-involved individuals and those who choose not to do so, as well as community-based organizations and offenders who can discuss the experiences of individuals releasing from incarceration. Members indicated that they would like to hear from offenders who have been successful and those who are less successful in finding self-supporting employment, in order to determine the barriers that offenders face when they are released from confinement.

The committee also discussed hearing from sheriffs, DOC probation and parole agents, and chambers of commerce. Additionally, members mentioned related challenges faced by those with prior convictions, focusing primarily on the difficulty of finding available and affordable housing. The committee raised the CQE process and employer liability for hiring those with prior convictions, as well instructor shortages for CTE programming and the possibility of allowing inmates who complete programming to instruct other inmates (“train the trainers”).

PLANS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Chair Felzkowski reminded members of future meetings scheduled for the following dates:

- Thursday, September 29th.
- Friday, October 21st.
- Thursday, November 10th.
- Tuesday, December 6th.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

KBO:ksm