
Legislative Council Study Committee on Increasing Offender Employment Opportunities
Thursday, November 10, 2022
9:30 AM
State Capitol, Room 201 Southeast

Department of Workforce Development Comments on LRB-0516/P3, Relating to Establishing a Hotline for Employers Interested in Hiring Individuals with a Conviction Record.

Thank you, Chair Felzkowski, Vice-Chair Schraa, and Committee Members, for your work to address barriers to employment and increase employment opportunities for justice-involved individuals. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) appreciates your efforts to ensure employers have ease of access to information about and support in hiring justice-involved individuals.

DWD is committed to expanding the public's understanding of the resources DWD offers employers to address their recruitment and retention needs, including hiring justice-involved individuals. Currently, employers may access DWD resources by contacting their local Job Center or by calling the Job Center Call Center. When an employer contacts their local Job Center or the Call Center, they are connected with a DWD Division of Employment and Training Business Services specialist. The Business Services specialist then works with the employer to identify and navigate resources available to them. These resources may include initiatives that support hiring justice-involved individuals, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and the Fidelity Bonding program.

While, as mentioned, a Business Services specialist is able to provide support in hiring justice-involved individuals, a valuable feature of the Business Services Team is that specialists may also advise employers on many other issues and programs, eliminating the need for employers to "shop around" for assistance. DWD's current Call Center offers a "one stop" service model for employers. DWD supports the intent of this proposed new hotline; however, we are concerned that the creation of a separate hotline for employers to call about hiring justice-involved individuals may unintentionally reduce employers' access and understanding of other services available to them to address their unique needs.

Should the committee move forward with legislation to create a dedicated hotline, DWD respectfully requests the committee create and fund an appropriation to cover the related costs. The bill does not provide position authority for these activities, and these new activities are not absorbable within the department's existing operations. The estimated annual fiscal effect for DWD is \$243,600, which is the cost of contracting for 2.0 FTE at an equivalent pay scale for a Program and Policy Analyst – Advanced classification. Ongoing costs to establish a toll-free telephone number for the hotline are estimated to be minor and absorbable within agency operations. One-time costs to post on the department's web site the hotline telephone number, hours of operation, and basic assistance information for employers seeking to hire individuals with a conviction record are also assumed to be minor and absorbable. This estimate does not include any additional promotional activities.

There is an estimated fiscal effect for local governments related to DWD's need to coordinate with counties and tribes who operate work release programs to maintain a list of programs and incentives available under state or federal law that could be of interest to employers who contact the hotline. However, the local fiscal impact is indeterminate at this time.

Again, DWD shares the committee's interest in building employers' awareness of the opportunities to hire justice-involved individuals and addressing any questions or concerns they may have regarding that process. Using existing resources, DWD will develop additional targeted outreach materials in the coming year to promote employers' use of the Job Center Call Center to seek assistance in hiring justice-involved individuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information, and for your time and consideration.