Investing in What Works: Pathways from Prison to Employment

Of those who are incarcerated in Minnesota prisons, 95% will one day be back living in our communities. Our safety depends on these individuals coming out of prison successfully – as supportive family members, good neighbors, taxpayers, and stable employees.

Data shows that individuals engaged in higher education while in prison and those with meaningful job opportunities when they are released are less likely to re-offend and go back to prison. The impact is also inter-generational as the children of formerly incarcerated parents who have completed higher education and are gainfully employed have more successful outcomes into adulthood. When post-secondary programming in prisons runs in partnership with Minnesota’s public and private educational institutions, behavioral change and lifelong positive outcomes accelerate. Minnesota must make investments in what works and create more pathways from prison to employment.

“The safety of our neighborhoods depends on people who commit serious offenses and go to prison come out as better neighbors for all of us. These proposals invest in what works for transforming lives and keeping us safe.”

-Nanette Larson, Assistant Commissioner

It is also no secret that Minnesota employers need workers. Supporting the nearly 5,000 individuals who are expected to leave prison each year with education, job training, and employment navigation serves the economy and protects public safety.

The Department of Corrections is requesting an investment of $2 million in FY 2023 and $7 million in FY 2024/2025 to create and support pathways from prison to employment. This funding will build and expand connections to public and private employers, the trades, and community colleges and other post-secondary institutions and connect incarcerated individuals with employment upon release. An additional $1 million each year is requested to expand
opportunities for higher education for incarcerated individuals through current work-release authority.

**Expand Post-Secondary Institution Partnerships**

The investment will expand the partnerships with Minnesota institutions of higher education and the DOC for degree-track classes provided while an individual is incarcerated. The enhanced capacity will allow for more degrees with post-secondary institutions, such as our current large-scale partners (Minneapolis College, Metro State, Minnesota State – Mankato, and the University of Minnesota), along with new partnerships with community colleges and technical colleges.

**Create a Public Safety and Economic Opportunity Unit**

The investment will create a Public Safety and Economic Opportunity Unit to build intentional, evidence-based pathways from training, education, and industry in prisons to job placements upon release. The unit will integrate with the work of the previous DOC program, EMPLOY, in addition to developing and strengthening new relationships in the community, bringing together both public and private employers, the trades and trade unions, community colleges, and post-associates degree pathways. Employment navigation will support the pathways begun in prison to continue into long-term job stability. The unit will set strategic goals and create a centralized, transparent, data-sharing system, including partnering with DEED and Minnesota employers.

**Expand Work-Release for Education Programs**

This investment will increase the availability of community-based educational programming to individuals during their incarceration. The funding will allow individuals who qualify for work release to be placed in transitional housing and pursue a degree with partnering institutions of higher education as they complete their sentences.