

Landon State Office Building  
900 SW Jackson, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Topeka, KS 66612



Phone: (785) 296-3317  
Fax: (785) 296-0014  
Email: kdocpub@doc.ks.gov  
www.doc.ks.gov

Ray Roberts, Secretary

Sam Brownback, Governor

Testimony on HB 2568  
to  
The House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice

By Margie Phelps  
Reentry Director  
Kansas Department of Corrections  
February 7, 2012

The Kansas Department of Corrections addresses offender employment as part of its risk reduction and recidivism-reducing efforts. The ability of offenders to become and stay employed is a buffer against high-risk behavior, because it provides a pro-social activity, interaction, and role for the released offender. It helps offset anti-social thinking, financial problems, family problems, and substance misuse. A weak employment history and overall low-employability is a criminogenic risk factor, so helping offenders become employable and to achieve sustained employment, are important risk reduction strategies. Offenders who are more employable have a better chance of becoming stable, safe, law-abiding citizens, after release.

Offenders are assessed for risk/need when entering incarceration for the first time. One of the areas assessed is Education/Employment. 78% of offenders are high or moderate risk on the Education/Employment domain. Offenders who are high or moderate risk are targeted for services, including Basic Education, GED Preparation, Offender Workforce Development (OWD)<sup>1</sup> classes, and job planning.

<sup>1</sup> NIC funded an evaluation of the OWD model in Kansas. Offenders who received the OWD class had one-third less recidivism after one year than a comparison group. After two years, the highest risk offenders recidivated at the same rate as the comparison group, while the moderate risk offenders continued to have a one-third less rate of return. Offenders who completed OWD as a group earned a higher wage than the comparison group. The focus in KDOC's work is on retention, using enhanced NIC training and strategies, because retention is necessary to sustain lower recidivism by high risk offenders.

Job Specialists in the facilities are trained in the OWD model, which is provided by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). Facility Job Specialists conduct job readiness classes with offenders which address: \*skills/interests assessments (to direct offenders into work for which they have aptitude); \*getting essential documents (social security card, birth certificate); \*resume writing; \*interview skills; \*transportation; \*punctuality/reliability; \*effective job searching; \*sustaining employment (relapse prevention; coping skills).

In addition, offenders are placed in facility and industry jobs during incarceration. KDOC policy permits supervisors to provide offenders with feedback on their performance (see attached format), for use by the offender as part of his/her resume employment upon release.

Resource rooms in the facilities are available to offenders to prepare resumes; practice mock interviewing with volunteers; conduct job searches; and prepare applications for employment. In some facilities, the offender is able to make direct contact prior to release with the workforce center in the community where s/he will release, through video conferencing, Skype or at least by phone. As often as possible, offenders leave prison with a portfolio of employment-relevant information in hand to begin their job search.

The federal government, as an incentive for hiring underemployed groups including ex-offenders, enacted the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). The Kansas Department of Commerce administers the WOTC program for Kansas and provides pre-release certifications, for those offenders who are eligible for the tax credit. This allows the offenders to have a document in hand reflecting that employing him/her would make the employer eligible for the WOTC. Also, KDOC and the Department of Commerce have collaborated to use a federally funded position which focuses on developing and identifying market-relevant vocational training opportunities for offenders, whether the training is done in the correctional facilities or the communities.

Employment within 45 days is a condition of post-release supervision, and parole staff are required by policy to notify employers of the offender's criminal history (see attached format). Job

Specialists and Parole Officers work with offenders to identify employment that is suitable given the criminal history of the offender. Staff and mentors work with employers to address their concerns and answer their questions about the offenders' criminal history, and provide contact information for Parole Officers should concerns arise.

KDOC in partnership with Commerce has established collaborative relationships with the local workforce development centers to support offender's accessing job search, placement and retention services. All workforce centers have staff that have been trained in the OWD model, and in two centers a staff person is devoted full time to serving the offender population. Job Specialists in some parole offices (Topeka, Kansas City, Wichita) work with offenders to support job placement and retention.

These are all strategies used by KDOC and its partners to address the employment needs of offenders, which is an important recidivism reducing strategy, while working to make job placements that are safe and sustainable. Sustained employment by offenders has been shown to reduce recidivism, which reduces victims and enhances public safety.

**KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
JOB PERFORMANCE INFORMATION**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Held: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates Held: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Main duties performed:

Skills demonstrated:

Strengths as an employee:

Areas to develop for future:

For more information contact:

Name of person providing information: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Position of person providing information: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address of person providing information:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone of person providing information: \_\_\_\_\_

**Kansas Department of Corrections**  
LETTER TO EMPLOYER TO CONFIRM CONVICTION HISTORY DISCLOSURE

Dear Employer,

Subject:

Offender Name:

DOB:

The above named offender is under supervision by the KDOC parole office. We are writing to ask for your support in monitoring this offender's behavior as part of his supervision. Also this letter will give you information about this offender's conviction history so you can make safe and sound decisions about his/her employment and duties. Employment is an important part of safe reintegration for offenders after they serve their prison sentence. By sharing information, and us working together, we hope this offender can become a law-abiding, tax-paying citizen.

My contact information is below, as well as my supervisor's. We encourage you to make contact with us at any time if you have questions or if we can help address issues about this offender. Our office may contact you periodically to monitor the offender's employment and offer any necessary support. We will make every effort to do this without disruption or inconvenience to you or your employees.

Many offenders want to work and want to succeed. At the same time we must be sure the community is aware of potential risk and that employment decisions are safe. As part of case planning, we monitor employment, and make ourselves available to assist and support the offender in gaining sustained employment.

Many offenders are able to gain job skills and improve their ability to hold a job during their stay in prison, through education and training programs, and jobs in the prison. We would be happy to discuss these programs with you further if you have questions.

We also have information about a federal bonding program and work opportunity tax credit for employers who hire released offenders. If this information is useful to you please call us at the number indicated.

Thank you for providing this employment opportunity. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time about this matter.

Conviction history:

Offense	Date of Offense
Comments:	

Sincerely,  
Parole Officer Signature  
ADDRESS:  
PHONE:  
Supervisor's Phone: