

Testimony of Kathie Harris before the House commerce & Economic Committee
January 15, 2014

In 2011 the Kansas Department of Corrections received a grant from the second chance act to place a position within the Kansas Department of Commerce to serve as a bridge, broker or liaison between the Kansas Department of Corrections, the Local Workforce Investment Boards and Commerce System of Kansas. Both agencies have as part of their mission the development of a skilled workforce in Kansas; and both agencies recognize the offender population includes individuals who are or can be viable members of the workforce. Additionally both agencies recognize there are public safety and economic benefits in skilling up offenders in preparation for sustained employment becoming viable members of the workforce and the communities they release to and reside in.

According to the Department of Corrections data, 45% of incarcerated Offenders do not have a high school diploma or GED and 75% score moderate to high risk in the domain of employment/education on the Level of Service inventory risk/need assessment tool and 97% of those currently incarcerated will be released from the correctional facilities to our communities.

So the question is posed as to how do we reintegrate individuals with criminal history into our communities so they can be viable members of the labor pool, obtain meaningful employment to become tax payers and not tax users. According to the National Institute of Corrections, if an offender cannot find meaningful employment he/she is three times more likely to recidivate (reoffend or violate the conditions of post-release). This would be an added cost to our economy and result in another victim. And the PEW Charitable Trust reported that 1/53 Kansans in 2009 were under some form of Criminal Justice Supervision

http://www.pewstates.org/uploadedFiles/PCS_Assets/2009/PSPP_1in31_report_FINAL_WEB_3-26-09.pdf

Through the development of this position it is hoped that the educational services we provide in the correctional facilities can be linked to workforce needs paying close attention not to prepare offenders for occupations that have statutory restrictions attached to them that would preclude a person with a criminal history from participating in.

Results for Offenders who released in CY 2013 that I have worked with:

- 117 offenders released (combination of juvenile and Adults)
- 15 cannot be tracked (interstate compact and Detainers)
- 2 have absconded
- 39 obtained employment
- 44 remain unemployed: 12 recently released have not had time to obtain employment
- 12 are employed and going to post-secondary school
- 27 are attending school full-time

Success stories

Example #2: Promoting Reentry Success through Continuity of Educational Opportunities
(PRSCOE)/GEAR UP

John was incarcerated at the age of 15 at the Larned Juvenile Correction Facility in Kansas. While serving a 5-year sentence, John earned his high school diploma and 41 hours of college credit towards an associate's degree from Barton Community College through funding from the Workforce Investment Act. John was released from Larned this fall, and continued taking online classes at the community college. Now, starting in January 2014, John will begin studying **** at Wichita State University. With help from programs such as Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP, John has access to a roadmap for success and is on track to a very bright future.

Example #2

When Jordon was incarcerated for a drug offense at the age of 27, he had a 10th grade education and no desire to continue his education. Staff worked with him on the benefits of getting an education and he agreed to participate. Jordon successfully completed his GED and decided to continue on. The team worked with him to identify career interests and assisted him in completed his FAFSA and enrollment to a technical college in the area he was releasing to. He released in August of 2013. Today he is still attending school fulltime and was working part-time. The company has now offered him a full time position due to the skills he is learning at the technical college. He has maintained his sobriety and is on track to graduate in one year. Additionally he will complete the terms of his supervision next month.

Additionally:

2 youthful offenders will be earning an associate's degree in Business from Barton Community College in May

1 adult offender will be receiving his Associates degree from Barton Community College in May and releasing in August