

Donnelly College Testimony for HB 2401

In Catholic social teaching, solidarity is that virtue where we recognize and act on the fact that we are all in this together. It entails a recognition of **the common good** – the sum total of conditions necessary for everyone to flourish in accordance with their vocation in life. To live in solidarity with others is to promote and work for the common good for all.

HB2401 is an example of solidarity in action. This bill will provide for a public – private partnership to serve, for example, the educational needs of our incarcerated brothers and sisters. Donnelly College, where I serve as the seventh president, and I strongly support this legislation.

For 20 years, Donnelly has provided such education as part of our Lansing Correctional Program, and this experience has shown us that higher education in prison programs have a positive impact not just on the prison students, but also on the community at large. Recidivism is reduced and studies show that can translate into reductions in crime, safer communities, and savings to taxpayers.

While this information can be found at our website ([College In Prison | Donnelly College | Academics](#)), we repeat it here for convenience. At Donnelly, we are proud to offer an on-site associate degree program to the inmates of Lansing Correctional Facility in Lansing, Kansas.

Program Achievements

Donnelly began offering classes at our Lansing Correctional Facility satellite campus in 2001.

Quick Facts:

- 500 number of inmates who have taken courses since 2001
- 23 number of Lansing students who have earned associate degrees
- 202 number of former students who have been released from prison
- Only 4 of these 202 (less than 2 percentage) of Lansing inmates/participants who have been released have reconvicted of a crime and are back in prison
- Nationally, 68 percent of inmates are resentenced for a new crime within 3 years nationally (National Institute of Justice)

Why Is This Program Needed?

Earning a college degree is the single most effective tool to lower recidivism and to prevent individuals from returning to a life of crime after their release. Providing access to education in this manner:

- Creates self-sufficiency and self-confidence for inmates as they start to realize a better path in life and gain the necessary skills to attain it
- Produces a healthier community

- Saves countless taxpayer dollars

How We Provide This Opportunity

We strive to make our program accessible to inmates by asking that they pay only 1/3 of the hourly tuition fee. Donnelly College raises the remaining 2/3 of the tuition costs in scholarships from private patrons.

Donnelly is also proud to participate in the U.S Department of Education's Second Chance Pell program. This program creates educational opportunities for incarcerated students by providing need-based Federal Pell Grants to individuals enrolled in post-secondary programs offered by approved colleges and universities. Before the current expansion, just 63 schools in 26 states had been invited to participate. Those institutions were awarded approximately \$36.2 million in Federal Pell Grants during the first two years of the program. In that time, 11,750 students received Federal Pell Grants and, after three years, 4,000 post-secondary degrees and credentials have been awarded to those students. Donnelly College is one of only 67 new institutions chosen from more than 180 schools that applied to be added this year. Donnelly College has a nineteen-year history of working closely with the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC) and the Lansing Correctional Facility (LCF) administration to provide college-level educational programs to Lansing inmates. Since 2001, nearly 500 inmates have taken Donnelly courses and 23 have graduated with associate degrees. Although we are proud of this record, we know that many more inmates will be able to benefit from our academic programs now that Donnelly has been approved for the Second Chance Pell program.

In fall 2019, when KDOC began working with the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) to develop a coordinated strategy to provide postsecondary educational programs at correctional facilities across Kansas, Donnelly was invited to become a charter member of the newly formed Kansas Consortium for Correctional Higher Education (KCCHE). Although private colleges are not governed by KBOR, Donnelly was included in the consortium based on our long-standing commitment to our Lansing students and our excellent relationship with LCF.

Through the consortium, Donnelly will not only expand our own associate degree programs, we will also connect them with programs offered by two other KCCHE member institutions: a welding certificate program offered by Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC) and a bachelor's program in Business Administration offered by University of St. Mary in Leavenworth (USM). We are excited about the additional opportunities these new pathways will provide for incarcerated students seeking a postsecondary certificate or degree. As Lisa Stoothoff, Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs / Dean of the College has stated: "This award will allow our Lansing students to complete their associate

degree in business in a timely manner and increase the opportunity to many others who want to complete their post-secondary education. Donnelly College students at Lansing are among the most inquisitive students in our associate degree program. This opportunity will allow them to explore the field of business and gain employable skills for the future,”

In addition to establishing new educational pathways through KCCHE, Donnelly will continue to encourage LCF students to continue their education after release on our main campus, either completing their associate degree or enrolling in one of our two bachelor’s degree programs—our Bachelor of Science in Information Systems or our Bachelor of Arts in Business Leadership. Donnelly will provide admissions, financial aid, tutoring, and career services support to ensure that LCF students successfully transition to campus-based programs after release.

Donnelly’s longstanding commitment to providing postsecondary educational programming at LCF is an extension of our mission of “providing education and community services with personal concern for the needs and abilities of each student, especially those who might not otherwise be served.” Our Financial Aid staff has extensive experience administering Federal Pell grants and we have numerous experienced and dedicated instructors who have taught in the LCF program for many years.

Witnesses

The program’s best witnesses are those who have benefitted from it. For example, Perry Reed, 2003 Lansing graduate, says: “For me, college was a golden opportunity — a chance to prove to myself, and to my family, that I would be able to pick myself back up after such a terrible mistake... Donnelly not only provided me with the opportunity to develop my academic potential, but also the opportunity to be a better person... Donnelly has helped me realize that I am able to achieve all things that I set my mind to.” Michael Bess, a 2003 Lansing graduate said: “Graduation was one of the greatest days of my life. My self-esteem has soared, and I truly believe I can accomplish any goal. Furthermore, my education has drawn me closer to my family and friends. My children look up to me now.” And Carl Hughes, 2010 Lansing graduate testifies: “If it could be summed up in one word, [this program] gives us opportunity.... Having the opportunity to not lose those years — to be able to walk out and do something — the appreciation can't be said.”

Present and Future

This past month, Donnelly College working with LCF and through the generosity of a private donor, gifted to LCF a temporary classroom to serve the student inmates taking courses at the recently refurbished site. Through an MOU, we were able to contract, have built and delivered to the LCF site a

complete modular classroom. This will serve temporarily while a new, more complete educational site is planned and built.

HB 2401 will authorize a framework, like those used in other public - private collaborations in Kansas, for concerned citizens to work with the state to raise funds to help build these much-needed educational spaces. By educating our returning citizens, we will provide well-formed workers for our community while simultaneously reducing the chances that they will return to prison. In the long run, this will save the state much needed resources and provide more well-equipped workers for our economy.

We urge your "yes" vote on this bill as an act of solidarity and as a service to the common good.

Thank you.

Msgr. Stuart W. Swetland
President, Donnelly College