

RECOMMENDATION TO THE LEGISLATURE OF ALASKA FROM THE ALASKA CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

Recommendation 2-2021, adopted May 25, 2021:

Recommendation Regarding Vocational Programming

People who have been incarcerated are less likely to recidivate if they are able to obtain high-quality, well-paying employment.¹ However, obtaining employment post-prison is an uphill battle, and formerly incarcerated individuals are unemployed at much higher rates than the general public.² This is particularly true for formerly incarcerated people of color.³

The Alaska Department of Corrections (ADOC) helps incarcerated individuals better their chances of employment upon release by providing vocational programming through training and apprenticeships. Vocational education is one of the most cost-effective investments in criminal justice programming in Alaska.⁴ ADOC has recently conducted a thorough review of its vocational programming and stands ready to expand and scale up its offerings that mirror and are relevant to the areas of employment that the market offers reentrants in their communities upon release.

The small engine repair program, for example, is particularly relevant to people who will be released to rural Alaskan communities where there are high rates of small boat and snow machine usage. An example of a successful apprenticeship program, the welding program offered in association with the Ironworkers gives participants the chance to learn valuable skills that will translate to high-paying jobs post-release.

ADOC has also been collaborating with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD). Previously, DOLWD job placement experts were placed within correctional facilities, working with incarcerated people who were about to be release. This

¹ Jennifer Doleac, “Can Employment-Focused Programs Reduce Reincarceration Rates?” Econofact, June 29, 2018. Available at: <https://econofact.org/can-employment-focused-reentry-programs-keep-former-prisoners-from-being-reincarcerated>.

Kevin Schnepel, “Do Post-Prison Job Opportunities Reduce Recidivism?” IZA World of Labor, November, 2017. Available at: <https://wol.iza.org/uploads/articles/399/pdfs/do-post-prison-job-opportunities-reduce-recidivism.pdf>

Anke Ramakers et al., “Not Just Any Job Will Do: A Study on Employment Characteristics and Recidivism Risks After Release,” International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, December 2017. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5669259/>.

² Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, “Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment Among Formerly Incarcerated People,” Prison Policy Initiative, July 2018. Available at: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Valle, Araceli, “Alaska Results First Initiative: Adult Criminal Justice Program Benefit Cost Analysis” Alaska Justice Information Center, University of Alaska Anchorage, September 29, 2017. Available at: <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu/handle/11122/7961>.

program was very successful, but ended when the grant funding for the program was not continued. More recently, ADOC has received a grant that includes a career counselor to work with incarcerated individuals returning to rural communities. ADOC and DOLWD are also looking into ways to assess whether returning citizens have been able to obtain employment using the skills they have learned while incarcerated.

The Commission supports these efforts, and makes the following recommendations to increase ADOC's focus in this area:

- (1) The Commission recommends that the ADOC prioritize and expand vocational education and employment efforts, particularly those that will lead to meaningful and well-paying employment, and to seek additional funding to do so if needed.
- (2) The Commission also recommends an expansion of the ADOC and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development collaboration to enhance the opportunity for inmates to receive training and to secure employment prior to their release from custody. The Commission recommends that DOLWD once again place job specialists within individual correctional facilities, if feasible.
- (3) The Commission also recommends that a neutral evaluation be funded and conducted to determine how many reentrants who received education or vocational training within the ADOC were employed on release in a job that directly utilized or required the education or vocational training they received in custody. The Commission supports DOLWD's efforts to develop a system to track whether reentrants are employed.