



Legislative Testimony

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

March 18, 2015

The Honorable Tobias Read, Chair
House Committee on Higher Education, Innovation, and Workforce Development

RE: House Bill 3390

Chair Read and members of the Committee, I am Heidi Steward, Assistant Director of the Offender Management and Rehabilitation Division for the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC). I am here to provide information regarding HB 3390 and answer any questions.

What the Bill Does:

HB 3390 directs DOC to enter into interagency agreements with community colleges and public universities for the purpose of establishing a program that provides post-secondary education to at least 150 inmates but no more than 300 inmates. Additionally, this bill directs DOC to pay a community college or public university up to \$9,500 per inmate per year for no more than three years per inmate.

Background Information:

Philosophically, we agree with the intent of this piece of legislation, because we know that education can significantly reduce recidivism. In fact, a 2013 meta-analysis report published by the RAND Corporation found that, on average, inmates who participate in correctional education programs have 43% lower odds of recidivating than inmates who don't participate in education. DOC currently provides associate-degree programs at three prisons through collaboration with the local community colleges. Each of these programs is funded by grants, donations, or inmate self-pay. Our concerns with the bill are generally related to the cost and required participation numbers.

Potential Impact/Concerns:

There are several potential impacts to DOC from this bill. The first being that an inmate is only allowed to participate for a maximum of three years which, in turn, limits them to an associate's degree.

Additionally, the General Fund biennial appropriation that is included in this bill appears to fund 37.5 separate individuals per year for a total of 150 inmates at the end of the 2017-2019 biennium, which is the minimum number required by the bill. However, the bill also requires DOC to pay the cost for an inmate to participate in the post-secondary program for multiple years if so desired by the inmate up to a maximum of three years. If multiple inmates participate

in the program for more than one year, the potential exists for DOC to fall short of serving the required minimum number of inmates or be placed in the position to supplement the cost in order to meet the requirements of the bill. Unfortunately, the current Education and Training budget is not sufficient to cover these increased expenses.

DOC also consistently experiences space issues within the prisons for all types of programming and would need ample time to develop a plan for accommodating the increased education programming if it is required to be classroom training, rather than online. If online education is required, we do not currently have the technology to support this.

Lastly, this bill would likely increase the need for inmates to access computers as well as the internet to complete class assignments. The existing computer labs within our institutions are at capacity with Adult Basic Skills Development students and currently, inmates do not have access to the internet due to security and infrastructure concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Submitted by:

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