



Legislative Testimony

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

May 17, 2021

The Honorable Chris Gorsek, Co-Chair
The Honorable Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

Re: 2021 Federal Second Chance Act Grant Improving Vocational and Employment Services

Co-Chair Gorsek, Co-Chair Sollman, and members of the committee, my name is Nathaline Frener, and I serve as Assistant Director of the Correctional Services Division for the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC). Today I am requesting authority for DOC to submit a federal grant application to the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) in the amount of \$900,000.

This grant is focused on developing strategic plans for integrating correctional vocational education opportunities and employment programming and systems during incarceration to help facilitate the successful reintegration of offenders returning to communities after a prison sentence

DOC requests permission to apply for this grant to begin a virtual heavy equipment training and certification program at DOC facilities and work with a contractor and community groups to help prepare adults in custody (AICs) for gainful employment after release.

The program is similar to one offered by Oregon Youth Authority. A mobile classroom would be moved onto each prison footprint for a two- to four-week duration. AICs would be trained on virtual heavy equipment simulators, which have been demonstrated to expedite the training and certification process. If possible, we would also offer the hands-on Level 2 certification. The grant program will be designed to include employment preparation soft skills such as resume preparation and mock interviews; and DOC and the contractor would collaborate with industry representatives for post-release placement.

These positions are in high demand in the community, typically pay \$25 to \$60 per hour, and highway construction industries and other employers needing heavy equipment operators are often more open to hiring employees with a criminal history.

DOC is still in the early planning stages, but at this time we anticipate possibly 1.0 or 2.0 additional Full-Time Employees (FTE) will be required, but they would be limited-duration positions funded by the grant. DOC also anticipates requesting indirect costs to compensate for reporting and other administrative support for this grant. All training will be provided through contracted services.

Because research has demonstrated post-secondary education and vocational training and certification during incarceration reduces the risk of recidivism, the Legislature has funded DOC for basic education and work-based education opportunities. The proposed heavy equipment training program will allow DOC to add a new education and certification opportunity.

DOC intends to use the grant funds to pilot this training program. If the program is successful, DOC will work with contractors and the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission to ascertain whether Pell grants could be utilized for AICs to pay for the training after the grant project concludes.

Reducing recidivism through the proposed use of these grant funds supports the agency's mission to promote public safety by holding offenders accountable for their actions and reducing the risk of future criminal behavior. It also promotes [Preparing Offenders for Reentry](#), which is a component of the agency's vision.

DOC will return to the legislature to ask for the limitation required to expend the grant funds if awarded this grant.

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

Submitted by:

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