

To: Transition Team for Governor-elect Lamont and Lt. Governor-elect Bysiewicz
From: Preparing People in Prison Working Group, Criminal Justice Committee
Re: Preparing People in Prison for Life After Incarceration
Date: December 31, 2018

This memo considers implementation of the Governor-elect's policy goals with respect to preparing people in prison for life after incarceration.

I. EDUCATION

A. College

Access to higher education helps incarcerated men and women, who report that taking college classes is transformative and life-affirming. It also helps the economy and improves public safety; according to the RAND Corporation, every dollar spent on programs for higher education in prison saves \$4-5 for society, because people who take college classes behind bars are less likely to recidivate and more likely to work and pay taxes.

According to state DOC data, 11,188 prisoners were paroled in 2016. Historically, we can expect 56 percent of that total to be rearrested within two years. A 2011 Connecticut Office of Policy and Management Study found the state recidivism rate to be 47 percent. One of the primary causes of recidivism is the inability of those released or paroled to find a decent-paying job.

Despite the proven impact of higher education behind bars, our current system falls woefully short. Even with the Second Chance Pell Grant program (a pilot program that is not guaranteed renewal) – just seven of our state prisons offer a college-level program and just two offer classes above the community college level.

We propose a statewide, post-secondary-level, in-prison education program that would service all 13 adult state prisons. The participating colleges would be the University of Connecticut campuses, the state university and community college system, and participating private colleges and universities, coordinated through the Department of Correction. There is no prison located more than 24 miles from one of these campuses. Five are located within 15 miles.

Existing initiatives provide a foundation for a state-wide program. The state has a large and growing pool of colleges and universities offering classes in prison. These include community colleges that are part of the Second Chance Pell Initiative, as well as Wesleyan, Trinity, Quinnipiac, and Yale, which offer courses at Cheshire, York, MacDougall-Walker, and Carl Robinson. Yet current programs are dispersed and largely uncoordinated, which limits their impact and accessibility.

We encourage the incoming administration to remedy this by using its bully pulpit and convening authority to promote and coordinate existing initiatives. In addition, the administration should designate a committed and enthusiastic college program coordinator. This person's responsibilities would include: 1) facilitating college programming across the state, both

Pell and non-Pell, and meeting and communicating regularly with all college course providers, 2) collecting transcripts from all the colleges offering classes to help coordinate associate's degrees, 3) collaborating with wardens around materials, supplies, and technology access, 4) negotiating transfer and placement for students in a particular college program, 5) creating a unified menu of college offerings from which students could choose, rather than having to stay within a single college's program, 6) helping students apply to college after reentry, 7) training faculty and staff, 8) collecting data regarding outcomes for those involved in college programs, and 9) troubleshooting.

B. Preparing for College

Many incarcerated men and women lack the skills to complete college courses, and in some cases, to obtain GED. Budget cuts have hampered the DOC's ability to provide sufficient teachers, and many positions remain unfilled. While the administration should work to provide additional resources, we also believe that some of the need can be met at little cost by tapping into the network of college and other volunteers. A "college bound" program would prepare incarcerated men and women for reentry by supporting their studies in basic reading, writing, math, and English as a second language.

C. Life Skills

In addition to the above-mentioned academic programming, there is a great need for additional programming in areas such as everyday skills (time management, cooking, laundry, cleaning, navigating recent technology, and other basic skills necessary for life on the outside), financial and budgeting skills (writing checks, managing bills, budgeting, managing debt, building resumes, interviewing effectively, and developing personal financial responsibility) and interpersonal skills (confliction resolution, communication skills, de-escalation, and telling personal narratives). Once again, we believe that much of this can be provided by non-profits and other college and community volunteers. The incoming administration could facilitate and channel pre-existing energy with a publicized initiative, convening, and a dedicated point person within the DOC to coordinate community-based efforts.

D. Connections to employers

Incarcerated men and women currently lack access to employers, and employers aren't always aware of the workforce potential behind bars. We propose job fairs throughout the DOC system.

E. Assessment

The above programs will only succeed if the state properly assesses individuals upon arrival to prison and allows them access to the appropriate programs during their incarceration. We recommend a more robust assessment process in which each individual is designated for particular services based on need. These would include things like therapy for emotional and mental health, education plan, and drug treatment (if necessary). This plan would operate as a

contract between the incarcerated and the state, and fulfilling the plan would be relevant to the parole determination.

F. Centering the Voices and Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated People

Some formerly incarcerated people have succeeded against the odds and proven there is life after incarceration. They can and should play a much larger role in efforts to prepare currently incarcerated people for a future beyond the prison walls. Formerly incarcerated men and women are especially credible messengers to a population that can be distrustful of outsiders. The hardships of life inside of prison are usually overwhelming. Someone who is familiar with the emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs of people inside can reach a part of them that others may not.

II. CONNECTION TO FAMILY

There is overwhelming research demonstrating that reentry is made easier when an incarcerated person has been able to stay in touch with his or her family and children. Connecticut unnecessarily makes this more difficult by imposing some of the nation's highest prison phone costs. According to the organization [Prison Phone Justice](#), Connecticut ranks 49th in the country in terms of affordability of inmate phone calls. Connecticut's extraordinarily high rates partly result from the fact that the state extracts a 68% commission on the revenue from the calls. We encourage the administration to take efforts to curb the cost of phone calls from prison to bring Connecticut in line with the rest of the country.

III. OBTAINING AN ID

Every committee member who works with returning citizens expressed frustration with the difficulty in obtaining valid state-issued ID upon release from prison. Many reported that this problem has spanned decades. Without an ID, a person can't access anything—housing, employment, and benefits. DOC's administrative directive outlines the ID procurement process, but it is clear from our conversations that many people are leaving prison without an ID. We recommend that the administration prioritize a 100% success rate for obtaining IDs for each eligible returning citizen. This could and should be an easy win for the administration.

IV. CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

This transition committee has brought together groups who should be in regular conversation, but often aren't. The administration should consider building upon this model by creating a citizens advisory board or some group that would meet regularly with DOC officials. The meetings would allow groups who work closely with incarcerated individuals to provide feedback to the DOC on topics such as: issues people are having interacting with DOC (e.g., problems with visiting policies), problems their loved ones are experiencing in prison, or issues coordinating with DOC to plan successful reentry (e.g., obtaining IDs).

V. EXPAND THE TRUE/WORTH PROGRAMS

By every measure the TRUE/WORTH units have been an astonishing success. They are rays of light in an otherwise bleak system. The administration should publicize their success and prioritize their expansion.