
Report to
The Vermont Legislature

Incarcerated Individual Workforce and Education Training Programs
Report

In accordance with Act 183 of 2022
Section 6

Submitted to: The Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee; the House Committees on Corrections and Institutions and on Commerce and Economic Development; and the Senate Committees on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs and on Judiciary.

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Executive Summary

This report consists of two sections. The first section covers current and proposed efforts to support incarcerated individuals' successful reintegration as well as proposed policy changes. The second section identifies disparities of outcomes and recommends solutions for incarcerated BIPOC individuals.

Section one begins by detailing current efforts by the Department of Corrections ("DOC" or "the Department") to support the successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals back into the community and the workforce. Three of the most significant efforts are an Adult Reentry and Employment Strategic Planning Grant, a partnership with Community College of Vermont (CCV), and Second Chance Pell Grants.

The report then covers planned and proposed efforts. Most notably, DOC is working to: 1) implement a transition pilot program through Vermont Works for Women to bridge gaps between employee readiness and employer needs, and 2) transition the Vermont Offender Work Program (VOWP) to a skills-based training program.

DOC proposes two policy changes. First, DOC proposes modifying the statute that governs VOWP. These modifications will maximize the Department's existing resources and enable VOWP to focus on vocational services that are relevant to the current population and labor needs. Second, DOC requests updates to the Corrections Education Statute to transition the Corrections Education Advisory Board to an advisory panel comprised of members from key stakeholders and partners which will increase its effectiveness.

The second section of this report, per Act 183, identifies disparities of outcomes and recommends solutions for incarcerated BIPOC individuals concerning facility-based training, educational programming, and successful community reintegration. DOC is preparing to significantly expand data collection that will assist in understanding and addressing disparities. The FOCUS software used to capture educational, programming, and vocational services is being revamped to capture more information related to grades, skill attainment, and program completions. These data will be used to uncover and address disparities moving forward.

Finally, this report provides an update on DOC's use of education and vocation enhancement funding in 2023 as well as recommendations on what aspects of the pilot program should be replicated in other correctional facilities.

Introduction

Act 183 of 2022, an act related to economic and workforce development, charges the Vermont Department of Corrections, in consultation with the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL), to “facilitate the education and training of incarcerated individuals so that they have a greater likelihood of obtaining gainful employment and positively contributing to society upon reintegration into the community.”

This report outlines the plans and progress to date on requirements outlined in Act 183.

Section One: Current and Proposed Efforts

Current Efforts to Support Successful Reintegration

The Vermont Department of Corrections is engaged in numerous activities related to design, logistical, and policy changes to increase the success of incarcerated individuals’ reintegration and employment. The three most notable efforts are an Adult Reentry and Employment Strategic Planning Grant, a partnership with Community College of Vermont, and Second Chance Pell.

Adult Reentry and Employment Strategic Planning Grant: DOC is in year 4 of a 5-year federally funded strategic planning effort. The goal of the Adult Reentry and Employment Strategic (ARES) Planning Grant is to assess the current system and challenges faced by reentering incarcerated adults and develop a plan to support successful reentry. DOC worked with a cross-disciplinary group comprised of representatives from HireAbility/Vermont Department of Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), VDOL, Vermont EAP, Career Technical Education (CTE), Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) and CCV to complete the assessment and identify strategies. The work group agreed on the following strategies:

1. DOC will use a vocational assessment called WorkKeys. This assessment is currently used by core community partners. The use of a common tool will eliminate the need to re-assess a person after release.
2. DOC will pilot a vocational training/enhancement program that integrates facility jobs with hard and soft skill instruction provided by DOC and community partners. The pilot is currently operational at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF) and is focused on the kitchen jobs. Traditionally, facility jobs have not been captured as a vocational training opportunity even though incarcerated individuals in those positions are learning valuable skills that can be transferred upon their reintegration into society. The pilot will develop a system to document these skills based on industry-recognized credentials and share this information with potential employers in the community.
3. DOC will adopt national standards to capture progress in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Common Career Technical Core (CCTC). SEL reflects the critical role of positive relationships and emotional connections in the learning process and helps individuals

develop a range of skills they need for school and life. CCTC is a state-led initiative to establish a set of rigorous, high-quality standards for Career Technical Education. The standards have been informed by state and industry standards and developed by a diverse group of teachers, business and industry experts, administrators, and researchers. Use of these standards is another step to document and share information about the skills and knowledge an incarcerated person has gained.

4. DOC will increase data sharing and communication. Specifically, DOC will generate a report, which resembles a report card, that can be shared with the participant, potential employers, and employment training programs.
5. DOC will establish a pilot partnership with a HireAbility Coordinator and two Probation and Parole Officers to provide one point of contact for transition meetings and exchange of information.
6. DOC will establish a Workforce Development Coordinator position to help document facility employment that qualifies as vocational training and support connections between potential employers and HireAbility at the local level.
7. DOC will implement a dedicated wireless network with tablets to facilitate self-directed learning opportunities (i.e., Byrne, Second Chance Pell, etc.)

Partnership with Community College of Vermont: Starting in 2022, a three-year, congressionally directed Byrne Grant supports incarcerated individuals with college readiness and/or credit-bearing courses. The DOC and CCV will coordinate with the Corrections Education Registrar to identify and dually register eligible incarcerated individuals. This grant permits the use of nontraditional course preparation and timeframes to help prepare and assess individuals who qualify for Second Chance Pell (see below). It will support the use of technology to deliver remote courses. CCV will also support the population in an advisory capacity and through peer student mentoring.

Second Chance Pell: Starting in July 2023, incarcerated students will be eligible for traditional Pell grants to pay for college. There will no longer be restrictions based upon sentence length nor type of conviction. Currently, CCV is an approved Second Chance Pell Site under this initiative. Pell restoration offers an opportunity to ensure multiple career pathways can be offered within correctional facilities. They can be used by students to pay for tuition, books, fees, supplies from accredited colleges for academic and workforce degrees as well as vocational certificates.

Proposed and Planned Efforts to Support Reintegration

Community Transition Pilot: Per Act 183, DOC has contracted Vermont Works for Women (VWW) to implement a transition pilot program to bridge gaps between employee readiness and employer needs. Specifically:

1. VWW will conduct regional consultations with VDOL, HireAbility, and potential employers to inform the training and support incarcerated women will need to return to specific regions.
2. VWW will provide gender responsive employment training and support strategies to potential employers. Training content will be developed in collaboration with DOC.
3. VWW will work with potential employers to develop Enrichment Workshops and other facilities activities and opportunities for incarcerated women to learn about career development opportunities.
4. VWW will assist in the transition phase for women released to the community by sharing referral information and providing career coaching within the first six months of release.

DOC will monitor the Community Transition pilot program, along with activities of the ARES grant, to inform expansion and modifications of services that support successful hiring of formerly incarcerated individuals.

Vermont Offender Work Program: DOC will transition the Vermont Offender Work Program (VOWP) to a skills-based training program. VOWP's current configuration, Vermont Correctional Industries (VCI), had a funding structure and mandate that limited its success. DOC proposes aligning VOWP to focus on vocational services that are relevant to current population and labor needs. Specifically, DOC proposes to:

1. Transition the VCI Furniture Shop. The furniture shop revenues do not cover the cost of raw materials, production, and staffing. The shop completed its last delivery in October 2022 and has stopped accepting new contracts for production. DOC will consult with VDOL and HireAbility to determine what equipment to keep for small project-based learning.
2. Close the VCI Sign Shop. The shop will stop taking orders on January 15, 2023 and complete projects March 1, 2023. The shop will be inventoried and deep cleaned. DOC will move some equipment to the plate shop and consult with customers regarding their interest in purchasing the remaining equipment.
3. Evaluate the future of the print shop. This shop services other state entities. DOC will need more time to support customers as they transition to a different vendor. The print shop will have an order deadline of May 31, 2023 and project deadline of August 30, 2023.
4. Use federal ARES funding to train and purchase new equipment. DOC is exploring the option to use ARES funds to support mobile labs in HVAC, construction, heavy equipment, and computer graphic arts. If ARES funds cannot be used to fund these investments, DOC will prioritize Act 183 funds to this effort.

5. Transition VCI's VOWP-funded staff to general fund and revise their roles to be in alignment with a vocational training position.
6. Expand the ARES Culinary Pilot as a model for facility employment and hard skill adjunct instruction and industry-recognized credentials and post-secondary education.

Proposed Policy Changes

1. DOC proposes modifying the statute governing the Vermont Offender Work Program – 28 V.S.A. §751b – to provide DOC with two options:
 - a. Option to direct revenue from VOWP to a revolving fund that will support adjunct hard skill instruction by either internal and/ external vocational training partners; and,
 - b. Option to partner with community non-profit and for-profit industries to provide vocational training.
2. Corrections Education Statute 28 V.S.A. § 121 should be updated to transition the Corrections Education Advisory Board to Risk Intervention Services Advisory Panel. The advisory panel should include membership from:
 - three members with expertise in adult education, special education, or other adult educational field;
 - one member with expertise to post-secondary education;
 - one member with expertise community reentry services (i.e., Community Justice Center);
 - one member with expertise in vocational training; and,
 - one member with expertise in forensic intervention.

Section Two: Disparities and Updates

All correctional facilities in Vermont are required to offer education and risk-reducing services. There is significant geographic inequity in facility-based vocational training, which is only delivered at three facilities. There are no vocational training services at the other three facilities. A lack of available infrastructure is the primary cause for this inequity, which also contributes to a disparity for BIPOC individuals. Without additional space, there are limited options to address bring additional services to those facilities.

As part of COVID mitigation strategies, the modalities of delivering education, programming, and vocational training were scaled down. Participation and outcome data for the past few years is not readily available and would not accurately portray outcomes of facility-based services.

The new model proposed in this report includes a significant expansion to data collection that will assist in understanding and addressing disparities. The FOCUS software used to capture

educational, programming, and vocational services is being revamped to capture more information related to grades, skill attainment, and program completions. These data will be used to uncover and address disparities moving forward.

Update on DOC's Use of Education and Vocation Enhancement Funding in 2023

DOC will use the \$420,000 appropriation in Act 183 over the State Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025 to continue the rollout of mobile labs and to train staff and contractors to deliver new service offerings. Mobile labs can be shared between facilities to support flexibility and module-based learning. Given the infrastructure at most facilities, mobile labs are the most efficient way to deliver training without undergoing costly and time-consuming construction projects.

Recommendations on Replicating Aspects of the Pilot Program

DOC plans to use the next two years to evaluate the success of the Culinary Pilot program. This pilot is the model for the integration of facility jobs, vocational training, and community support that could be expanded to other facility jobs in the future. DOC also expects to identify priorities for vocational training and programs for the future female facility. New opportunities could include the purchase and implementation of a mobile training lab that meet the interests and needs of incarcerated women.

DOC is administering a survey to the incarcerated population to gather information about their interests in vocational training to inform planning and development of new services.