

I am John W. Vorder Bruegge, a resident of Windsor County. I have lived in Vermont for more than 25 years. I educate offenders as a Correctional Instructor for the Community High School of Vermont (or CHSVT) at the Southern State Correctional Facility (or "SSCF"). Before becoming a teacher, I spent all but one year of my 17 years practicing law in the Twin States prosecuting or defending criminal cases in state courts in the Upper Valley. From 1993 to 2000, I served as a Deputy State's Attorney for Windsor County. Subsequently, I also served in New Hampshire as an Assistant County Attorney and as a Regional Prosecutor in Keene, and, later, Hanover. For much of 2004 - 2005, I represented indigent clients as a Windham County Public Defender. I know about crime and punishment in Vermont.

The Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) should not have its budget cut, since CHSVT is an under-utilized resource crucial to the effort to reduce recidivism in the Green Mountain State. At the House Corrections and Institutions Committee hearing on February 27, CHSVT staff provided reorganization ideas to save approximately \$1.1 million in the Vermont Department of Corrections (or "DOC") budget without ANY of the cuts proposed by the Commissioner. There may be even greater savings possible if contracted services are instead provided by CHSVT staff.

Corrections Education Reduces Recidivism

According to a 2013 study by the Rand Corporation, there is a clear correlation between corrections education and a 43% reduction in recidivism. The Rand study found that for every \$1 spent on corrections education, \$4.00 - \$5.00 are saved in incarceration costs during the first three years post-release. Allowing CHSVT to continue to do the work we do, at the campuses where we operate, is simply good, pragmatic policy that saves Vermont's taxpayers money and helps to cut down on the costs associated with crime. No other DOC program impacts our quality of life, and the quality of our communities more than the work CHSVT educators do with offenders every school day, year round.

DOC Policies & Procedures, and Vermont Statutes Relating to Corrections Education

Title 28 VSA § 120 (a) established an "education program" within the DOC for "the education of persons who have not completed secondary education and who are committed to the custody of the commissioner of corrections." This means any and all offenders who have yet to complete high school, and obtain a diploma are eligible to attend CHSVT. Subsection (d) notes that the education program shall be provided "at each correctional facility and department service center...." Lastly, "[a]ll persons under the

custody of the commissioner of corrections who are under the age of 23 and have not received a high school diploma shall participate in an education program unless exempted by the commissioner."

According to *Department of Correction Philosophy and Goals Section 4.2.1* – "The [Department of Corrections or "DOC"] has a dual statutory mission – to protect the public from offenders who present risk to safety and property, and to provide those offenders with opportunities for change." In fact, *Section 4.2.8* reads:...the primary task of the Department is the preparation for and eventual reintegration of the offender with the community.

Under the *Policy 371.05 Offender Case Planning*, DOC policy is to "effectively engage offenders in the case planning process" For an incarcerated offender, both a probation officer (field office) and a facility caseworker "share responsibility for ensuring that an offender's case plan is complete...and adequately identifies areas of need." Two areas of need - education and employment – are directly targeted by CHSVT programs. In its case planning tool and risk assessment measurements, DOC recognizes how offenders must address educational and/or employment needs in order to succeed with rehabilitation and successful return to the community.

There seems, however, to be a disconnect between these policies and what I and my colleagues in the Southern State Correctional Facility see each day (and what I have observed for the two-and-a-half years I have worked at SSCF). Almost exclusively, offenders referred to education are those who must attend, as required by 28 V.S.A. §120(h). The emphasis, as far as I have been able to determine, begins and ends with students obligated by law to attend. Rarely do SSCF caseworkers refer older students to CHSVT. For some reason, very little is done to prompt older offenders (over 23 years-of-age) to address their educational or employment area(s) of need. The work my colleagues and I at CHSVT do is a significant part of making communities safer, since we present offenders with meaningful opportunities for change – a chance to better their prospects in the community with more education and/or more employment skills.

One Day's Data from SSCF

A Presidents' Day review of the "Department of Corrections Alphabetic Headcount Report for Southern State CF" database on February 16, 2015, showed 347 inmates who were incarcerated at SSCF. A narrower search revealed that only 23 of those 347 inmates had yet to reach their twenty-third

birthday. Consistent with the so-called "U-23 law" (28 V.S.A §120(h)), only those 23 inmates would be required to attend and participate in the educational programs offered by CHSVT at the Springfield jail. A closer review of the records demonstrated, however, that of the remaining 324 inmates who were too old to be subject to the U-23 law, I located at least 112 inmates who had not completed their secondary education and earned a high school diploma. There were an additional 27 offenders for whom I located no educational information. 112 out of ~~324~~ = one-third of the entire population at SSCF, all OVER 23 years-old, each of whom had an educational need: a need that Community High School of Vermont is designed to address and meet. 112 offenders with an educational need, who would get no education under the governor's FY 2015-2016 budget proposal.

In the classroom, in the days after Presidents' Day, among other things, I worked closely on Math and Writing with students including a 50+ year-old, a 38 year-old, a 40 year-old, a 37 year-old and a 31 year-old. None of these guys are high school graduates. They weren't the only students I worked with, but they were the most ardent and most interested in bettering themselves by obtaining a H.S. diploma. They were the ones who wanted to spend more time than their classes required trying to sharpen their skills. The student who tested at a 5th grade reading level or the guy who has no high school records, since he did not continue school past 4th grade, neither one will be getting a diploma this year. Does that mean that the work each one is doing this year, the work that we do together every Math class or every Writing class to get them closer to the day they can graduate does not matter. The cuts proposed by the administration would end any and all educational services for those students, and many other older offenders - all of whom, according to 28 VSA § 120(a), should be permitted a chance to complete their secondary education.

Do our elected officials mean to ignore the reality that correctional education cuts recidivism and lowers the cost of recidivism for all Vermonters. CHSVT and the work we do better prepares offenders for future success in careers and in their communities. Is there any other program provided by DOC that does more to cut recidivism, and to make the Green Mountain State safer for us all?