

To: Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs  
Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Mike Touchette, Commissioner, Department of Corrections

Re: H. 533 Sec. 12 CORRECTIONS; WORKFORCE TRAINING

Date: April 3, 2019

I come before you today with testimony regarding *H. 533 An act relating to workforce development*. Section 12 of this act pertains to the Department of Corrections (DOC). The intent behind the section is something that DOC supports, however we believe that this section is not necessary as it duplicates work that is already underway.

Section 12a pertains to a memorandum of understanding between the DOC and the Department of Labor (DOL). In October of 2018, DOC was awarded a grant from the US Department of Justice (USDOJ) Second Chance Act Program titled *Adult Reentry and Employment Strategic Planning Grant*. Many Vermonters who remain unemployed or underemployed face significant barriers to employment and require more support to overcome these barriers. Vermont has identified an untapped workforce in people sentenced to incarceration. To assist in this effort, DOC applied for these funds in collaboration with DOL.

The goal of this grant is to align stakeholders through a statewide strategic planning process that identifies barriers and obstacles to employment after incarceration and designs systemic changes to address them. The strategic plan will integrate best practices from the corrections and workforce development fields. The existing Statewide Workforce Development Board (SWDB) agreed to act as the executive committee to guide the planning process. To support the work of the SWDB, DOC has convened a multidisciplinary workgroup that includes stakeholders from criminal justice, workforce development, employment and training providers, community colleges, and employers.

Over the next year, the workgroup will proceed through an in-depth process, outlined by the USDOJ, to identify opportunities to: improve existing program quality; new job training and education programs; develop and promote service contracts and agreements which use evidenced based practices; and, support coordinated transition and release planning with formal partnerships and data sharing agreements. With this strategic plan in place we can build and expand the capacity of correctional and

community-based education and employment programs to reduce recidivism and improve employment outcomes among those most likely to recidivate.

DOC and DOL collaborated to submit this grant and have committed to working together over the period of the award to complete the planning process. Once complete, we will be eligible to apply for implementation funds to support the specifics of the program in areas of offender vocational training and training in best practices for DOC staff, employers, and the other stakeholders who support offenders in their efforts to seek and retain employment.

It is my belief that the requirements of this grant extend well beyond the language proposed in H. 533 and position the state to leverage more resources, knowledge, and skills to support offenders accessing employment. The USDOJ has also provided the state with technical assistance from the Council of State Governments to support our work on this project.

Given the work that is already underway, DOC recommends that Section 12a be removed from the House-passed version of H. 533.

Section 12b relates to the issuance of government identification for inmates. It requires DOC and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to collaborate to ensure that inmates leave incarceration with government issued ID. This topic is complex and has been the subject of much national discussion. I agree that identification is an important component of reentry. A person without identification cannot access many services, open a bank account, and faces many other barriers. To address this issue, the DOC is changing its practices to allow for the storage of government issued ID if a person enters a correctional facility with those documents. This will require some communication with law enforcement about our change in practices and an update to our policies. We are committed to making this change as soon as our operations can support it.

The issue of inmates who do not have government issued ID is more challenging because to get ID you need ID. To get an ID card often requires multiple proofs of identity or permanent residence, such as utility bills, Social Security cards or birth certificates. Many organizations charge a fee to get an identification card — not to mention fees of as much as \$50 for a copy of a birth certificate. But even with waived fees, getting an ID can be an arduous process entailing multiple visits to a state or local office. In cases such as this, the DOC is not resourced with the staff or the funds to assume the responsibility of acquiring identification. Recently, a Counselor from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has started to provide assistance securing identification to inmates who qualify for the program. This

experience can inform a larger discussion about the barriers and solutions to acquiring identification. I agree that this issue should be addressed. However, I ask that this body remove the current language and allow the Department and the other stakeholders in this matter to study the issue and bring a proposal to you in January 2020.