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Testimony on HB 2510
to
The Senate Commerce Committee

By Ray Roberts
Secretary
Kansas Department of Corrections
March 7, 2012

The Department of Corrections opposes HB 2510. While HB 2510 as amended by the House would permit the current correctional vocational education program constructing cabins for the Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism; this bill would prohibit this program from constructing small buildings for any other state agency, regents institutions or nonprofit organization.

The department urges this Committee to consider the sound public policy and benefits attained by correctional vocational education programs. The department submits the handful of cabins or any of the vocational projects it has built over the years has not negatively impacted the mobile or modular home manufacturing industry or home building in this state. To the contrary, the department's vocational education program specifically aids the construction industry in Kansas by providing nationally certified training in electrical, plumbing and construction skills to the employees needed by construction industry.

Inmates completing the department's vocational education program receive national certification by the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER). This program enables released offenders to gain employment upon reentering the community and provides employers with a trained workforce without the employer having to bear the cost of training. Additionally, employers who hire released offenders can receive federal tax credits and payment of a liability bond. This vocation program benefits Kansas businesses, specifically the Kansas construction industry.

In addition to providing vocational training benefiting Kansas employers, correctional vocational training enhances public safety. 78% of KDOC inmates have a moderate or high risk/need LSI-R score due to the need for employment or education. The types of training opportunities provided by construction projects are invaluable when it comes to their return to the community seeking meaningful employment. Dr. Liechtenberger in a study for the Kansas Department of Labor found the department's work force development program reduces recidivism by 1/3. Not only are released offenders less likely to recidivate and reenter the state correctional system, they are more likely to become safer, tax-paying citizens.

Finally, vocational training programs enhance facility safety. Inmates engaged in constructive activities pose a reduced threat while incarcerated. Not only are inmates spending their time productively while incarcerated, they realize they are gaining skills for their future.

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Attachment 2

These public policy benefits do not cripple the private building sector of the state's economy. Throughout calendar year 2011, the Department of Corrections only constructed six cabins by utilizing the 72 slots made available for the project. While HB 2510 as amended by the House would permit that cabin building project, the two cabins build for Fort Hays State University for field studies at Cheyenne Bottoms would be prohibited by HB 2510. Pursuant to HB 2510, once sufficient cabins have been built for Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, there would be no other entity that could utilize the training projects build by the vocational program. In effect, HB 2510 is a sunset provision that ends this worthwhile vocational education program. In years past, the department's vocational education program has build homes for religious and nonprofit organizations on a model similar to Habitat for Humanity in the Hutchinson and Ellsworth communities. This type of project, irrespective of the community support for the project, would be prohibited by HB 2510.

The department's vocational training program does not just build cabins, it builds people. Therefore, the department urges that HB 2510 not be recommended for favorable passage.