



Testimony on HB 2401

Presented To

The Senate Ways and Means Committee

By

Jeff Zmuda, Secretary
Kansas Department of Corrections

March 25, 2021

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony from the Kansas Department of Corrections on proposed House Bill 2401. We support the bill as proposed.

A consistent theme in Kansas today is that the workforce needs more skilled ready workers. Also, multiple independent evaluations have reflected that the work we do in the Kansas Department of Corrections to prepare incarcerated individuals to obtain a sustained livable wage job has the effect of increasing their employability and decreasing recidivism. Indeed, the ability to achieve sustained livable wage employment after release is the cornerstone for success for our returning individuals who are looking to turn their lives around. This means if we can increase training and education opportunities for incarcerated individuals, we can benefit Kansas employers significantly. While simultaneously increasing the chance for success of those who return to the communities, so they can be law abiding tax paying contributing members of society.

One of the biggest gaps in this work is space. We lack adequate space in our correctional facilities to implement a broad range of Career Technical Education, college courses, and programming that supports success in education and employment readiness. The department – indeed the industry – just did not envision the huge opportunities that would develop in this area. This legislation allows for robust and sustained public and private partnerships to address this space need. Through this legislation, the department can work with an array of business, college, chamber, non-profit, foundation and other partners to raise funds to assist the State of Kansas in putting buildings in our prisons where a learning environment can be created. And where our college and business partners can have a place to bring market relevant skills training to the incarcerated population, to prepare them to enter the workforce as skilled and valued workers. This legislation would also ease some of the purchasing processes for this work; and allow the creation of a non-profit 501(c)(3) arm for fund raising and management.

This legislation arose out of just such a partnership in the Kansas City Metro area. That partnership consists of multiple business, chamber, college, non-profit and other partners. This group is working diligently to put together a plan to carry out a fund-raising campaign to build a modern welcoming productive Career Campus at Lansing Correctional Facility. This campus can be a model for the nation

on how to share this very important work between government, industry and communities. Also, on how to use the best techniques, equipment, and training programs to prepare incarcerated individuals for the workforce and for success after release. We are grateful for these partners; and, we look forward to this Career Campus being the first of many such successful partnerships and building projects in Kansas. Everyone wins with this approach to this critically important issue.

In closing, we appreciate the Committee's consideration of this important piece of legislation. It has the potential to significantly improve the workforce and the success of individuals returning from prison, their families and communities, and ultimately improve public safety.

Thank you