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By Representatives Romero, Van Luven, Morris, Long, Riley, G. Cole, L. Johnson, Mastin, Edmondson, Ogden, Valle, Karahalios, Holm and Anderson

Read first time 02/19/93. Referred to Committee on Corrections.

1 AN ACT Relating to literacy training for offenders; amending RCW
2 9.95.070 and 72.09.130; and adding new sections to chapter 72.09 RCW.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 72.09 RCW
5 to read as follows:

6 The legislature finds that inadequate learning skills and
7 illiteracy among correctional institution inmates not only impairs
8 their ability to reenter society and limits severely the benefits of
9 inmate work programs, but creates a tragic and socially costly pattern
10 of recidivism. Nation-wide studies have shown that a significant
11 number of prisoners are high school dropouts and most inmates perform
12 several grade levels below the last grade they completed in school.
13 Prison literacy programs are effective deterrents to recidivism and
14 therefore are an effective and efficient cost-cutting tool. The fact
15 that the inmate who reenters society able to read and write is less
16 likely to return to prison translates to direct savings to our state.
17 Moreover, the savings realized by all of our citizens from an
18 individual becoming a productive member of society rather than a costly
19 threat, potentially adding to the work load of the already overloaded

1 criminal justice system, is harder to quantify but is of unquestionably
2 greater value.

3 The legislature further finds that prison literacy programs need to
4 include a focus on self-image, decision making, and other social
5 skills. We must strive not only to ensure that inmates can read and
6 write, but that they appreciate the importance and usefulness of these
7 abilities. Combined with inmate work programs and training, literacy
8 training will serve to greatly increase the odds that once an inmate
9 leaves prison, they are not going to return.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 72.09 RCW
11 to read as follows:

12 The department shall develop and implement a literacy testing and
13 training program. This program must require the testing of every
14 person sentenced to a correctional institution under the jurisdiction
15 of the department of corrections to determine that person's written and
16 oral communication skills level. Those persons testing below an eighth
17 grade level must be provided the opportunity to receive training as
18 necessary to reach that level. The department shall determine the
19 structure, scheduling, and method for literacy training. The
20 department is encouraged to consider computer-assisted training, inmate
21 tutors, and volunteer programs as appropriate. Offenders identified by
22 the department to be incapable of participation in literacy training
23 are not required to participate in the program.

24 **Sec. 3.** RCW 9.95.070 and 1955 c 133 s 8 are each amended to read
25 as follows:

26 Every prisoner who has a favorable record of conduct at the
27 penitentiary or the reformatory, and who performs in a faithful,
28 diligent, industrious, orderly and peaceable manner the literacy
29 training, work, duties, and tasks assigned to him or her to the
30 satisfaction of the superintendent of the penitentiary or reformatory,
31 and in whose behalf the superintendent of the penitentiary or
32 reformatory files a report certifying that his or her conduct and work
33 have been meritorious and recommending allowance of time credits to him
34 or her, shall upon, but not until, the adoption of such recommendation
35 by the indeterminate sentence review board (~~(of prison terms and~~
36 ~~parole)~~), be allowed time credit reductions from the term of

1 imprisonment fixed by the indeterminate sentence review board ((of
2 ~~prison terms and paroles~~)).

3 **Sec. 4.** RCW 72.09.130 and 1981 c 136 s 17 are each amended to read
4 as follows:

5 The department shall adopt a system providing incentives for good
6 conduct and disincentives for poor conduct. The system may include
7 increases or decreases in the degree of liberty granted the inmate
8 within the programs operated by the department and recommended
9 increases or decreases in the number of earned early release days that
10 an inmate can earn for good conduct and good performance. Earned early
11 release days shall be recommended by the department as a form of
12 tangible reward for accomplishment. The system shall be fair,
13 measurable, and understandable to offenders, staff, and the public. At
14 least once in each twelve-month period, the department shall inform the
15 offender in writing as to his or her conduct and performance. This
16 written evaluation shall include reasons for awarding or not awarding
17 recommended earned early release days for good conduct and good
18 performance. The term "good performance" as used in this section means
19 successfully performing a work, work training, literacy training, or
20 educational task to levels of expectation as specified in writing by
21 the department. The term "good conduct" as used in this section refers
22 to compliance with department rules.

23 Within one year after July 1, 1981, the department shall adopt, and
24 provide a written description of, the system. The department shall
25 provide a copy of this description to each offender in its custody.

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