

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5537

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Human Services & Corrections, February 25, 1997

Title: An act relating to an ex-offender transitional work program.

Brief Description: Providing transitional employment services for ex-offenders.

Sponsors: Senators Stevens, Rasmussen, Zarelli, Brown, Morton and Oke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/25/97 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 3/8/98.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5537 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Long, Chair; Zarelli, Vice Chair; Franklin, Hargrove, Kohl, Schow and Stevens.

Staff: Andrea McNamara (786-7483)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

Background: The Ex-Offender Work Orientation Program, started in 1972, provides specialized job development and placement services for offenders returning to the community upon release from incarceration.

The program is administered by Corrections Clearinghouse in the Employment Security Department (ESD) through contracts with community-based organizations in a number of regions around the state. Funding for the program comes primarily from an appropriation from the penalty and interest fund of the ESD. Community-based contractors typically are able to leverage additional funding in the amount of three dollars for every one dollar provided by the state.

The current level of funding for the program is \$781,300 for the 1997-1999 biennium. This funding provides services to approximately 11 percent of the offenders released from the adult and juvenile corrections systems, with an average job placement cost of \$525 per offender.

A study done by the ESD and the Department of Corrections suggests that the program is a cost-effective method of assisting ex-offenders to find productive employment upon release

from incarceration. The study also found a significant reduction in recidivism among participating offenders over a five-year follow-up period.

It has been suggested that the Ex-Offender Work Orientation Program be expanded to additional locations throughout the state not currently being served.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A findings and intent section is included relating to the need for specialized transitional employment services for ex-offenders and the historical success of the community-based programs operated by the Employment Security Department.

The current transitional employment services program for ex-offenders is codified within the ESD's specialized employment services chapter. The types of services provided and the types of offenders who are eligible for services are specified.

The ESD is directed to develop and implement an on-going evaluation component to the program. The evaluation must be designed to measure the effectiveness of the program in reducing recidivism.

An appropriation is made from the ESD's penalty and interest fund in the amount of \$800,000 for the 1997-1999 biennium. An additional \$500,000 is appropriated from the general fund for the purposes of expanding the number of offenders and geographic areas served.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute corrects an error in the dates of the appropriations and clarifies that the additional \$500,000 from the general fund is to expand the program into geographic areas not currently served.

Appropriation: \$1.3 million.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The ex-offender work program provides critical assistance to offenders who face major employment challenges. Most offenders lack a consistent work history or employable skills, and many do not know where or how to look for employment. This program is a very cost-effective way to address their transition needs and to positively impact recidivism. The communities accept and support these programs because they provide a needed service. Expansion of the program could save the state a great deal more over the long run by diverting more offenders from the cycle of crime into the work world.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Val Stevens, prime sponsor; Adam Vogt, New Connections (pro); Jack Roos, corrections volunteer (pro); Kevin Glackin-Coley, Catholic Detention Ministry (pro); Niko Colella, Catholic Detention Ministry (pro).