Career Technology and Workforce Development

Meeting Minutes

January 30, 2025
10-11am

Virtual Meeting

Attendees: Adam Cummings, Amanda Owens, Anne Bocchini Pack, Arinze Ifekauche, Danielle Cox, Diana Bailey, John Griffin, Dr. Judith Lichtenberg, Renee Yarbough-Williams, Sec. Sanjay Rai, Dr. Stephen Steurer

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The meeting was called to order at 10am.

Group members introduced themselves.

Diana Bailey asked Dr. Judith Lichtenberg if there was anything relevant in the other Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission workgroups for the Career Technology and Workforce Development workgroup. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg said that the other groups are working on obtaining more data, so this workgroup may want to see if there is information about incarcerated individuals who are in career technology and workforce development programs and if they are successful at obtaining employment post-release.

Arinze Ifekauche pulled up data charts about the number of GEDs obtained and workforce programming over time. There was a drop in GED obtainment during the pandemic, but there is an overall trend downwards over the years.

Adam Cummings mentioned that it may be helpful to see how many people enter prisons with GEDs. Danielle Cox replied that she is working on getting that data. Anne Bocchini Pack asked if she could have access to the data tables where the information was coming from, and Danielle Cox replied that she is unsure how the data will arrive. Arinze Ifekauche said that they will work on getting the spreadsheets to Anne Bocchini Pack.

Adam Cummings asked if there was a trend between the number of people being incarcerated and the number of people obtaining GEDs. Danielle Cox responded that in 2014, the GED test was changed from a paper and pencil test to an online test, which proved problematic for incarcerated individuals who did not have tech literacy. In 2018 and 2019, the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) test became more

rigorous. In 2020 and 2021, the COVID pandemic resulted in limited testing. Afterwards, it has been difficult to recover.

Diana Bailey said that GED obtainment is important to this group as incarcerated individuals must have a GED to be in workforce training programming. The group may want to look at digital literacy.

Danielle Cox went over the differences between occupational certificates and industry-recognized certificates. Occupational certificates indicate an incarcerated individual has completed one of the occupational programs offered by the Department of Labor. Incarcerated individuals may also have the opportunity to obtain industry-recognized certifications from outside organizations such as a barber's license. A list of current occupational programs and certifications is available in the Commission Dropbox.

Danielle Cox continued talking about the collaboration with the Maryland Longitudinal Data Systems Center, which is using cross-agency data to track incarcerated individuals who were in a correctional education program and their post-release employment. This is a recent development because of new legislation authorizing the project.

Adam Cummings talked about the efforts happening in Maryland Correctional Enterprises to hire formerly incarcerated people. 20% of their headquarters staff are formerly incarcerated individuals in various positions. Other state agencies are not making efforts to hire formerly incarcerated individuals.

Arinze Ifekauche asked if the state is doing any outreach to large employment sectors to create employment pipelines. Diana Bailey mentioned that there used to be one-stop career centers for incarcerated individuals.

Anne Bocchini Pack added that the Correctional Education Council is working on improving job services, and there is some miscommunication and misunderstanding of the prison education system by legislators. HB 289 would establish an incarcerated individual apprenticeship program, but it might be more helpful to have apprenticeships be paid so they can be connected to the Department of Labor's Workforce Development Office. Adam Cummings added that the infrastructure for apprenticeships already exists at MCE. Anne Bocchini Pack asked if MCE had the ability to take pre-release incarcerated individuals outside the facility to complete their apprenticeships. Adam Cummings responded that MCE works with pre-release and thinks that incarcerated individuals should be placed at state agencies to receive training, so state agencies know there are properly trained individuals who could work there post-release.

Amanda Owens asked if there were specific barriers due to having a criminal background that might limit someone from obtaining a job at a state agency. John Griffin wondered if there are structural barriers that

filter out those with convictions, or if there is a perception problem. There needs to be more advocacy inside state agencies for hiring formerly incarcerated individuals.

Adam Cummings added that MCE has the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program, which allows incarcerated individuals to make goods for private industries. Since it is difficult to get private industries to hire formerly incarcerated individuals, we should focus on hiring them at the state level. He emphasized that legislators may misunderstand correctional education programming, making it difficult to pass helpful legislation.

Diana Bailey summarized the meeting saying the group wants to focus on advocacy and incentivizing state agencies to hire formerly incarcerated individuals with skill sets. Additionally, coordination between state agencies will be crucial.

The group discussed when to meet. They decided they will meet once a month in order to try and form recommendations for the interim report due in June, or come up with a top five list of issues the workgroup wants to focus on.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if incarcerated individuals need to have a GED or a high school diploma to be involved in career technology and workforce development programming. Danielle Cox and Adam Cummings responded that yes, they do. Anne Bocchini Pack asked if there are ways incarcerated individuals with special education needs could receive programming without needing a GED. Danielle Cox responded that in certain circumstances, they waive that requirement, but it is rarely necessary as often they will already have obtained a GED or are able to obtain the GED with accommodations.

The group decided they would meet next on February 27 at 9am, and continue to meet the last Thursday of every month at 9am until the legislative session ends, at which time they will meet at 10am instead.

Arinze Ifekauche recommended that the workgroup set tangible goals for the February, March, April, and May meeting, and have some workgroup members meet in the meantime to make sure work is being done in the meantime.

Danielle Cox suggested that workgroup members send her questions so they be addressed at the next meeting.

Adam Cummings asked if one of the goals of the workgroup should be to help formerly incarcerated individuals obtain jobs. Danielle Cox answered that the ultimate goal is to have five recommendations of how to improve and support the current career technology and workforce development programs, and asked how do we get to those recommendations. Adam Cummings responded that the Commission has members from various state agencies that can advocate for the hiring of formerly incarcerated individuals.

Arinze Ifekauche offered that perhaps the committee would draft model language to send to HR representatives within state governments that is accommodating to formerly incarcerated individuals.

Adam Cummings said that a portal that connects formerly incarcerated individuals to state agencies may be beneficial. Danielle Cox said that a separate portal just for incarcerated individuals may not be the best way to approach the situation.

Diana Bailey said that the time is 11am, which is the end time for the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11am.