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The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) is required by HB 693 to provide the Law & Justice Interim Committee and the Legislative Finance Committee a report on expansion opportunities for vocational programming at the Montana Women's Prison (MWP).

Executive Summary

DOC faces three primary challenges for considering additional vocational program offerings at the MWP.

The biggest constraint is space within the existing facility. Classroom and vocational education programming space is limited and competes with security-related needs daily. There is space outside the existing building at the rear of the facility that could be used; however, additional funding is required to either build or buy facilities that can [be adapted to] serve as secure and dedicated classroom and programming space.

The second is technology infrastructure and internet bandwidth. Adding new classrooms or programming space would come with its own specific considerations, in addition to current facility and device ages and inventory and parts availability. Internet bandwidth is also an issue; however, the Department of Administration is working with DOC to assess and hopefully resolve that.

The third is teacher/instructor availability and compensation. The lingering effects of the pandemic on the education industry continue to be felt in the public sector, just as in the private sector. There are no easy answers, but additional funding to hire more teachers and instructors, and more competitively compensate current teachers and instructors, would obviously help.

Detailed Summary

- What is DOC-MWP seeking to do?
 - Improve, expand, and connect education, vocational education, training, work experience, and transitional services offerings and opportunities

- Why is DOC-MWP interested in doing this?
 - Overall
 - Provides equitable access to education, post-secondary education, and career readiness training with the goal of obtaining sustainable income upon release
 - Goal of filling identified employment gaps that are felon friendly with skilled, trained workers
 - Provides industry-recognized credentials
 - Facilitates soft skill training
 - Provides transitional perspectives and services throughout incarceration
 - Benefits to the public
 - Inmates with higher skills and more education have proven less likely to recidivate
 - Safer communities and lower future victimization
 - Ability to pay crime victim restitution and fines imposed by judges
 - Benefits to the facility
 - Inmates are busy and less likely to cause problems in the facility
 - Benefits to the inmates
 - Receive an education
 - Learn transferrable skills and work ethic
 - Increase personal employment value and employment opportunities
 - Become valued employees, good neighbors, involved parents, and taxpaying citizens

- Who is DOC-MWP doing it for?
 - 240 female inmates housed in one building spread across four acres representing four custody levels
 - 37% don't have a verifiable high school diploma or equivalent
 - Many don't have a verifiable High School Equivalency score above a 4th grade level in math and reading
 - It can take 3-5 years to get a High School Equivalency score to a 9th grade level, at which point an individual can test for the HiSET
 - Average DOC-MWP incarceration period is approximately 11 months

- Who at DOC-MWP does it?
 - 120 total staff
 - 115 performing security, clinical care, and related duties
 - 5 performing teaching and training duties, including
 - 2 full-time, certified teachers (1:110 teacher/student ratio)

- Process Flow of Education, Vocational Education, and Work Programs
 - During prison intake, when inmates first arrive at MWP, their high school level and core educational competencies are verified and evaluated
 - If high school diploma or equivalent is verified, they are placed on the vocational education and work track
 - This puts them in the queue for career-related training/work opportunities
 - If high school diploma or equivalent cannot be verified, they are put on the school track
 - This puts them in the queue for HiSET and other education programs.
 - Individuals may also receive work opportunities while waiting to get into education programs
 - If/when education is completed and HiSET achieved, they are placed on the vocational education and work track

- Current Program Offerings
 - At any given time, there may be up to 50 different education, vocational education, work program, and transitional service offerings available to eligible inmates, including but not limited to:
 - Education
 - HiSET
 - Special Education
 - Library Services
 - Vocational Education
 - MS Office
 - Adobe Suite Illustrator
 - Dog Grooming

- Work-Related Programs
 - Dog Training, Boarding, and Grooming
 - Sublimation
 - Garment Graphics
 - Sewing
 - OSHA 10
 - First Aid/CPR
 - Forklift Safety
 - ServSafe

- Anticipated Future Program Offerings
 - Manufacturing bootcamp
 - Job Site Ready (a general construction bootcamp)
 - Quick Books certification
 - 2nd Chance Pell (postsecondary education for individuals while incarcerated)
 - Pre-Apprenticeships in Embroidery Operator, Graphic Arts Design, and Screen Print Operator
 - Technology infrastructure improvements to support more remote-access availability to specific classes and opportunities
 - Co-parenting curriculum for incarcerated mothers (at MWP) who have children that also have an incarcerated father (at the Montana State Prison)

- How does DOC-MWP need help?
 - More space/additional funding - to build, or acquire assets that provide, additional classroom space on the MWP campus
 - Improved/upgraded technology infrastructure - to support more electronic offerings and access
 - Teachers/more funding - to hire more teachers and reduce the overall teacher/student ratio while also making more offerings available
 - Industry partners – to help develop, support, and potentially hire individuals who successfully complete courses and programs