

Depts. of Corrections, Workforce Development: New job center builds on department's success training inmates for careers in the community

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OREGON – Lt. Governor Kleefisch joined the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) and Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to celebrate the opening of a new Job Center at Oakhill Correctional Institution (OCI).

“Educating inmates in our Correctional facilities not only reduces recidivism, but it also brings much-needed talent back into our economy,” said Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch. “Here in Wisconsin, our historically low unemployment requires us to recruit and train talent that is oftentimes overlooked. I am proud of our \$3 million investment in workforce training for inmates, and I look forward to following the success of the new Job Center at Oakhill Correctional Institution.”

Governor Walker’s investments in vocational training for inmates are already paying off, as 95% of inmates who have completed a vocational academy have found employment in the community. Academies are offered in high-demand fields like

welding, CNC machining, industrial maintenance, and construction where employers have had difficulty finding skilled workers.

Inmates can use the Job Center for career readiness programs, job search assistance, resume development, services for veterans, registered apprenticeships, and assistance for individuals with disabilities.

DWD Secretary Ray Allen spoke about DWD's partnership with DOC and the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin, noting that "providing inmates with access to a wide range of workforce programs and services will prepare them for reentry into the workforce and greater opportunity to gain meaningful jobs."

Wisconsin's unemployment rate has remained at or below 3.0% for eight consecutive months and the number of open jobs is exceeding the number of unemployed workers. With 9,000 inmates releasing to the community each year and the Department's vocational training programs expanding significantly, employers can hire skilled workers to fill vacant positions and grow their business.

Governor Walker's current budget includes \$1.5 million to expand vocational training in Department facilities, \$500,000 to expand the Windows to Work program, which provides pre-release and post-release employment readiness assistance to inmates, and \$1.05 million to construct two mobile labs to provide vocational training inside Department facilities.

Department of Corrections Secretary Cathy Jess thanked Governor Walker for his support of vocational training efforts, adding that "inmates completing vocational training programs are finding good-paying, family-supporting jobs in the community, decreasing the chance they'll return to prison and enabling them to live crime-free while caring for themselves and their families." She went on to state that "ultimately, these programs are about providing hope for prisoners as they release into the community so they can become productive citizens and taxpayers."

These funds have already resulted in hundreds of inmates completing short-term, intensive vocational training academies with area technical colleges, including an Industrial Maintenance academy and a Construction Fundamentals academy taught by instructors from Madison College.

More than 275 inmates have graduated with employer-recognized, transferable

credentials for in-demand occupations in areas like welding, CNC machining, industrial maintenance, and construction. Of the 157 inmates who have completed a vocational academy and released to the community through September 2018, 149 have obtained employment, a 95% success rate. This number includes 91 inmates who found employment in a related field.