



Home Builders Association of Central Arizona

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HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Davis and members of the subcommittee. It is an honor to be with you to provide a brief overview of a unique workforce development program that has been successfully initiated in Arizona.

I represent the Home Builders Association of Central Arizona which is a trade association for the home building industry. The metro Phoenix home building market is rapidly expanding. In 2015, there were almost 16,000 residential building permits issued. Last year, there were nearly 20,000, representing a 25% increase in 2 years. All forecasts indicate that we can expect this trend to continue in 2018. The biggest obstacle that our builders face in satisfying the demand for new homes is the labor to build them. So in early 2016, we launched a number of initiatives on workforce development including our partnership with the Arizona Department of Corrections.

Our initial work with the Department of Corrections centered on two efforts. One was to visit the various correctional institutions to see the construction programs being taught by the community colleges. Through these education programs, we initially travelled throughout the State with residential plumbing, electrical, masonry, framing, and drywall companies holding hiring fairs at prisons targeting inmates releasing into the Phoenix area. Participating employers were required to have paid training programs and be willing to work with this population's unique challenges such as parole, drug tests, and transportation. Since most prisons are about 4 hours outside of Phoenix, these recruitment efforts were extremely inefficient and took employers out of their offices for several days.

Another was to connect appropriate employers with Arizona Correctional Industries (ACI), a unique self funded 30 year old business within Corrections that provides "jobs" for 2,000 inmates any given day. Working in a safe, positive work and learning environment, inmates gain skills that will help them secure employment upon their release. We were instrumental in facilitating a contract with one of our framing contractors to have a shift of inmates at their yard building wall panels and roof trusses. Several inmates have since been hired by the framing contractor upon release.

In March of 2017, as part of a statewide effort to reduce recidivism, Governor Ducey established 3 Second Chance Centers for inmates releasing in 60 days who had a moderate to high probability of recidivating. Two of the Second Chance Centers, one male and one female, are in minimum custody

prison complexes outside Phoenix, and one is in Southern Arizona in Tucson. This collaboration between the Arizona Department of Corrections and the Department of Economic Security consists of a 10 week training program to prepare and equip inmates with the career and life skills they need to succeed after release. Inmates are instructed in writing resumes, job interview skills, budgeting, conflict resolution, and counseled about child support and other obligations they may have. Many faith based organizations also provide support for various needs during this program. Since studies have shown that employment is the most direct link to reduce recidivism, job fairs and connecting with employers are a huge part of this effort. The Department of Economic Security regularly hosts job fairs for the inmates at the Centers.

Since its inception, over 817 individuals have graduated from a Second Chance Center and 54% of them have successfully gained employment upon release. Additionally, Arizona has seen a 10 percent drop in released inmates going back to prison on a technical violation and is experiencing the largest drop in the number of inmates in Arizona prisons since 1974.

In April, 2017, at our first construction job fair at the Second Chance Center at the Lewis Prison outside Phoenix, we found that many inmates had construction experience and others were eager to learn a construction trade. Shortly thereafter, we piloted training for two trades, electrical and painting at the Center. Inmates were provided the opportunity to sign up for a training class, they were interviewed by the instructors, and if chosen, they were required to report to class at the designated time. A portion of the electrical training was hands on training with three framed walls that the inmates would take turns running the electrical wires through. The residential painting class spent most of their time painting doors and walls inside the prison complex.

Currently, the largest Second Chance Center is expanding from 100 inmates to 275 and we are expanding our training offerings from 2 trades to 6 trades at this Center. We will offer training in electrical, drywall, framing, door and trim, masonry and plumbing. The Center has provided us a building with 6 training rooms for our classes. We are digging footings for the walls for the masonry class and are building a framed house for the other trades to have areas for hands on training.

Our employers provide the trainers, curriculum, materials and tools for their specific trade. While 6-8 weeks of training is not a lot, it is enough to familiarize the inmate with the basic skills of the trade, learn how to work safely, and establish a relationship with their potential employer. Participating inmates also have the opportunity to leave with an OSHA 10 hour card. Additional training is provided once the inmate has been released and hired.

There were a number of reasons why this population made sense for us. First, 60% of Arizona's prison population is between the ages of 18-39. Due to the physical nature of construction, this age demographic was generally interested in more physically challenging jobs, and many have previous construction experience. Second, inmates recognize the opportunity to enter a career that would allow them to support themselves and their families. Third, when we allow ex-offenders to work we assist individuals become productive members of our communities, we assist our employers to address the labor shortage, and we assist taxpayers and our communities by keeping former offenders out of prison.

Working with this population, however, has not been without its challenges. First, there is the challenge of finding employers that are willing to take a chance on a former offender. We have had employers join our program only to leave after an incident with a former offender. Additionally, we have had employers tell us that they don't want the liability of hiring a former offender. To address that concern, last week Governor Ducey signed a bill which helps to protect employers from liability solely for hiring a former offender.

Without question, the biggest challenge ex-offenders face when trying to get a post-release job is transportation. Many former offenders have suspended driver's licenses because of civil court fines or penalties. If someone wants to go to work, we didn't want this to be an obstacle, so we worked with the Courts to pursue legislation to allow for a restricted driver's license. This bill was also signed into law by our Governor last week.

Over the last 2 years our efforts with Corrections has resulted in approximately 300 former offenders being hired by our participating employers. During the 5 months of piloted training 80 inmates completed training prior to release and approximately 40% of them were hired by the companies that trained them. While we would have liked to see a higher percentage of trainees hired, we saw enough success that it warranted expansion of the program. We also recognized that at the same time we needed to address barriers to employment such as transportation.

We are excited about the opportunities this partnership presents and look forward to growing the program in the coming years.