

Prisoner Open-Market Employment

CURE Position:

1. Full economic empowerment and economic responsibility should be promoted for incarcerated persons.
2. Incarcerated persons should be mainstreamed into the civilian labor force to the greatest extent consistent with safety, security, and an unsubsidized competitive economy.
3. Slavery, forced labor, contracting out, and monopsony (one buyer/contractor) should be abolished as instruments of corrections policy.
4. Prisons and prison policies should be redesigned to facilitate successful prisoner open market employment, including promotion, management, ownership, and entrepreneurship. Prisons should be located near jobs;
5. Sentencing policies should be modified so that:
 - a. Sentence terms should propel offenders into, rather than away from, successful labor force participation.
 - b. Wherever possible, pretrial and sentenced offenders should remain employed in the community.
 - c. Sentence terms should recognize economic impacts on (1) uncompensated victims, (2) dependents and caregivers, and (3) the offender.

CURE Strategy:

1. Policies regarding prisoner work programs and the monitoring of these policies should be entrusted to a special public commission made up of representatives of business, labor, education, and corrections. Recommendation for legislative changes should emanate from this commission.
2. Prisoner work-programs should provide on-the job training. They should be accompanied by vocational, life-skills, and academic education, to prepare prisoners for jobs that pay a livable wage.
3. Prisoner work-programs should provide achievement certificates comparable to apprenticeship training, as credentials to be used upon release.
4. Prisoner wages should be at least the minimum wage, and deductions for incarceration and/or restitution should still allow the accumulation of resources for the time of release.

5. The Department of Corrections should support and coordinate the work of community agencies to establish job banks and job referral systems for inmates being released back into the community.
6. Each inmate, upon entering a correctional facility, should develop, with the aid of counselors, a "Plan of Work" that combines the inmate's skills, post release employment objectives and interests with the available resources at that facility.
7. Incentives, including wage increases and sentence reductions, should be provided for the successful achievement of work skills, and the completion of "Plans of Work" and associated training and education.

Why We endorse This Position:

1. Potential rewards in reducing crime and overcoming poverty through appropriate prisoner jobholding outweigh the punishment value of unemployment.
2. Prisoner employment can be good economic policy. Appropriate jobholding can reduce crime. Many prisoners do not need constant armed security.

Final Note: A Warning

Prisoner employment can be either exploitive or restorative. Abuses are likely without careful regulation. Prisoner employment must be designed to be restorative of the prisoners and not merely profitable for the system.