



Colorado State Senate, Committee Members
 Attn: Senate State, Veterans & Military Affairs

May 2, 2016

Re: In Favor HB16_1388; Reducing the high cost of recidivism

I have reviewed and highly approve of the details and structure of this bill.

While a business owner in the engineering realm I have also volunteered personal time weekly during the past 12 years providing lay substance abuse counselling at Boulder County Jail as well as correspondence on the topic with numerous inmates within the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC). Dozens of times I have observed as people emerge from jail/prison, clean & sober, but within months or a few years return to incarceration having failed to thrive in society.

Certainly, the problem of addiction to alcohol and other drugs is its own world whose solutions require much attention. *However, once clean & sober, why is the return to that life of misery so prevalent among the prison population?* My personal observation is that while inmates may have served their designated debt to society they cannot trade for their sometimes considerable skills on an even basis in the job market.

Recidivism rates have long been unsustainable in terms of providing enough beds and frankly the Department of Justice report (attached) that followed several thousand inmates for 5 years (instead of the typical 2-3 yr metric) finds a staggering 77% of inmates will return. This report includes inmates from 30 states with a sizable cohort from Colorado DOC. From a conservative economics point of view (\$32,000/inmate/yr) my hair is on fire.

The great predominance of returns is not for a new crime but a parole or probation violation. Drilling deeper one finds the inability to secure viable employment and safe housing underpins the bulk of parole violations. Even where the technical violation is a return to alcohol and/or other drugs, the underlying reason for a slip in sobriety is the unmanageable weight of metaphorically carrying a past felony on one's back.

Solutions are right in front of us in the annual Community Corrections report (CC) consistently sights that inmates who successfully complete their tour a halfway house **have a job** and have used available substance abuse recovery programs. Pulling down the arbitrary "check box barrier" without impeding a potential employer's ability to ask viable candidates about their history is a very important beginning. As an employer I can tell you it is the personal interview that wins a job. Let's encourage ex-felons to talk to employers about their skills, abilities and enthusiasm to work for them. *After an interview*, if a felony conviction cannot be overcome so-Beit.

Please vote in favor of HB16 1388 and in favor of the tax payer.

Respectfully,
 Barry Keene
 President



HB16_1388 Senate Presentation Outline

Wed 05/04/16

I am Barry Keene founder & owner of KEENE Research & Development, a consulting engineer for the past 24 yrs.

In addition to business owner I am a lay substance abuse counsellor working with men at BCJ for the past 12 years and by correspondence within DOC.

I am testifying today requesting a simple thing that will reduce prison and jail costs for Colorado taxpayers by reducing unnecessary re-incarceration or recidivism.

Tackling recidivism on every front is critical for taxpayer equity.

By e-mail Monday I provided you with a 5 year DOJ study of ~70,000 inmates from 30 states, including 2,300 in Colorado; released in 2005 and followed thru 2010:

It shows that the typical 3 year metrics badly understate the problem

The general population at 5 years had a recidivism of 77%.

DOC budget ~\$800 mil/yr largely for housing ~21,000 inmates; 6th largest GF item

This does not include the local government systems that suffer the same issues and collectively spend about 60% of what DOC does. Per capita \$97 Local/\$164DOC FY 2009-10

Overall Colorado's Corrections costs are ~11% higher than national average.

Recidivism is a route cause of high costs compared to other states.

Having employment is the single largest factor in successful paroles

The 2015 Colorado Community Corrections annual report, also provided earlier shows:

(pg 31/Fig 32; PDF pg 34)

Inmates employed 3x more likely to succeed

Employed inmates ½ as likely to have technical violations

A high degree of recidivism involves no new crime but parole & probation failures. Parole / Probation success correlates directly to employment because unemployment leads to insecurity in: Housing; Food & Transportation; followed by conflicted choices of lifestyles & associates

Frankly, re-incarceration amounts to very high cost public housing for nuisance violations.

We are often talking about people who had marketable job skills prior to incarceration or have developed them in DOC.

During a 45 year industrial career I have hired dozens for blue collar and professional positions. I recall few openings where applicants would have been prevented from doing the job or succeeding by a felony history; of itself.

Eliminating the “felony check box” is a very useful beginning that has been demonstratively effective in other states in increasing parolee employment.

Two examples of great potential employees:

Rodney: DRDC (Denver Reception & Diagnostic Center) facility clinic; will release with close to enough experience to be certified as a “Medical Assistant”. He has many years working in the trenches of long term illness care and would be pleased to earn a starting wage in a sector chronically short handed. *But if the check box remains the likelihood of a quality interview is nil.*

Jesse: Trinidad facility; will release with a multi-year depth of experience training dogs; his slots are sought after. He would be highly valuable as a Veterinary Tech. Jesse is an Army vet and also teaches a class on the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People”. *But if the check box remains the likelihood of a quality interview is nil.*

Respectfully,

Barry Keene

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