



## THE WALZ-FLANAGAN BUDGET



## TO MOVE MINNESOTA FORWARD

### Investing in What Works: Pathways from Prison to Employment

Of those who are incarcerated in Minnesota prisons, 95% will one day be back living in our communities. Our safety depends on these individuals coming out of prison successfully – as supportive family members, good neighbors, taxpayers, and stable employees.

Data shows that individuals engaged in higher education while in prison and those with meaningful job opportunities when they are released are less likely to re-offend and go back to prison. The impact is also inter-generational as the children of formerly incarcerated parents who have completed higher education and are gainfully employed have more successful outcomes into adulthood. When post-secondary programming in prisons runs in partnership with Minnesota's public and private educational institutions, behavioral change and lifelong positive outcomes accelerate. Minnesota must make investments in what works and create more pathways from prison to employment.

**“The safety of our neighborhoods depends on people who commit serious offenses and go to prison come out as better neighbors for all of us. These proposals invest in what works for transforming lives and keeping us safe.”**

*-Nanette Larson, Assistant Commissioner*

It is also no secret that Minnesota employers need workers. Supporting the nearly 5,000 individuals who are expected to leave prison each year with education, job training, and employment navigation serves the economy and protects public safety.

The Department of Corrections is requesting an investment of \$2 million in FY 2023 and \$7 million in FY 2024/2025 to create and support pathways from prison to employment. This funding will build and expand connections to public and private employers, the trades, and community colleges and other post-secondary institutions and connect incarcerated individuals with employment upon release. An additional \$1 million each year is requested to expand

opportunities for higher education for incarcerated individuals through current work-release authority.



### **Expand Post-Secondary Institution Partnerships**

The investment will expand the partnerships with Minnesota institutions of higher education and the DOC for degree-track classes provided while an individual is incarcerated. The enhanced capacity will allow for more degrees with post-secondary institutions, such as our current large-scale partners (Minneapolis College, Metro State, Minnesota State – Mankato, and the University of Minnesota), along with new partnerships with community colleges and technical colleges.



### **Create a Public Safety and Economic Opportunity Unit**

The investment will create a Public Safety and Economic Opportunity Unit to build intentional, evidence-based pathways from training, education, and industry in prisons to job placements upon release. The unit will integrate with the work of the previous DOC program, EMPLOY, in addition to developing and strengthening new relationships in the community, bringing together both public and private employers, the trades and trade unions, community colleges, and post-associates degree pathways. Employment navigation will support the pathways begun in prison to continue into long-term job stability. The unit will set strategic goals and create a centralized, transparent, data-sharing system, including partnering with DEED and Minnesota employers.



### **Expand Work-Release for Education Programs**

This investment will increase the availability of community-based educational programming to individuals during their incarceration. The funding will allow individuals who qualify for work release to be placed in transitional housing and pursue a degree with partnering institutions of higher education as they complete their sentences.



**Inver Hills**  
Community College

Emily Lefholz  
DOC Legislative Director  
Minnesota Department of Corrections  
1450 Energy Park Drive #200  
St. Paul, MN 55108

14 March 2022

Dear Ms. Lefholz,

I am writing to lend our support to the Department of Corrections' legislative request. Assistant Commissioner Larson has it right when she says our prisons need to focus on ensuring people come out of incarceration ready to navigate the workforce and our civic society, so they can be contributing citizens. Inver Hills Community College and Dakota County Technical College have long histories of providing education that empowers individuals and their families to improve their lives and strengthen their communities. We believe post-secondary education is a critical partner in this work.

Inver Hills has provided educational opportunities to persons experiencing incarceration for over a decade. We have seen first-hand the transformative power of learning, not only in students' technical skills but in personal growth and optimism. The proposed unit of Public Safety and Economic Opportunity recognizes that our collective safety lies in creating meaningful pathways for all people to secure employment and long-term stability.

Inver Hills and DCTC also partner with nonprofit organizations like Ujamaa Place to support adults coming out of incarceration with licensure in commercial truck driving that leads to well-paying jobs. We have learned the importance of providing intensive, wrap-around services like transitional housing to help students focus on their learning, so they can secure employment and secure their own futures.

This important work has received renewed attention within the Department of Corrections in the last few years. We hope the Legislature will provide the resources needed to ensure this work continues to grow, so we can reduce our recidivism rate in Minnesota and make our communities safer and stronger.

Sincerely,

Michael Berndt  
President, IHCC and DCTC

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*Members of Minnesota State and  
affirmative action, equal opportunity  
educators and employers.*



Volunteers of America of Minnesota  
7625 Metro Blvd  
Edina, MN 55439  
P: (952) 945-4000

March 14, 2022

To: Minnesota State Legislature

From: Julie Manworren, President & CEO, Volunteers of America of Minnesota

To Whom It May Concern:

Volunteers of America of Minnesota writes to support the Minnesota Department of Corrections in its efforts to procure funding for *Pathways from Prison to Employment*.

Volunteers of America of Minnesota (VOA) is a nonprofit health and human services organization committed to serving people in need, strengthening families, and building communities. For 125 years, VOA has stepped forward as community builders working to close the gaps between people and their needs and aspirations with services that span health, housing, education, employment, and support. From infants to older adults, VOA's services encompass the entire lifespan -- and the whole human experience -- serving over 20,000 Minnesotans in 92 neighborhoods and communities every year.

For over fifty years, a critical pillar of VOA's commitment to restorative justice has been helping individuals successfully re-join the community as engaged, contributing, and whole citizens. To accomplish this goal, VOA provides transitional housing and supervision in residential re-entry centers and work-release programs. Additionally, VOA has one of Minnesota's longest standing and most successful mentoring programs and offers a continuum of evidence-based and trauma-informed support and education for individuals pre-release and leaving incarceration. This program (Amicus) benefits over 1,000 Minnesotans every year. Among other services, it provides tailored assistance to meet the specific challenges that result from an encounter with the criminal legal system, including one-on-one help finding employment and housing, transportation services, referrals to meet mental and physical health needs, access to computers and phones, and other related aid that reduces recidivism, reunites families, and helps build safe, strong, and healthy communities.

With its extensive experience supporting people after their incarceration, VOA's Amicus services has a unique and important perspective into the vital roles education, employment, and cross-sector partnerships can play as sources of stability and opportunity for Minnesotans bettering their lives after involvement with the criminal legal system. Your support of *Pathways from Prison to Employment* is greatly needed and appreciated. Minnesota thrives when all its residents are safe, have stability, and the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration, as well as your leadership and service on behalf of all Minnesotans. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Manworren".

Julie Manworren  
President & CEO

(952) 945-4004 | Julie.Manworren@voamn.org

Dear Legislators,

On behalf of the University of Minnesota's MN Prison Education Program, I am writing to express enthusiastic support for the Investing in What Works: Pathways from Prison to Employment budget request from the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

After a year of planning supported by a grant from Ascendium Education Group, we launched our new higher education in prison initiative, the Minnesota Prison Education Program (MPEP) in Fall 2021. As part of Governor Walz's new, collaborative model for higher education in prison, MPEP is working in close partnership with Metropolitan State University's College in Prison Program. Metro State is currently offering a bachelor's degree program in Individualized Studies to 40 students at MCF-Stillwater, and beginning in Fall 2022, Metro State will also begin offering credit-bearing courses to students at MCF-Lino Lakes.

In order to support degree programs for incarcerated students in our state, the U of M is focused on creating opportunities for distinguished instructors to teach courses through Metro State and other partners. By recruiting our instructors to teach inside, we are able to support the development of a wide range of course offerings designed to foster a solid foundation of skills applicable to a wide variety of employment opportunities. To date, we have invited two faculty members to teach courses for students at MCF-Stillwater: Associate Professor Robert Nichols taught a section of POL 1201 Introduction to Political Theory in the fall, and McKnight Land-Grant Professor Kate Derickson is currently teaching a section of GEOG 1301W: Our Globalizing World this spring.

Looking to the future, the U of M is at work on developing pathways for students to continue their studies on our Twin Cities campus following their release, and we look forward to mobilizing our strong working relationships with many Twin Cities employers in support of these students. The U of M and the DOC also have a shared goal of enhancing our existing partnership by developing financially sustainable pathways to offer a future U of M degree program for incarcerated students.

The funding outlined in the What Works: Pathways from Prison to Employment proposal would be instrumental in allowing us to continue the momentum we have built in developing these much-needed programs and making the expansion of employment opportunities a reality for incarcerated people in Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration of this crucial investment.

Sincerely,



Robert B. McMaster  
Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education



Minnesota State Legislature  
St. Paul, MN 55155

March 9, 2022

Dear Members of the Minnesota Legislature,

As the executive director of SOAR Career Solutions (SOAR), a community-based organization located in Duluth, MN, I encourage the MN Legislature to support the Department of Corrections' request for funding to support *Pathways from Prison to Employment*.

SOAR has over 39 years of expertise implementing *effective*, evidence-based programming for people who experience social, emotional and/or physical barriers to employment. In 2006, SOAR started its employment and training focused Re-entry Program supporting individuals transitioning out of MN DOC facilities back to our community. We serve over 400 participants each year, roughly 150 of those individuals are coming to us directly from incarceration.

In our experience, individuals who are re-entering society face a significant number of obstacles such as finding safe and stable housing, developing a healthy support system, accessing substance use support, addressing behavioral health needs, and obtaining high-wage in-demand jobs. *Pathways from Prison to Employment* would help increase the work readiness and job skills for this population – giving them the tools needed to secure high wage employment thus setting them up for increased success upon their release. We know when our participants obtain meaningful employment, their self-esteem increases and their chance of recidivating decreases.

Minnesota must invest in what works and create more pathways for individuals from prison to employment.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Emily K. Edison", is written over a horizontal line.

Emily K. Edison  
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March 14, 2022

Dear Legislators,

I write to you today to express The Redemption Projects' staunch support for the proposed funding of the Pathways from Prison to Employment program.

The Redemption Project is a Minnesota-based nonprofit organization that works with incarcerated individuals to assist them in finding meaningful employment with a sustainable living wage. We have extensive research that supports the fact that individuals who have meaningful employment upon their release from prison are far less likely to re-offend and return to prison. We fully support the Department of Corrections' overall efforts to prepare offenders to be successful once released beginning the day they enter prison. We applaud their holistic efforts and believe they will have a lasting impact on:

- Reducing crime rates by ex-offenders not returning to prison.
- Positively impacting the ex-offenders and their families, who benefit from their loved ones becoming a meaningful part of their community.
- Providing trained and motivated employees to Minnesota companies to help reduce the current labor shortage.

Most individuals incarcerated in Minnesota will be returning to their communities at some point in the future. Do we want them returning to their communities as employed contributing members of society or as individuals engaged in criminal activities with no hope for their future? The choice is yours.

We believe your support of the Pathways from Prison to Employment program is smart on crime and will increase the odds that those touched by the criminal justice system will become productive members of society.

Respectfully,



Dwight Tostenson  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Redemption Project



March 14, 2022

Emily Lefholz, Legislative Director  
State of Minnesota  
Department of Corrections  
1450 Energy Park Drive  
St. Paul, MN 55108

RE: Support for Pathways from Prison to Employment PY2023-2025 Budget Investments

Dear Ms. Lefholz:

We are writing to express strong support for Governor Walz's proposed budget investments in employment and training services for incarcerated individuals. The Department of Corrections' Pathways from Prison to Employment priorities would significantly enhance our state's capacity to address workforce development needs by engaging incarcerated individuals through job training and higher education opportunities, which have demonstrated success at accelerating behavioral change and positive lifelong outcomes. These investments, in turn, will increase the odds of incarcerated individuals' success upon their re-entry, while also decreasing the likelihood of recidivism that impacts our communities' public safety.

We support the Department of Corrections' proposed investments of \$2 million in FY2023 and \$7 million in FY2024/2025 to create and support pathways from prison to employment. This funding will build and expand connections between incarcerated individuals and public and private employers, the trades, and post-secondary institutions. An additional \$1 million each year will expand higher education opportunities for incarcerated individuals through current work-release authority.

Minnesota's employers need skilled workers who can meet the labor force needs so that our economy can continue to grow and compete in an increasingly regional and global marketplace. We strongly encourage the legislature to approve these investments that are needed to expand partnerships to support vital workforce development priorities in our state.

Sincerely,



Laura Beeth, Chair  
Minneapolis Workforce Development Board



Deb Bahr-Helgen, Director  
Minneapolis Employment and Training





**MINNEAPOLIS**  
COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL  
**COLLEGE™**

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To Whom It May Concern,

3/13/2022

I am writing in support of the Pathways from Prison to Employment budget proposal. As a faculty member and program coordinator for the Minneapolis Community and Technical College and Lino Lakes Correctional Facility college-in-prison partnership, I directly advise and support each student from admissions to graduation, transition, and employment. We currently have 90 full and part-time incarcerated students at Lino Lakes Correctional Facility, and many more who desire admission. Over 75% of incarcerated people at Lino Lakes are eligible for admission into any one of our 100+ degree programs, and the majority will receive full federal Pell grants that cover 100% of tuition, fees, and textbooks so that they will accumulate no college debt. Our students are people of faith with families from all political perspectives who desire to restore their lives and communities and are grateful for this new opportunity. They are thirsty for higher education and have surpassed their counterparts on the outside. Some may complete their college degree while incarcerated, and others while on work release or post-release. Either way, Minneapolis College provides full academic and student support services for each student and partners with the MnDOC, community organizations and transitional housing for post-release wraparound services. For example, one student graduated with our Associate of Arts with Emphasis in Philosophy in fall 2021 and was admitted into University of Minnesota - Duluth - with a double major in Finance and Philosophy. Another student matriculated to our Minneapolis College campus while on work release and is a full-time student in the Architectural Technologies program. That student also works full-time (second shift) and is a leader in the Lino Lakes student organization "Running for Change", which holds weekly 5k runs to raise donations for non-profit organizations and resources for higher education. While studies (Simpkins, 2015) have shown that incarcerated students who complete a 2-year degree have a low 3.8% recidivism rate and much higher rates of employment, college-in-prison is much more than that. In the words of one of our students "Higher education is providing me a new life, a life I thought I could never reach." Your support for Pathways from Prison to Employment will enable us to build a foundation for a nation-wide model of college-in-prison.

With Gratitude,

Matthew Palombo, PhD  
Department of Philosophy  
Program Coordinator, Lino Lakes College-in-Prison Partnership



# DamascusWay

The Road To Freedom

## *Letter of Support for the "Pathways from Prison to Employment Budget Request."*

To the Honorable Legislators of Minnesota,

Damascus Way Reentry Center is a statewide non-profit dedicated to breaking the cycle of recidivism which many individuals exiting the Department of Corrections get caught up in. One of our distinct objectives is to end reoccurring periods of incarceration. Our service model focuses on *three* areas which provide the necessary foundations for successful reintegration into the community; housing pathways, employment opportunities and community connections. We believe that the synthesis of these three core program components is essential in creating positive pathways from prison to reentry.

It is due to our experience in the field of reentry services, that Damascus Way is voicing our complete and enthusiastic support for the inclusion of funding for the *Pathways from Prison to Employment* proposal in the new state budget. Over the years we have observed how indispensable education and employment are to a holistic return from prison. As such, we thoroughly support the notion that viable and rewarding employment positions provide a sense of purpose and livelihood for an individual, while significantly reducing the probability of reoffending. There is further value in the expansion of educational programs and partnerships, particularly when considering the correlation between educational access and rates of incarceration. The prevalence of "inter-generational" trauma and ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences) among those who enter the correctional system points to the value of further exploring funding for educational opportunities which as research demonstrates will diminish negative outcomes.

Once again, we'd like to reiterate our ardent belief in the value of this request as part of the budget proposal that will be presented to the Minnesota state legislature at the request of the MN Department of Corrections. The combination of investments in post-secondary education, employment training and job placement is bound to bring about greater prosperity for those on the pathway out of prison, which in turn will lead to increased safety, trust and harmony in the community at large. An investment in *Pathways from Prison to Employment* is not solely an investment in corrections and reentry, but in well-being of all Minnesotans.

Thank you for your consideration!  
Sincerely,

Tierre Webster  
Executive Director  
Damascus Way Reentry Center