

Project: Academic & Workforce Development Program at the Montana Women's Prison

Brief description: Montana State University Billings requests continued funding of \$350,000 to further develop a pilot project for an academic development program targeted to inmates at the Montana Women's Prison in Billings. The program would offer inmates general education coursework toward certificate or Associate of Applied Science degrees while at the same time providing them with college and/or life skills.

Executive summary: The MSU Billings pilot project for Academic and Workforce Development at the Women's Prison will be designed to enhance the academic and job-skills success of an at-risk group which has historically not graduated from high school, post-secondary vocational technical schools, community colleges or four-year colleges. This project would provide "boot camp academic preparation" for the women's prison population in general, and we would look to export the methodology and the courses to other Montana prison facilities upon completion of the project.

This project serves a diverse female population, many of whom are high-risk students, under-prepared for college or typically do not consider further education as an alternative. The June 30, 2006, the female prison population was 297 offenders and is expected to grow by 17% per year. The demographics of the Women's Prison show that inmates are 66% White/Caucasian; 26% Native American; and the remaining being Hispanic, Asian and black. Educational levels for inmates traditionally varies from first grade/ninth month (with some having basic illiteracy) to some having 11th and 12th grade levels of education. Roughly 40% place in that upper range of educational preparation. The age of the inmates ranges from 16 to over 60, with 37% over the age of 40. That puts the majority between the ages of 18 and 39, or an age where workforce skills can be best put to work to keep them out of jail upon release. This appropriation would allow MSU-Billings to hire a coordinator and educators for the program as well as provide tuition subsidies for students and provide the necessary equipment for coursework. The inmates would be taught basic study skills and reading courses; and MSU Billings staff would also work in conjunction with existing School District #2 personnel to transition inmates from the GED preparation to college-level work and workforce development skills. The MSU-Billings College of Technology would also be able to hire faculty to provide basic skill instruction through formalized courses, seminars and workshops.

Billings School District #2 Adult Education Center is currently at the Montana Women's Prison doing literacy and GED work as well as basic computer literacy. This project would work in tandem with that existing offering to the inmates in order to bring them into certificate or AAS technical training and job preparation, specifically with construction trades training. Partnerships in this endeavor would include the warden and staff of the Montana Women's Prison and the staff of the Billings Job Service Workforce Center to assist with placement opportunities.

Congressional action needed: An ongoing appropriation of \$350,000 is requested.

Importance/Outcomes for Montana: The hand's-on teaching at the prison would include:

- Vocational and occupational counseling programs for the women to explore future careers
- General education courses which would enable students to transfer to a two-year or four-year institution to complete their degrees once they are released
- Developmental and remedial courses for students with weak academic skills
- Counseling, tutoring, and other support services to meet their needs and make released inmates more employable upon release.
- Alternative teaching methods to accommodate a variety of learning styles
- Reduced recidivism rates through better preparation for re-entry to society. Recidivism has hovered at above 30 percent for the last decade. Successfully putting inmates back to work will save money for the correctional system and taxpayers of Montana.

In addition, the program would encourage and develop the academic and workforce potential of Montana's women prison population and support high-risk and under-prepared learners for academic success.

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FY 2009 CONTINUATION REQUEST

Academic Development Program at the Montana Women's Prison Talking Points

- The \$350,000 appropriation would continue a pilot project funded by Congress in 2007 to enhance the academic and workforce success rate of high-risk women who in the Montana Women's Prison in Billings.
- The program would offer inmates general education coursework towards certificate or Associate of Applied Science degrees while at the same time teaching the inmates reading/college survival skills.
- This program would work in tandem with an existing Billings School District 2 GED program in order to bring the inmates into certificate or AAS technical training and job preparation.
- This appropriation would allow MSU Billings to supplement staffing and resources used to provide education as well as provide tuition subsidies for students and provide the necessary equipment for coursework.
- Recidivism rates will be reduced through better preparation for re-entry to society. Recidivism has hovered at above 30 percent for the last decade. Successfully putting inmates back to work will save money for the state.
- Many inmates have high school-level educations. General education courses would enable students to transfer to a two-year or four-year institution to complete their degrees once they are released.
- Partnerships in this endeavor would include the warden and staff of the Montana Women's Prison and the staff of the Billings Job Service Workforce Center to assist with placement opportunities.

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