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Task Force would help find ways to lower recidivism

SB 689 re-establishes task force to identify ways to help offenders reintegrate

SALEM – Lowering recidivism starts with properly transitioning ex-offenders back into society after they’ve served their time. The Oregon Senate voted to re-establish a task force charged with coming up with ideas to help those Oregonians more successfully transition back into productive lives.

Senate Bill 689 – which passed the Senate on a 30-0 vote today – re-establishes the Task Force on Reentry, Employment and Housing. The task force is charged with studying and recommending actions related to reentry into the community for those leaving incarceration.

“We are doing Oregonians a disservice by releasing them from lengthy periods of incarceration and expecting them to smoothly get jobs, housing and meet all of their other basic needs without any supports,” said Sen. Lew Frederick (D-Portland), who carried the bill in the Senate. “This bill re-creates a task force that was effective once before in identifying issues these individuals face and recommending solutions.”

The task force also is called upon to find ways to expand employment opportunities for those with criminal convictions, identify housing opportunities for those with criminal convictions and create certifications for people with criminal convictions. The task force originally was created in 2015, but it was scheduled to sunset at the end of 2016. The group submitted a report that noted the task force should continue working on supervision issues and reentry needs unique to women, among other issues. Several of the suggestions put forth by the group were passed into law by the Oregon Legislature.

“This session the Legislature has passed a number of bills that came out of the task force,” said Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland). “All have passed on strong, bipartisan votes. There is a growing understanding of the importance of successful reentry in reducing recidivism and keeping people on track to productive lives. We’ve removed some of the obstacles that get in the way, but many remain. It’s exciting that the task force will continue to do this important work.”

Senate Bill 689 builds upon the work begun by the first task force. The bill found support from the education sector, with Treasure Valley Community College Vice President of Academic Affairs Eddie Alves submitting written testimony in support of the bill.

“I believe this committee can be the center point for taking these complex issues and concerns and moving them forward in a systematic and positive direction,” Alves wrote to the committee. “The goal of this committee is to decrease recidivism rates, improve all re-entry process and ultimately lower Public Safety cost to all Oregon taxpayers. Oregon continues to lead the nation in the use of research-based treatment of incarcerated individuals. The Joint Task Force on Reentry has the same opportunity to make Oregon the leader in successful reentry of incarcerated individuals.”

Senate Bill 689 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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