

Third Piece of Governor's Criminal Justice Reform Package Passes General Assembly

Gives ex-offenders the chance to compete for Department of Correction jobs

Dover, DE – Building on efforts to address employment obstacles for ex-offenders, the Senate today passed legislation to allow the [Department of Correction](#) to hire qualified ex-offenders into a short-term job training program and give those who have paid their debt to society a better opportunity to reintegrate into our communities.

Markell highlighted the need for this legislation when he outlined his criminal justice agenda in January's [State of the State address](#), saying, "If there is one employer in Delaware that should be able to decide whether hiring an ex-offender makes sense, it's the Department of Correction. But the Department is prohibited from hiring anyone with a felony record, even on a part-time basis."

"The vast majority of offenders will return to their communities, so we have a responsibility to support our economy and improve public safety by ensuring they have an opportunity to contribute as law-abiding citizens," said Governor Markell. "One of the best indicators of whether individuals will reoffend is whether they have a job. No employer is better positioned to evaluate their capabilities in the workforce than the Department of Correction, so it's time we remove the hiring restriction preventing the Department from doing so."

House Bill 264 enables the Department to offer employment for

up to 6 months to ex-offenders who demonstrate exceptional job skills while enrolled in a Level 4 or Level 5 vocational program, notwithstanding any prior felony convictions. The Senate's 20-0 vote follows unanimous passage by the House earlier this month.

"The Department of Correction approached us about this issue," said Rep. James "J.J." Johnson, D-New Castle, the bill's prime sponsor. "We want people who are imprisoned to gain useful job skills that will allow them to become productive members of society once they are released, but we are blocking them from obtaining a job with the department that helped train them. To me, it makes perfect sense that the Department of Correction would have the best idea of who they should hire. I'm glad to see so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle support this bill."

"This is another step in our efforts to help inmates in our correctional facilities get their lives back on track by allowing them to sharpen their job skills as casual-seasonal employees," said Sen. Bruce Ennis, D-Smyrna, the measure's lead Senate sponsor. "And because it's paid for by money earned by our correctional industries, it won't impose an additional burden on taxpayers."

The bill represents the third of the Governor's criminal justice priorities that will become law this year. It follows another measure to address employment discrimination against ex-offenders, House Bill 167, which the Governor [signed into law last month](#), forbids public employers from asking job candidates to check a box on their applications if they have a criminal record.

Markell also proposed, and the [General Assembly passed](#), sentencing reform legislation. House Bill 312 provides judicial discretion by permitting judges to impose concurrent sentences for multiple offenses. Delaware is the only state that currently forces judges, without exception, to impose

consecutive sentences.

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