



THE STATE  
of ALASKA  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of Corrections

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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March 20, 2017

The Honorable Dean Westlake  
Alaska State House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 24  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Westlake -

I am writing today to express my enthusiastic support for HB 171: Employment of Prisoners. The efforts to increase employment opportunities for Alaska's incarcerated population are needed now more than ever during these challenging fiscal times. Currently, inmates are sitting idle far too often. Inmate idleness exacerbates the potential for mental health issues, and further puts Correctional Officers and Institutional staff at increased risk for incident. Restitution payments are low, and often they aren't made at all, hindering the ability for crime victims to be made whole. Inmates re-entering society are less likely to recidivate if they've had access to rehabilitation, education, and training within our institutions. Providing greater latitude for the Department of Corrections to create programs for inmates to obtain real-life work experience increases these opportunities.

HB 171 will assist Alaska's Criminal Justice System in the goal of controlling prison growth and ensuring that we are achieving the best public safety return on our state dollars. Offering inmates opportunities to gain real-life work experience while incarcerated can increase restitution payments, increase safety inside of facilities, reduce recidivism, and thus increase public safety as former inmates reenter into our communities. Right now it is so important to think outside of the box in finding ways to increase public safety in Alaska. Additionally, prison industries in other states have a well-established history of public/private partnerships that advances the private business community. I stand by HB 171 and urge favorable action on this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean Williams".

Dean Williams

Commissioner, Department of Corrections

**Trust**

Alaska Mental Health  
Trust Authority

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April 4, 2017

Dear Representative Westlake:

I am writing today to express my support for HB 171: Employment of Prisoners. Enhancement of prisoner employment will provide more opportunities to find savings within the correctional system and, importantly, provide meaningful and productive work experiences for Alaska inmates.

Correctional employment programs are used throughout the country and provide a better quality of life during incarceration for those employed and better chances for successful reentry after incarceration. Implementing a similar program will allow inmates in Alaska the opportunity to gain work experience and learn new skills.

The Trust is actively working with a number of partners to develop solutions to address the growth of our state's criminal justice system and reduce recidivism. We believe this bill will help the state work towards those goals.

Thank you for your leadership in addressing this important issue.

Sincerely,



Jeff Jessee  
Legislative Liaison