

California Prison Industry Authority

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FORUM URGES EMPLOYERS TO CONSIDER FORMER OFFENDERS

Technical Skills, Improved Rehabilitation Programs Create Dependable Workforce

Los Angeles....Former offenders who take advantage of improved training and rehabilitation programs are an often overlooked force of skilled and motivated employees that are eager and able to do a good job.

State correctional officials and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa today shared that message with business owners and prospective employers during the first Los Angeles Employers Forum, urging them to consider former offenders to improve their workforce and contribute to public safety.

Matthew Cate, Secretary for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), stressed that corrections officials are developing programs that will make inmates more prepared for the working world.

"Governor Schwarzenegger has made rehabilitation of inmates a major priority because he recognizes that is the only long term solution to permanently reducing the prison population, which will reduce the burden on taxpayers and make our communities safer," Cate said. "CDCR is developing new programs that will address the needs of inmates the day they walk into the prison rather than the day before they leave."

Speaking to an audience of business owners and employment specialists, Mayor Villaraigosa contended that giving inmates work skills is a smart alternative to building more prisons.

"We have to be as tough on addressing the root causes of crime as we are on the criminal," said Villaraigosa, who noted that there are now 100,000 more inmates in California prisons than when he was elected to the Legislature in 1994. "We have to hold people accountable for what they did, but after they serve their time we need to give them a second chance and a job if they have the skills. This approach is tough on crime, and is in the long term best interest of the city and the state."

New programs being developed by CDCR will ensure that inmates will have driver's licenses and other documentation they need to participate in the working world, as well as programs that will improve life skills, making them more employable.

"One of the most critical things former offenders need to turn their lives around is a job," said Charles Pattillo, General Manager of the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA), which provides training to industry level standards in more than a dozen agricultural and light manufacturing skills. "These former offenders have skills that are in demand and are ready to work on day one," Pattillo added. "As workers

they are often more dependable, and a better investment over the long term than the work force provided by temporary agencies. They are especially motivated to avoid the mistakes of their past and make a constructive change in their lives.”

CALPIA, which operates more than 60 businesses in 23 of the state's 33 prisons, offers inmates opportunities to learn job skills and become accredited to industry standards of competency in such diverse skills as operating a commercial bakery or laundry, dental and optical technician, machining, metal stamping and welding. In addition, CALPIA offers pre-apprentice level training with craftsmen in skills such as carpentry, ironworking, and commercial underwater diving and welding. This training is done with formal agreements with some trade unions, making those inmates very competitive in the job market.

Recent research has documented that employment significantly reduces the rate at which former offenders return to prison. The recidivism rate among inmates who participate in CALPIA programs is as much as 25 percent lower than that for the general prison population within a year and remains lower over three years, saving taxpayers an estimated \$40 million that could be diverted to other public uses.

For more information on inmate programs offered by PIA, visit the PIA web site at:

<http://www.calpia.ca.gov>

