
Detailed Fiscal Analysis

The bill requires all prisoners in the custody of the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction who have not obtained a high school diploma to take courses leading towards an Ohio Certificate of Education or an Ohio high school diploma or courses that provide vocational training. If a prisoner already has a high school diploma, or its equivalent, the department is to encourage the prisoner to participate in a program of advanced studies or training for a skilled trade. The department is also to adopt rules prescribing disciplinary action to be taken against a prisoner who refuses to participate in an educational program. Any prisoner who does not have a Ohio Certificate of Education or an Ohio high school diploma will be prohibited from employment with the Ohio Penal Industries or any other prisoner employment.

The bill also requires the Department of Youth Services to require a child committed to its custody to participate in courses leading toward the attainment of a high school diploma or a certificate of high school equivalence if the child has not already attained a diploma or certificate of that kind. Exempted from this requirement is any child in an assessment or treatment program prescribed by the department.

Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC)

As has already been noted, prisoners who do not have either a high school diploma or its equivalent will be required to participate in educational or vocational programming. Currently, in the range of 75 percent to 85 percent of offenders enter prison without a high school diploma or its equivalent. This means that of DRC's intake population, which runs around 18,000 to 19,000 offenders annually, somewhere between 13,500 and 16,150 of these individuals enter prison with neither a high school diploma nor its equivalent. What will this educational programming mandate mean then for the department fiscally? Since the bill essentially codifies the department's current policy, it should create no additional fiscal burdens.

The department's current education policy is to encourage inmates to pursue a high school diploma or a GED prior to release. The Ohio Central School System, a formally chartered school system by the Department of Education, operates all educational services within DRC. The chartered school provides educational opportunities to inmates in the area of literacy training, adult basic education, GED preparation, and vocational programs.

The department currently divides prisoners that would be required to participate in educational programming under the bill into two groups: (1) those functioning below a ninth-grade achievement level and (2) those at or above a ninth-grade achievement level. The first group of prisoners are required to participate in educational programming full-time, which means roughly three-hours-a-day, five-days-a-week. The second group of prisoners are required to pursue a high school diploma or its equivalent at night or during the weekends while working at a full-time institutional job. For the full-time educational programming, the staff consists of approximately 280 academic teachers, 125 vocational teachers, and 200 support staff. For the night/weekend GED programming, most of the services are delivered through contractual relationships with local public school adult education programs.

What about program space? Does DRC need more program space to accommodate educational programming? Currently program space is not a problem due to the schools having extended hours to accommodate prisoner participants. In the future if space becomes a problem, Sunday hours could be added to the program schedules.

So will this bill become problematic for the department? The department currently has the flexibility to redesign the service delivery of its educational programming, as well as in determining which offenders will be required to participate and when. If the department is not allowed to determine the most appropriate form of educational programming for certain segments of the inmate population, like those with learning disabilities, and is not given the discretion to determine the timing of each offender's participation, then the bill's fiscal impact becomes, we believe, considerably more problematic.

Department of Youth Services (DYS)

According to DYS, the bill will have no effect on the department's operations. All youth who would be affected by the bill are currently required to participate in the requisite educational programming.

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