

Monday, July 6th, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Arnold . My State Identification Number is . I was convicted of Aggravated Murder in Wasco County, Oregon, in 1984, while on escape from Wyoming State Penitentiary and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Except for escape I have been incarcerated since February 16, 1978. I have been incarcerated in several State Corrections Systems and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

I first served time in Arkansas Department of Corrections at both Tucker and Cummins Prison Farms. There was no prison industry within that system...just hard labor in the fields all day. My first experiences with the prison industrial complex began in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1978. I was hired as a sewing machine mechanic. I went on to work several other jobs within the Bureau of Prisons Industry. I also worked in Prison Industry in both Tennessee and Minnesota Corrections, respectively. Having served time in Corrections Systems with and without prison industries provides me, I believe, with a different perspective from most other prisoners.

Incarceration for individuals within our society is supposedly for two primary reasons: the first reason is to protect society from the acts and actions of the individual who chose to violate the laws of that society; and the second is to carry out some measure of punishment through incarceration or separation of that individual from within that society. Reformation may be listed as a third reason. Many laws stipulated these individuals be subjected to hard labor as a general part of their incarceration. The purpose of that stipulation was twofold, intended I believe as both punishment and to reform.

Reformation is another factor our society has struggled with and addressed with mixed messages. The concept or idea of reformation of a prisoner has been a heavily debated subject of the modern prison system since its inception. With much experimentation, through trial and error, society has generally come to embrace that reformation of an offender is at least as important as society's punishment for the underlying offense. In the majority of cases, much more so in the long-term.

I bring up these points because I think maybe it is important to place prison industries in something of its historical heritage and evolution. Prison Industries seems to me to have morphed from the combination of those societal objectives into what you find in most Corrections Systems today.

I actually worked in Prison Industries in Minnesota when it paid its prisoner-employees minimum wage. And I was also there when its Legislature cut those wages back to what today is about a tenth of that minimum wage. As one might imagine, the effect was dramatic on the prisoner-employees and the prison population as a whole. Morale plummeted of course, and so did the quality of the work those prisoner-employees continued to produce. But few prisoners, if any actually quit working in Prison Industries. And there is the truth of it...that while every prisoner wishes that Prison Industry paid its prisoner-employee wages more in-line with societal norms for the same or similar skills, all accept on another level that they are incarcerated and their prison industrial job is better than they could otherwise get within the prison.

To my personal knowledge, without exception in every correctional system where prison industry exists, that industry provides a better opportunity for prisoners than otherwise exists within that prison system. This is invariably true on a variety of levels: wages, housing, working conditions, other benefits not generally available to the remainder of the prison population. Moreover, again to my personal

knowledge, no prisoner is required to work in any prison industry job. Work in prisons industries is completely voluntary. And there are a few prisoners who choose not to work in prison industries. Invariably those prisoners are either short-timers, have independent financial means, have other interests such as higher education, or have other job interests that are available to them within the system. As a general rule, again to my personal knowledge, prison industries employment is highly sought after within every corrections system.

Having tried to present a broad view of prison industries within the corrections setting, I will now give you my own personal views on Oregon Corrections Enterprises (“OCE”). I do not believe my views are all that much different from most prisoners within this system, although I may be privileged to have somewhat more insight working for OCE.

To begin with, I feel privileged to work in OCE...primarily because of the scarcity of meaningful job opportunities within Oregon Department of Corrections (“DOC”). I am one of approximately fourteen-thousand, four-hundred prisoners incarcerated within this system, and fortunate to be within the less than ten-percent currently employed by OCE. I perform a variety of work within OCE, from shipping lead to computer coding. I earn approximate \$140.00 per month. I work an average of six-hours or so daily, five-days a week. My working conditions are not difficult and I work in a clean, comfortable environment. I am treated respectfully by my OCE staff and administrators, often as a general employee would be treated; so much so that DOC staff often look down on OCE staff with disdain or as “chocolate-hearts” for treating OCE prisoner-workers as regular employees would be treated in society.

I have worked other, regular prison jobs within the corrections system. I have worked in floor care, unit orderly, gardening, and education tutor positions to name a few. I earned the maximum pay such position(s) usually offer of approximately \$82.00 per month, and the average pay for such position(s) of approximately \$30.00 per month. I worked at moderately hard physical labor on most of these jobs, under less than comfortable environments at times. Generally speaking, my DOC supervisors treated me respectfully, but never as a regular employee.

I have several criticisms of OCE, but am familiar enough with its structures and strictures to realize that my complaints can only be addressed at a legislative level. Nevertheless, I will list several of them here.

First, OCE does not provide employment opportunity for nearly enough Oregon prisoners. Providing employment/job training for barely ten-percent of its prison population is, in my opinion, an abysmal failure. That failure however cannot be laid at the doorstep of OCE. It is a more complex failure, involving Oregon business leaders, citizens, and voters and ultimately the Oregon Legislature. OCE’s primary mission is to provide job training for prisoners who will reenter society with a marketable job skill that will provide them with a living wage. In my opinion, there is no greater single service or benefit OCE can provide to Oregon citizens and voters.

I will tell you why: Every prisoner released from the DOC without a job skill sufficient to acquire a job and earn a living wage...is a direct failure of the system. Simply ask yourself what do you think an individual will do...released back into society, into your communities, without the job skill to acquire employment that does not pay a living wage? Compound this with the re-adjustment necessary after imprisonment, the lasting blemish of a criminal record...and you have a recipe for failure. This failure is directly reflected in shamefully high recidivism rates and the too often terrible, and sometimes even horrible crimes inflicted on citizens and voters in this State by those same individuals.

The ODC fails the citizens and voters of Oregon in this regard for several reasons. I believe it primarily fails because the State's leaders do not realize and have not effectively communicated to its business and community leaders that OCE requires a broad partnership on all three levels to be truly successful and provide the citizens and voters of this State the benefits they deserve.

OCE simply cannot deliver its potential results without developing a broad, strong partnership with Oregon business leaders, with support from the Oregon Legislature. OCE's mission is to provide job training for not just prisoners, but for men and women who are Oregon citizens and will be reentering Oregon cities and communities. OCE needs to be able to train men and women in those job fields that are present in society, in communities, and it needs partnerships with the businesses and industries in those communities to successfully do so.

One of OCE greatest hurdles, I believe, is providing the job training opportunities in career fields that actually provide a marketable job skill to those individuals being released back into society. This is not entirely OCE's fault, as it cannot do this without the support of the legislature and strong partnerships with Oregon business leaders. OCE cannot be successful on the scale it has the capability to be as long as it is viewed by Oregon business leaders and business as a competitor, rather than a valued partner and resource.

OCE wages and prison labor are issues currently being viewed in context with broader current societal and cultural climate. And while I genuinely do, as an incarcerated prisoner appreciate that interest by the public, I also believe these issues are being used more as a slogan than an actual point of interest for change within the system. I base this on two facts: First, prison labor was established by Oregon voters under Measure 17, not something arbitrarily established by any agency or organization. Second, prison wages are, again, the product of legislative processes; not something an agency or organization arbitrarily establishes.

Do I believe prisoner wages should be increased? Absolutely. Prisoner pay has not increased for Oregon prisoners since around 1995; while cost of canteen food and basic toiletry items has increased by something like 500% in the same time period. A prisoner making \$27.00 - \$30.00 per month might afford to purchase ten envelopes, a pad of paper, a pen, a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste, a bar of soap, a deodorant, a wash cloth, a small bag of coffee, and maybe some top ramen soups...to last the individual all month. The disparity between prisoner earnings and cost of canteen (and societal costs) have continued in an ever-widening trend.

Yes, the institution does provide some version of a toothbrush, baking soda for toothpaste, and a small hotel-style bar of soap...none of which are truly viable options.

There is no viable way for a prisoner to save any money toward his or her release, or afford higher education or vocational courses...unless he or she works in OCE Industries. Even then, it requires sacrifice and a level of self-discipline few prisoners possess to be able to engage in these activities.

Working conditions in OCE Industries, any of those Industries, is quite comfortable and seldom strenuous in any physical or mental sense. The conditions are, most emphatically, one-thousand percent better than for those prisoners having to work in the DOC kitchens as line-server, dish room workers, or one of the myriad other kitchen jobs...as the majority of prisoners are required to do.

Remember, Oregon Voters passed Measure 17, which **requires** all those incarcerated to participate in meaningful work and/or education programs for a minimum of 40 hours per week. The reality is quite different and quite stark...there are not enough jobs. Period.

In the current environment, OCE Industries constitutes less than ten-percent of possible job assignments an Oregon prisoner might receive during incarceration.

OCE, created by Measure 68 after Measure 17 was enacted in 1994, is a self-sustaining, semi-independent agency under the direction of the DOC. It utilizes prisoner labor to provide services and products with a high value, at a reduced cost to other state agencies. This accomplishes three important things: it offsets the cost of incarceration itself to the Oregon taxpayer, and it simultaneously provides work to meet Measure 17 requirement; while providing on-the-job training to incarcerated adults-in-custody (AIC's).

I can speak with experience in stating that many, if not most of those AIC's being incarcerated today fundamentally lack self-discipline, viable job skills, and responsible work ethic. Few have the self-confidence necessary to try to improve themselves. OCE inherently addresses each of those factors that invariable led, by one degree or another, to those contributing factors of incarceration.

From my perspective, I can state that OCE as an Organization is absolutely hamstrung by both the Legislature, the State's business leaders, and the general public in carrying out its mission statement. This results in an absolute disservice to the Oregon taxpayer, to the State in general, and the DOC.

OCE needs to be seen and accepted by both the Legislature, its business leaders, and the citizens of Oregon as a partner; not simply another state agency, or as a business competitor. It is meant to be something more. Unless and until that is accomplished OCE will never be able to truly fulfill its inherent value and mission to the State of Oregon or its taxpayers.

This is not rocket-science folks: Oregon citizens are being incarcerated. Many, perhaps most have backgrounds of little education, little or no work history or work ethic, lower economic income, broken homes, drug addiction, and other issues. This never excuses their choice to commit crime or their subsequent incarceration. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the State and its citizens to address these issues as part of a fundamental goal to both reduce crime in general, and stop or significantly lower recidivism.

If Oregon incarcerates an individual, who more likely than not possesses one or more of the underlying issues described above, at a cost of somewhere north of twenty-five thousand dollars a year...then it subsequently releases that AIC without providing him or her with programming to address some or all of these issues, and most importantly...without that individual having been provided with a job skill that will allow them to earn a living wage once released back into Oregon communities.... What do you believe that individual will do to survive and live?

In my opinion, every single time the DOC releases an AIC back into our society without, at minimum, providing the opportunity to that individual through programming or treatment to address their underlying issues, and without providing them with a job skill that is capable of earning a living wage...the entire State Corrections System has failed. It has failed the Oregon taxpayer by doing nothing more than taking an individual out of society for a determinate time, while charging every Oregon taxpayer considerable money to do so, and then returning that individual (who has spent that incarceration perfecting criminal-based talents and mindset) back into Oregon communities without any mindset or skills whatsoever to change what brought them to prison in the first place. It is then only a very expensive revolving door paid for by the honest, hard-working Oregon voters and taxpayers.

Finally, to respond more precisely to what elicited this conversation in the first place...I understand that the phrase "slave labor" resonates in today's political and cultural climates. But the reality is so completely opposite of that political and cultural mentality...that it would be laughable if not so saddening. No group in our society should understand that better, or be more offended by its current use in the OCE context than Black Lives Matter. There is no bondage here, no prisoner is forced to work in prison industries in Oregon, and within the boundaries of this environment we retain the right of some choice. None of which were available in the sad and repulsive history of slavery in this country.

I, like most AIC's around me, do not want to have to labor in the kitchen or one of the other meaningless, drudgery jobs the DOC offers. So again, while I do appreciate the attention of society into the internal workings of incarceration in the State of Oregon...in this instance that attention and the current accusation of "slave labor" is utterly and completely misplaced.

Arnold

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