

August 10, 2020

From:

Norm

Snake River Corrections Institute (SRCI)

OCE Call Center

777 Stanton Blvd

Ontario, OR 97914

To:

Ken Jeske, Administrator

Shawn Haywood, Deputy Administrator

Oregon Corrections Enterprises

RE: OCE and Prison Labor

In light of the growing national conversation centered on social justice and related issues, it seems only fair that the companies who do business with OCE would seek to be better informed about the circumstances under which inmates work in your various facilities. But whether that interest is motivated by a genuine concern for the well-being of the inmate workforce, or something a bit simpler like the desire to avoid negative reaction from their own customers or the public, it is also clear that much of that interest results from the fact that much of the public considers OCE work programs in Oregon prisons to be nothing more than “prison labor,” working for “slave wages.” That is unfortunate, because anyone who truly believes this is uninformed.

I’ve worked for Demand Lead Generation in the OCE Call Center at SRCI since 2014. During this time, I’ve come to know firsthand what the public rarely learns - that OCE and its contractors provide one of the few work environments within DOC where inmates are treated as human beings. So what if we don’t make market wages? You can’t say we’re being exploited when we’re all here voluntarily. Here in the call center, we are valued and appreciated. We are called by our first names. We are treated with dignity and respect. We are given the opportunity to advance on our own merit, to practice the workplace skills and develop the personal abilities that will help us succeed when we someday walk back out into the real world. We learn patience, teamwork and structure; we are trusted to do the right thing. That is in direct contrast to the rest of the prison, where we’re seldom treated as anything but inmates – offenders without individuality left only to be managed, and counted, and controlled.

Truth is, OCE work programs contribute more towards overall inmate rehabilitation and workforce preparedness than any other widely-available program within the whole of DOC. That means we need more of it – not less – and the public would probably agree, if only they knew. So this seems like an opportunity for you – and for us – to make the best of the current situation and join the conversation. Put us to work and let us help you educate the public about the important part OCE plays in preparing Oregon inmates for real-world employment. Let us show them that we’re more than “prison labor” working for “slave wages.” Give us the chance to prove that we’re human beings capable of making good decisions.

Sincerely,

Norm