



PREPARE
PREpare for PARole and REentry

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**HB0612 - Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs - State
Correctional Ombudsman and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for
Incarcerated Individuals - SUPPORT**

I am a graduate of the first class of the CPRS workforce training program at MCI-W. In order to understand how important this program is, it is necessary to understand what things were like before it existed. Prior to the CPRS training program, there were no peers working behind the walls. Informal peer support was available through programs like NA, AA and Celebrate Recovery, but these programs rely on the work of individual volunteers, staff or incarcerated individuals, so they are always vulnerable to collapse when that individual is no longer available. There were no workforce training programs available to incarcerated women that carried industry recognized certifications. Workforce training programs that offer certifications like ASE (automotive, diesel) and NCCER (construction trades) require a shop to be constructed and filled with tools. Because men make up almost 97% of the incarcerated population, these shops are built inside men's facilities where they are inaccessible to incarcerated women.

The CPRS workforce training program changed the game. It is taught in a classroom, so there is no need to build a shop or order any special equipment. This allows the CPRS trainers to move between institutions and serve the whole state, including women. At each institution, staff is trained to be Registered Peer Supervisors, establishing permanent infrastructure that continues to operate when the training is complete. Peer work has become an institutional job assignment, which means unlike other workforce programs, individuals trained in the CPRS program can continue working as CPRS until their release, make a meaningful contribution behind the walls, and enhance the services offered through other programs. Once released, CPRS certification offers in-demand, living wage job opportunities with advancement potential. Peers trained behind the walls have gone on to found organizations, achieve higher education degrees, and take roles with the State, universities, nonprofits and behavioral health providers.

Although the CPRS program offers the best value proposition of all the workforce programs, it exists solely on year-to-year grant funding and at the discretion of the Department. HB0612 funds and formalizes this program, which will sustain it through lean times, ensuring recovery support, gender equity and CPRS training continue to have a place behind the walls and formerly incarcerated peers continue to drive positive change in the community. I urge a favorable report.

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