

CHAPTER 64

(HB 5)

AN ACT relating to prison educational programs.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

➔SECTION 1. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 197 IS CREATED TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

- (1) *The Kentucky Community and Technical College System Prison Education Program, or KCTCS Prison Education Program, is hereby established within the department to provide inmates with intensive, hands-on job training in high-demand workforce sectors.*
- (2) *The department shall enter into a memorandum of agreement with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) as defined in KRS 164.001 in accordance with Section 2 of this Act to provide academic instruction for the program.*
- (3)
 - (a) *The program established in subsection (1) of this section shall be located on the grounds of the Northpoint Training Center.*
 - (b) *The department shall:*
 1. *Manage facility operations, including operations related to safety and security;*
 2. *Be responsible for all maintenance and repair of the facility, utilities, and facility supplies; and*
 3. *Provide inmate transportation to the facility, inmate meals and food services, and inmate housing that is segregated from the general prison population.*
- (4) *The program shall not be available to an inmate serving a sentence:*
 - (a) *Of imprisonment for life without possibility of parole;*
 - (b) *For escape or attempted escape; or*
 - (c) *For a sex crime as defined in KRS 17.500.*
- (5)
 - (a) *The department shall be responsible for the identification of candidates for the program, including recruitment and selection, in accordance with the restrictions set forth in subsection (4) of this section and as determined by the department.*
 - (b) *Selection of candidates for the program shall include consideration of:*
 1. *Established security criteria;*
 2. *Industry guidance for second-chance employment; and*
 3. *The capacity of academic instructors to provide industry-recommended and high-need training.*
- (6) *An inmate who is selected and meets eligibility requirements shall be transported by the department to the Northpoint Training Center facility.*
- (7) *The department shall promulgate administrative regulations in accordance with KRS Chapter 13A relating to:*
 - (a) *The selection and eligibility of inmates for the program, including but not limited to the following criteria:*
 1. *The inmate's academic background;*
 2. *Vocational counseling or testing that indicates the inmate has an interest or aptitude for a particular trade; and*
 3. *The inmate's willingness to abide by the attendance, academic, and behavioral requirements of the program;*

- (b) *The terms and conditions under which inmates may continue in the program;*
- (c) *The adequate care, supervision, guarding, disciplining, maintenance, transportation, and housing of inmates when assigned to the program;*
- (d) *Availability and accessibility of post-release services, including consideration of education and employment requirements in administering terms of probation and parole;*
- (e) *The collection of data to include:*
 - 1. *The number of inmates:*
 - a. *Participating in the program who receive an offer of employment prior to release;*
 - b. *Who successfully complete the program;*
 - c. *Who obtained employment following participation in the program; and*
 - d. *Who were unsuccessful and the reason for removal from the program; and*
 - 2. *Following completion of the program and release from the facility, the number of inmates with:*
 - a. *Successful completion of parole;*
 - b. *A violation of parole;*
 - c. *A return to prison as a result of a parole violation and the date the inmate returned; and*
 - d. *A return to prison as a result of the commission of a new offense;*
- (f) *Requirements of KCTCS employees, including:*
 - 1. *Compliance with the department's institutional safety and facilities management policies and procedures; and*
 - 2. *Participation in the department's drug-testing program, including random screenings and tests based upon reasonable suspicion of drug or alcohol impairment, as determined by the warden of the institution, and at the cost of the department if the test is administered at a department facility by a department vendor;*
- (g) *Policies to permit remote instruction or services during emergencies or pandemics, consistent with department and health advisories of the Commonwealth; and*
- (h) *Any other regulations the department deems necessary and appropriate to carry out the requirements of this section.*
- (8) *Hours of classroom instruction shall model, to the extent possible, an average workday similar to what the inmate can expect to experience in employment upon release.*
- (9) *Instruction shall occur outside of any area accessible by the general population of the facility and inmates participating in the program shall be segregated from the general prison population at all times.*
- (10) *Potential employers shall have the opportunity to recruit and interview potential employees prior to parole.*
- (11) *KCTCS shall:*
 - (a) *Construct a facility on the grounds of Northpoint Training Center to provide academic instruction for the prison education program established in this section;*
 - (b) *Upon completion of the facility construction under paragraph (a) of this subsection, deed the facility to the department which will bear responsibility for management, operations, security, and maintenance. The details of the prison education program will be jointly determined by the department and KCTCS outlined in a memorandum of agreement between the parties;*
 - (c) *Retain ownership, maintenance, and responsibility for all equipment related to academic instruction within the prison education program;*
 - (d) *Ensure compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws;*

- (e) *Enter into and maintain all appropriate confidentiality and data protection agreements, including nondisclosure forms, for all academic instruction employees accessing Commonwealth data;*
- (f) *Provide academic instruction within the facility and all components required for instruction, including a learning management system; and*
- (g) *Determine program placement with regard to a participant's academic readiness.*

(12) *This section shall not be interpreted to:*

- (a) *Create or confer upon any inmate any private right or benefit; or*
- (b) *Limit the discretion of the department in determining and maintaining operational and security requirements of the department.*

➔SECTION 2. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 197 IS CREATED TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

(1) *The memorandum of agreement required under Section 1 of this Act between the department and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS):*

- (a) *Shall establish the duties and responsibilities of each party; and*
- (b) *May be amended by the parties as necessary, including the addition of terms not required under this section, to meet the needs of the program.*

(2) *The duties and responsibilities of the department shall include:*

- (a) *Establishing rules of conduct for inmates participating in the program and maintaining decision-making authority related to any disciplinary action for violations of the rules established under this paragraph;*
- (b) *Marketing the program across correctional facilities throughout the Commonwealth with inmates who may meet eligibility requirements;*
- (c) *Providing training for each college employee entering the facility or communicating with an inmate, including necessary training related to safety, security, and relevant policies and procedures;*
- (d) *Providing training for each college employee entering the facility or communicating with a participating inmate virtually or in a distance format;*
- (e) *For the training required under paragraphs (c) and (d) of this subsection, providing modules related to:*
 - 1. *Safety, security, and related policies and procedures;*
 - 2. *The Prison Rape Elimination Act, 34 U.S.C. sec. 30301 et seq.;*
 - 3. *Maintaining professional boundaries; and*
 - 4. *The use of core correctional practices to effectively respond to behavior;*
- (f) *Providing KCTCS with necessary data to operate the program, including:*
 - 1. *The transfer and release dates of inmates participating in the program as required by the United States Secretary of Education under 34 C.F.R. sec. 668.239;*
 - 2. *A roster of inmates approved for the program to be submitted to the college's designated office for each term;*
 - 3. *Grades and course completions entered into the Kentucky Offender Management System;*
 - 4. *Information to determine the last day of attendance; and*
 - 5. *Information to assist in tracking graduates post-release;*
- (g) *Helping to facilitate required verification, identification, and financial aid documents with identified federal agencies for participation in the program;*
- (h) *Providing operational support to successfully carry out the program, including:*

1. *Adequate security staffing to support the inmates participating in the program at the KCTCS Prison Education Program campus and collaborating with external partners on reentry services;*
 2. *Office space, copier access, and utilities at no cost to KCTCS;*
 3. *Clear processes and systems to pay for education expenses, for use by inmates participating in the program;*
 4. *Background checks of all KCTCS employees using the department's approved vendors and processes;*
 5. *Maintenance and replacement of learning technology onsite to ensure continuity in the learning environment when technology malfunctions, including the use of department-issued tablets; and*
 6. *Facilitating the purchase and acquisition of class supplies at the beginning of each academic term and charging the cost, along with books, to the participating inmate's financial aid account; and*
- (i) *Participating in joint meetings between the department and KCTCS to review program outcomes, security issues, and facility updates each term.*
- (3) *The duties and responsibilities of KCTCS shall include:*
- (a) *Establishing rules of academic conduct for inmates participating in the program and maintaining decision-making authority related to any disciplinary action for violations of the rules established under this paragraph;*
 - (b) *Ensuring compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws related to student privacy and department security procedures;*
 - (c) *Maintaining all instructional equipment that is provided by KCTCS within the facility, outside of learning technology that is part of the prison environment;*
 - (d) *Providing marketing support for the program including:*
 1. *Brand guidelines;*
 2. *Program information;*
 3. *Transfer pathways; and*
 4. *Public relations requests related to the program;*
 - (e) *Developing and distributing a specific catalog or similar publication describing available programs, services for inmates participating in the program, curriculum maps, and delivery options;*
 - (f) *Establishing and maintaining a companion website section to inform participating inmate's families, department partners, and community supporters about the campus programs;*
 - (g) *Managing partnership components pertaining to the educational status of participating inmates, including:*
 1. *Initial college application completion and other educational records required for admission;*
 2. *Academic records and materials to determine transfer credit and initial placement;*
 3. *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion and submission, including eligibility criteria and financial aid payment options;*
 4. *Facilitation of financial aid payments for tuition, books, and supplies on behalf of the participating inmate, ensuring no direct disbursements to the inmate;*
 5. *Orientation for participating inmates each term addressing:*
 - a. *College policies and procedures;*
 - b. *Program requirements;*
 - c. *FAFSA and payment plans;*

- d. *Code of student conduct and college student expectations; and*
- e. *Available support services;*
- 6. *Completion of graduation application and transfer enrollment if desired;*
- 7. *Instructional materials that comply with the facility requirements of the department; and*
- 8. *Quality assurance processes, including:*
 - a. *Course evaluations;*
 - b. *Performance of the participating inmate;*
 - c. *Syllabi review; and*
 - d. *Faculty observation;*
- (h) *Providing and managing staffing related to the academic components of the program, including:*
 - 1. *Qualified and credentialed in-person and online instructors for coursework; and*
 - 2. *Admissions, financial aid, advising, online library, tutoring, veteran support, transcript collection, and academic support services on-site at the facility;*
- (i) *Ensuring compliance with requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges and requirements of the Department of Education for the program;*
- (j) *Providing graduation ceremonies on-site; and*
- (k) *Working with the department and external partners to match inmates who have completed the program with employers and collecting and reporting job placement and data transfer on an annual basis.*
- (4) *The department and KCTCS shall negotiate the responsibility for the cost of licensing and certification examinations if required by an academic program offered in the facility.*
- (5) *This section shall not be interpreted to:*
 - (a) *Create or confer upon any inmate any private right or benefit; or*
 - (b) *Limit the discretion of the department in determining and maintaining operational and security requirements of the department.*

➔Section 3. KRS 196.281 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) When a prisoner is released, the department shall issue to that prisoner, with the prisoner's consent, documents regarding all of the following:
 - (a) The prisoner's criminal history in Kentucky;
 - (b) The prisoner's institutional history, including all of the following:
 - 1. Any record of major disciplinary violations;
 - 2. Whether the prisoner successfully completed programming approved by the department;
 - 3. Whether the prisoner obtained a high school equivalency diploma or other educational degree prior to incarceration, to the extent known or verifiable by the department;
 - 4. Whether the prisoner obtained a high school equivalency diploma or other educational degree while incarcerated;
 - 5. The prisoner's work record prior to incarceration, including past employment and skills, to the extent known or verifiable by the department, and to the extent the department is technologically capable of providing this information; and
 - 6. The prisoner's institutional work record, including skills obtained through any job training or programming provided by the department; and
 - (c) Other information considered relevant by the department.

- (2) When a prisoner is released, the department may, in conjunction with the Transportation Cabinet, issue to that prisoner an operator's license or personal identification card that is a voluntary travel ID document pursuant to KRS 186.417.
- (3) In addition to the documents provided under subsections (1) and (2) of this section, the department shall issue a certificate of employability to a prisoner if all of the following apply:
- (a) The prisoner achieved one (1) or both of the following:
 1. While incarcerated:~~;~~
 - a. Successfully earned one (1) or more of the following:
 - i.~~;~~ An educational credit pursuant to KRS 197.045(1)(a)2.;
 - ii.~~;~~ A program completion credit pursuant to KRS 197.045(1)(a)3.;
 - iii.~~;~~ A work-for-time credit pursuant to KRS 197.047; or
 - b. ***Successfully completed the Kentucky Community and Technical College System Prison Education Program pursuant to Section 1 of this Act; or***
 2. Prior to incarceration, earned a High School Equivalency Diploma, a high school diploma, a college degree, certification from a vocational or technical education program that the program was completed, or a diploma or degree from a correspondence postsecondary education program approved by the department;
 - (b) The prisoner received no major disciplinary violations during the year immediately preceding his or her release; and
 - (c)
 1. The prisoner received a score or level of competence as determined by the department on a job skills assessment test administered by the department or jail; ***or***
 2. ***The prisoner successfully completed the KCTCS Prison Education Program and received an academic certificate, diploma, or degree.***
- (4) A certificate of employability issued pursuant to subsection (3) of this section shall:
- (a) Be issued to the prisoner when he or she is released from a correctional facility;
 - (b) Be on a form provided by the department;
 - (c) Be valid unless revoked by the department; and
 - (d) Not create relief from:
 1. A requirement to register as a sex offender under KRS 17.510;
 2. A driver's license, commercial driver's license, or probationary license suspension, cancellation, or revocation;
 3. A restriction on employment as a prosecutor or law enforcement officer; or
 4. The denial, ineligibility, or automatic suspension of a health care professional's license due to a substance use disorder.
- (5) (a) The department shall revoke the certificate of employability provided under this section of any individual who is convicted of a felony after receiving a certificate of employability.
- (b) The department shall provide an individual whose certificate of employability has been revoked under this subsection an opportunity to file a grievance through the department's prisoner grievance system. The revocation of a certificate of employability is effective when the individual is notified of the revocation.
- (c) The revocation of a certificate of employability does not affect the right of an employer to rely on the validity of the certificate of employability unless the employer knew before the individual was employed that the certificate of employability was fraudulent.
- (6) An individual shall not intentionally state or otherwise represent that he or she has a valid certificate of employability issued by the department knowing that the statement or representation is false. An individual who violates this subsection shall be guilty of a Class B misdemeanor.

- (7) Upon request, the department shall confirm whether a certificate of employability has been issued to a named individual and whether the certificate is valid at the time of the inquiry and at the time of the department's response to that inquiry.
- (8) The department is not civilly liable for damages based upon its decision to issue or deny issuance of a certificate of employability to any prisoner or for revoking or failing to revoke a certificate of employability issued to any prisoner.
- (9) (a) In a judicial or administrative proceeding alleging negligence or other fault, a certificate of employability issued to an individual under this section may be introduced as evidence of a person's due care in hiring, retaining, licensing, leasing to, admitting to a school or program, or otherwise transacting business or engaging in activity with the individual to whom the certificate of employability was issued if the person knew of the certificate at the time of the alleged negligence or other fault.
- (b) In any proceeding on a claim against an employer for negligent hiring, a certificate of employability issued to an individual under this section may be a defense for the employer as to the claim if the employer knew of the certificate at the time of the alleged negligence, except in cases where the employer knew or should have known the employee should not be hired for the position due to the nature of his or her history, including criminal history *relevant to the claim*.
- (10) The department shall notify incoming prisoners of the possibility to earn a certificate of employability.
- (11) The department shall submit an annual report no later than September 1 of each year to the Governor *and to the Legislative Research Commission for referral to the Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations and the Interim Joint Committee on Judiciary* ~~General Assembly~~, which shall include:
- (a) The number of certificates of employability issued in the preceding twelve (12) months; ~~and~~
- (b) The rate of recidivism among released prisoners previously issued certificates of employability; ~~and~~
- (c) Any other information the department deems appropriate to include; *and*
- (d) *Beginning September 1, 2029, the data in subsection (7)(e) of Section 1 of this Act.*

➔Section 4. KRS 335B.020 is amended to read as follows:

- (1) ~~A~~~~No~~ person shall *not* be disqualified from public employment ~~or~~ ~~nor shall a person be disqualified~~ from pursuing, practicing, or engaging in any occupation for which a license is required solely because of a:
- (a) Prior conviction of a crime, unless the crime for which *the person was* convicted directly relates to the position of employment sought or the occupation for which the license is sought; *or*
- (b) *Finding that an applicant lacks good character or fails to meet any other similar standard where a criminal conviction is the sole basis for the finding.*
- (2) In determining if a conviction directly relates to the position of public employment sought or the occupation for which the license is sought, the hiring or licensing authority shall consider *the*:
- (a) ~~The~~ Nature and seriousness of the crime for which the individual was convicted and the passage of time since its commission;
- (b) ~~The~~ Relationship of the crime to the purposes of regulating the position of public employment sought or the occupation for which the license is sought;
- and*
- (c) ~~The~~ Relationship of the crime to the ability, capacity, and fitness required to perform the duties and discharge the responsibilities of the position of employment or occupation.
- (3) *There shall be a rebuttable presumption for any occupational license that requires good moral character that the person applying for the license is of good moral character if, after the criminal conviction, the person obtains a certificate of employability pursuant to Section 3 of this Act and the certificate has not been revoked. This rebuttable presumption shall not apply if the conviction would qualify the individual as a registrant as defined in KRS 17.500.*

➔Section 5. The data collected pursuant to subsection (7)(e) of Section 1 of this Act shall be reported in compliance with subsection (11) of Section 3 of this Act beginning with the September 1, 2029, report submitted by the department.

Signed by Governor April 9, 2026.