

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DEAN KNUDSON

30TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 614- Certificates of Qualification for Employment
Committee on Corrections
January 14, 2016

Mr. Chairman and Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 614, which will give those with previous convictions a better shot at starting over and creating a stable life.

We spend approximately 7% of our state budget, \$2.2 billion, on corrections. That is a staggering number, and one that we should work to reduce. There are already positive signs from DOC in the area of reducing recidivism. In 2014, Wisconsin was recognized nationally by CSG as one of eight states to deliver the most dramatic recidivism reductions over a three year period—a reduction of 9.1%.

We need to continue that progress. One of the best ways to ensure that recidivism stays low is to ensure that those leaving incarceration find jobs. Being convicted of most any crime of substance in Wisconsin comes with a host of restrictions, often including the inability to get an occupational license. Those who learn skills or trades behind bars, or those who had them before they entered, may find themselves at a disadvantage while job-seeking because of their inability to attain a license.

AB 614 is modeled after an Ohio law that has been in place for several years. This allows those who have previously been convicted of a crime to apply for a Certificate of Qualification for Employment, or CQE. If granted, the CQE lifts many of the collateral sanctions that come with convictions.

This is not a carte-blanc process. Applicants will have their record extensively reviewed, and will still be subject to decisions by DSPS or licensing boards regarding any occupational license they may apply for. The CQE cannot be used to get a license in a profession related to the crimes committed. For instance, someone convicted of wire fraud could not go get a job at a bank.

We are working with the Department of Corrections and other stakeholders on improvements to the bill, including streamlining the application process to integrate it more closely with existing policy. In addition to my testimony, we have passed out a recent CSG paper on criminal records and occupational licensing, as well as a Legislative Council memo with answers to some FAQ's.

I would appreciate your support of this bipartisan bill, and am happy to answer any questions.