

If employment and rehabilitation are important to the TN DOC, why have they made it more difficult?

written by Sandy | October 29, 2021



By Sandy . . . Ask anyone in law enforcement what the ultimate goal of the criminal justice system is, or at least what it should be, and a great many of them will answer, "Rehabilitation."

A search of a few random states on this issue yielded remarkably similar results:

NH: . . . [services that promote successful re-entry into society](#) . . .

TX: . . . [promote positive change in offender behavior, reintegrate offenders into society](#) . . .

FL: . . . [support the improvement and readiness of lives in our custody . . . by providing programming for productive](#)

learning, positively transforming behaviors, and teaching pro-social skills that assists with re-integration into communities.

CA: . . . various rehabilitation programs that seek to improve the likelihood that offenders will lead a productive, crime-free life upon release from prison . . .

And even Tennessee: The Tennessee DOC's mission has always been to operate safe and secure prisons to enhance public safety in Tennessee through incarceration and ***rehabilitation of felony offenders***.

Ask those same people what a key element of rehabilitation and successful community reentry is, and they will say, "Employment. Gainful employment."

Again, this is verified and reinforced by a number of sources:

The Prison Policy Initiative says, "The strongest predictor for recidivism: poverty."

A Harvard Study, "Successful reentry: a community-level analysis" (2018) stresses the importance of, not only employment, but employment with opportunity for upward mobility.

And the Tennessee Department of Correction, in its section about jobs in prison, announces, "It is our desire that participation in prison jobs will be the basis for instilling good work ethics that will continue when the offender is released."

Why then, *why*, has Tennessee placed a major impediment in the path of a portion of its "felony offenders"? Why, with one hand, do they bother offering job experiences that they hope will lay the path to employment once released when, with the other hand, they do everything they can to shut off avenues of employment to those with sexual crime convictions?

Those who have been incarcerated for a sexual offense already face a host of impediments to rehabilitation and employment. Tennessee is one of the states in our nation that has [codified a state-wide distance restriction](#) for those on the sexual offense registry. Tennessee's is especially onerous and odious. It is for a thousand feet; it restricts registrants from living, staying at, or accepting employment at a host of child-centered places; and it applies to everyone on the registry, regardless of whether or not their offense involved a child and regardless of whether or not they are under supervision.

Not satisfied with making it extremely difficult for a registrant to find employment – or housing – in any Tennessee town or city, the Tennessee Sexual Offense Registry [now requires the place of employment for each registrant](#) be listed as part of the public registry. So now for those Tennesseans who managed to defy the odds and find gainful employment, there is a new obstacle: an employer who is not thrilled to have his address show up on the state's sexual offense registry.

Tennessee is not alone in requiring this information. A host of other states do, and prison reform advocates in those states report employment offers being retracted when company owners found out their addresses would be listed on the registry, and there are also some reports of registrants losing their jobs or having other unpleasantries occur. Anecdotal instances have also been reported of employers and company owners being harassed or threatened, of them losing customers, and even of property being damaged.

The Tennessee Department of Correction **says** that part of its mission is the rehabilitation of those it serves. It further **says** that preparing for employment after release is important.

And then the Tennessee Sex Offender Registry, managed by the DOC, takes a step that will not lower recidivism, will not

protect children, and will not make society any safer, but **does** make everything else they have said a lie.