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time in prison, they typically have little savings to show for it when they're released.

If they do have some cash, it's usually not much, said Paul Solomon. He's the executive director of Sponsors, a re-entry program with a network of services engaging roughly 500 former jail and prison inmates in Lane County annually.

"When you're starting out with nothing, two or three hundred dollars doesn't go very far," he said.

"The fact that almost half of the people being released from custody don't have identified housing when they are released is a bit of a travesty in my mind," Solomon said, "and where you're released, in many cases, dictates what type of resources you'll have."

He said in some counties, especially outside the I-5 corridor, some inmates are released to homelessness.

"It's tough to start when you're on the streets," he said.

But even if the Department of Corrections wanted to pay inmates the minimum wage – as prisons in Poland do – it couldn't afford it.

Oregon's prisons couldn't operate without their underpaid inmate workers.

Without them, "we would have to hire more people," Corrections Department spokesperson Betty Bernt said. "We don't have the resources to do that. That's just not realistic."



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

*OSP contact center manager Bruce Potts (left) stands with inmate Jimmy Kashi (right), who has worked in the contact center for the past four years.*

But if inmates want luxury items, such as toothpaste, they will likely have to work for them. But if they get into trouble, not only are they likely to lose their job, but they also may be fined for misbehaving, which can also eat into their savings.

In 2016, inmates at Oregon state prisons paid \$316,810 in fines they accrued while behind bars. Of that, \$88,960 was for property damage or medical expenses related to an assault, and \$227,850 was for disciplinary fines.

When prisoners are released with little or no savings, it places an additional burden on taxpayers.

"We're paying for it one way or another," Solomon said.

He and re-entry counselor Ciccotelli both agreed that most inmates will need some form of support once they are released.

"According to DOC, about three-quarters of the people in custody have moderate to severe substance abuse issues, yet only a fraction of them receive treatment," Solomon said. "Sex offender treatment is another one. Oregon is a state that doesn't provide sex offender treatment," he said, this, despite Oregon having a high rate of sex offenders.

He also expressed concern about the under-capacity status of the automotive training program at Oregon State Penitentiary.

"There is no reason those programs shouldn't be full, and if they aren't, they should be plucking people from other institutions and bringing them there for the better programs," he said.

He plans to bring this up at the next meeting of the Governor's Reentry Council, on which he sits.

Since it was established in 2007, this council has introduced some productive policy changes to help inmates succeed after their release, he said, such as ensuring they have identification.

There have also been improvements in Oregon's five largest counties, he said. In Oregon, parole and re-entry are handled on the county level, and it's common practice for parole officers, treatment providers and other service providers to connect with inmates before release to make the

transition back into society smoother.

But many rural counties don't have the resources to do this.

"We need to create more equity across the state for services to make sure every person that comes out of prison has transitional housing, has employment services, has treatment, the things that we know make a difference in a person's success," Solomon said.

In the 2017 legislative session, a bill creating a Certificate of Good Standing for inmates will be introduced.

"It's not something someone would get immediately upon release; it would be something that would take time," said Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland).

An inmate would begin to earn the certificate before release and then would obtain it if he or she continued to meet the conditions of parole for a period of time after re-entry. The intention is that having this certificate of rehabilitation would carry weight in the eyes of prospective employers, Dembrow said.

"Is there more work to do? Sure. And clearly there's a lot we could be doing to ensure people success when they get out," Solomon said. "Hell, when you take a look at the recidivism rates with master's degrees, there's a great solution! Give everybody an education. But fiscally, it's a little more challenging."

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