

House File 2129 - Introduced

HOUSE FILE 2129
BY GEARHART

A BILL FOR

- 1 An Act establishing a water and wastewater operator
- 2 apprenticeship and work release pilot program for inmates, and
- 3 making appropriations.
- 4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

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1 Section 1. NEW SECTION. **904.914 Water and wastewater**
2 **operator apprenticeship and work release pilot program.**

3 1. The department, in coordination with the Iowa department
4 of natural resources and Iowa workforce development, shall
5 establish an apprenticeship and work release pilot program for
6 inmates to train and work as certified water and wastewater
7 operators and to meet all of the following goals:

8 a. Address the shortage of qualified water and wastewater
9 operators in the state.

10 b. Provide inmates with meaningful vocational training, work
11 experience, and a pathway to post-release employment.

12 c. Promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.

13 2. An inmate is eligible to participate in the program if the
14 inmate meets all of the following conditions:

15 a. The inmate is serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense.

16 b. The inmate is within twenty-four months of the inmate's
17 earliest possible release date.

18 c. The inmate has participated and demonstrated good behavior
19 in prison programming.

20 d. The inmate meets the minimum qualifications established
21 by the department of natural resources and Iowa workforce
22 development for apprentices in water and wastewater operations.

23 e. The inmate is approved by the department and the board of
24 parole for work release.

25 3. The program shall include all of the following:

26 a. Classroom instruction aligned with the department of
27 natural resources certified water and wastewater operator
28 curriculum.

29 b. On-the-job training with participating municipalities or
30 utilities through registered apprenticeships.

31 c. Supervised work release placements to perform operator
32 duties in a real-world setting.

33 d. Assistance with certification exams and job placement upon
34 release.

35 4. The department of natural resources shall ensure that

1 training and experience obtained through participation in the
2 program qualifies toward the requirements for state certification
3 as a water or wastewater operator.

4 5. The department shall collaborate with the following:

5 a. Municipalities and rural water utilities.

6 b. Community colleges and certified apprenticeship sponsors.

7 c. The department of natural resources and Iowa workforce
8 development for technical guidance and support.

9 d. Employers willing to hire former inmates upon release.

10 6. The department shall submit an annual report to the
11 general assembly by January 15, 2027, and by January 15 each year
12 thereafter, that includes inmate participation, certification
13 rates, employment outcomes, and recidivism statistics for program
14 participants.

15 7. Employers participating in the program in good faith shall
16 be afforded the same liability protections as those currently
17 existing for work release programs and apprenticeships.

18 8. This section is repealed January 16, 2029.

19 Sec. 2. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS — WATER AND WASTEWATER
20 OPERATOR APPRENTICESHIP AND WORK RELEASE PILOT PROGRAM —

21 APPROPRIATION. There is appropriated from the general fund of
22 the state to the department of corrections for the fiscal year
23 beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2027, the following
24 amount, or so much thereof as is necessary, to be used for the
25 purposes designated:

26 For the purpose of implementing and administering the water
27 and wastewater operator apprenticeship and work release pilot
28 program established in section 904.914, as enacted by this Act:
29 \$ 500,000

30 EXPLANATION

31 The inclusion of this explanation does not constitute agreement with
32 the explanation's substance by the members of the general assembly.

33 This bill establishes a water and wastewater operator
34 apprenticeship and work release pilot program for inmates.

35 The bill provides that the department of corrections

1 (department), in coordination with the Iowa department of natural
2 resources (DNR) and Iowa workforce development (IWD), shall
3 establish an apprenticeship and work release pilot program for
4 inmates to train and work as certified water and wastewater
5 operators and to address the shortage of qualified water
6 and wastewater operators in the state; provide inmates with
7 meaningful vocational training, work experience, and a pathway
8 to post-release employment; and promote rehabilitation and reduce
9 recidivism.

10 The bill provides that an inmate is eligible to participate
11 in the program if the inmate: is serving a sentence for a
12 nonviolent offense; is within 24 months of the inmate's earliest
13 possible release date; has participated and demonstrated good
14 behavior in prison programming; meets the minimum qualifications
15 established by DNR and IWD for apprentices in water and
16 wastewater operations; and is approved by the department and the
17 board of parole for work release.

18 The bill provides that the program will include classroom
19 instruction, on-the-job training, supervised work release
20 placements, and assistance with certification exams and job
21 placement. DNR must ensure that training and experience
22 obtained through participation in the program qualifies toward
23 the requirements for state certification as a water or wastewater
24 operator. The department shall collaborate with municipalities
25 and rural water utilities, community colleges and certified
26 apprenticeship sponsors, DNR, IWD, and employers willing to hire
27 former inmates upon release.

28 The bill requires the department to submit an annual
29 report to the general assembly by January 15, 2027, and
30 by January 15 each year thereafter, that includes inmate
31 participation, certification rates, employment outcomes, and
32 recidivism statistics for program participants.

33 The bill appropriates \$500,000 from the general fund of the
34 state to the department of corrections, for FY 2026-2027, to
35 implement and administer the program.

1 The pilot program is repealed January 16, 2029.

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