Growth through Reentry to Advance Careers & Employment (GRACE) 2025 Conference Discussion Paper

Background

On November 20, 2024, the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) three-member Commission conducted a work session to discuss statewide initiatives funded through Fiscal Year 2025 reserve balances. During the work session, the Commission discussed programs for Second Chance individuals, including funding the Growth through Reentry to Advance Careers & Employment (GRACE) Conference for 2025. The Commission directed staff to develop a discussion paper for funding the GRACE Conference.

In 2023, over 32,500 individuals were released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison and state jail facilities (TDCJ Fiscal Year 2023 Statistical Report). Studies have shown that one of the most important factors in preventing recidivism for Second Chance individuals is finding and retaining employment. Further, this population represents an important talent pool for Texas employers that struggle to find quality candidates. There are a number of benefits to employers for hiring second chance individuals, including high job retention rates and employee loyalty, as well as cost savings incentives available through the fidelity bonding and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) programs.

The first GRACE Conference, held in 2022, was attended by 145 people. In 2023, attendance increased to nearly 190 people, and for the 2024 GRACE conference, 204 people attended, showing continued interest in the topic.

Issue

For the past three years TWC has hosted an event for employers, the Growth through Reentry to Advance Careers & Employment (GRACE) Conference, to share information with employers about hiring second chance individuals. The first year was completely funded with donated funds. The next two years, the conference was funded with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) statewide funding, and a registration fee was charged to cover food and beverage costs.

Decision Point

Staff recommends approval of $20,000 in WIOA statewide funds to support a 2025 GRACE Conference to promote hiring Second Chance individuals to Texas employers.