

Reported by Brie Jackson

Maryland Programs Help Prisoners Re-enter the Community (view clip)

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WESTOVER, Md. - Nationwide, nearly 650,000 inmates leave prison each year. In Maryland, the Department of Corrections says roughly half of prisoners get locked up again.

Inmates at the Eastern Correction Institution in Westover make their own clothes, fix cars for state employees and even build furniture for the governor. Correctional officers say the services are all part of the Maryland's re-entry program aimed at preventing inmates from ending up back inside prison.

Inmates at ECI spend hours each day sanding and polishing old furniture, making it look new again, then ship the pieces off to different federal agencies. (Photo: WBOC)

Inmates at ECI spend hours each day sanding and polishing old furniture, making it look new again, then ship the pieces off to different federal agencies. The DOC says the woodshop course is just one of several programs for inmates including

landscaping, cleaning and sewing jobs. Inmates can apply for the jobs once they get their GED. Mark Vernarelli, the DOC's director of information, said the programs help prisoners land on their feet after they are released.

"People who think that inmates should be locked up, throw away the key, and given nothing, don't see the bigger picture which is 95 percent of these inmates are going to be getting out one day," Vernarelli said. "Once the inmates are released, they are going to be our neighbors. We don't want them to be addicted, we don't want them to have issues. We want their behaviors to improve, we want them to have an education so they can be employed and become taxpayers."

Some inmates say the program does have its problems. They say it is difficult to get the job they want.

"The reality of the situation is that they do have programs that can help you, but it's overcrowded, there's too many people," said inmate Orville Nichols. "Everybody wants to be in autoshop, everybody wants to work in the kitchen, everybody wants to work out on the yard."

Staff at ECI say prisoners can make anywhere from \$.85 to \$12 a day.