

# Work limits on freed convicts discussed

By Gregory Korte

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## Officials want to lift barriers to help felons re-enter society

**WEST END** – Ohio's prisons have a program to teach barber and cosmetology skills to inmates, but the state won't give a barber's license to someone convicted of a felony.

That's just one example of how the state often makes it too difficult for convicted felons to return to society, said Reginald Wilkinson, director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.

Wilkinson spoke Saturday to a

summit of social service and criminal justice agencies working to ease the re-entry of the 2,670 state prisoners released back into Hamilton County each year.

Last week, Gov. Bob Taft directed all state departments to examine their employment policies to make it easier for convicted felons to get state jobs, Wilkinson said.

"Some of the barriers in the Ohio Revised Code have no nexus to the crime that was committed," Wilkinson said. "I can understand



Brinkman

if you robbed a bank, we would want a law saying you can't work as a bank teller. I understand if you're a child molester, we wouldn't want you working with

children. But why can't you be a barber?"

All sorts of other state-licensed professions – from accountants to

veterinarians – have some prohibition against convicted felons receiving a license. Even a telemarketer can be barred from employment for a theft offense.

State Rep. Tom Brinkman, R-Mount Lookout, called those laws "stupid," and is supporting two bills that would eliminate them.

"I'm for personal responsibility," he said, "but people do make mistakes and we should give them a second chance."

Saturday afternoon, about 750

people showed up at the Lincoln Recreation Center for a workshop on the barriers that convicted felons have in getting housing and jobs.

One example: child support payments aren't tolled while a convict serves his time, and so the Child Support Enforcement Agency can put a hold on his driver's license.

But without a driver's license, the convict often can't get a job to pay the child support, said Cincinnati Councilwoman Alicia Reece,

who co-chaired the event, sponsored by the Hamilton County Community Action Agency.

Mayor Charlie Luken proposed a one-stop center for re-entering felons to sort out housing, voter registration, Social Security, job training and employment issues.

Luken said it's difficult for the city to redevelop neighborhoods or make them safe until it breaks the cycle of criminal activity.

"It is an economic development issue. It is a public safety issue," he said.

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