

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1566:

Workgroup on Vocational Training and Placement

TO: Hon. Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, and members of the House Health & Government Operations Committee

FROM: Derrell Frazier, Policy Advocate

DATE: March 10, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support House Bill 1566 as a means of increasing the employability and access to vocational training for those incarcerated citizens re-entering the workforce.

The educational and vocational systems operating within most correctional institutions are a key component of rehabilitation. Maryland's mandatory education law requires prisoners to enroll in educational or workforce skills classes: 1) If the individual does not have a high school diploma; 2) If the individual has at least 18 months remaining on their sentence, and; 3) Is not exempt due to medical, developmental, or learning disabilities. Inmates must participate for a minimum of 120 days, but many never complete the program. The many issues surrounding work and vocational programs in prison cause an increase in recidivism. While these issues are inevitably complex, the programs themselves fail to meet the needs of the students participating in those programs. The programs fit into three main categories: prison jobs, short-term vocational training, and placement assistance upon release.

Education and vocational training, specifically obtaining one's GED behind bars, is associated with higher rates of employment after release. Studies have shown that incarcerated citizens who receive a GED upon release recidivate at a rate of 7.9% lower than their counterparts, meaning more productive members of the community. Encouraging inmates to not only participate but complete an educational program is a matter of public safety – empowering returning citizens with an educational foundation to build confidence and secure legitimate job skills.

HB 1566 seeks to require the Commissioner of Correction and the Chief Executive Officer of Maryland Correctional Enterprises to establish and convene a vocational training and placement workgroup for certain purposes. This bill would require the workgroup to study certain issues and make recommendations to Maryland Correctional Enterprises.

JOTF strongly supports this legislation. Therefore, we urge a **favorable** report of House Bill 1566.