

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 397: **CORRECTIONAL SERVICES – DIMINUTION CREDITS – EDUCATION**

TO: Chairman William Smith, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
FROM: Korey T. Johnson, Esq., Senior Policy Researcher – Job Opportunities Task Force
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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 Senate Bill 397 as a means of increasing the employability of job seekers with criminal records.

The educational and training systems operating within most correctional institutions are a key component to successful re-entry. Maryland's mandatory education law requires incarcerated individuals 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.

Currently, incarcerated persons, except for those serving a sentence for a crime of violence, sexual offenses, or kingpin drug offenses, can earn up to thirty (30) diminution credits per month for being enrolled in an educational program but there is no incentive for completing the program.

In reward those who are steadfast in their commitment to higher education or learning a skill, Senate Bill 397 would establish a 90-day diminution credit bonus to be awarded to those who earn their GED or high school diploma, complete a literacy skills program, post-secondary certificate or degree, or a college degree.

Education, specifically obtaining one's GED behind bars, is associated with higher rates of employment after release. Studies have shown that inmates who have a GED when released from prison recidivate at a rate that is 7.9% less than inmates overall, meaning fewer victims and more productive members of the community. Encouraging inmates to not only participate, but complete an educational program is a matter of public safety – replacing criminal behavior with an educational foundation to build confidence and secure legitimate job skill.

Many other states have recognized the benefits associated with educational attainment behind the fence. According to the Secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections, the increase in inmates earning a GED or vocational certificate behind bars appears to be a factor in Florida's decreased recidivism rates. By passing this legislation, Maryland will join 13 other states in offering diminution credit bonuses for educational achievement. Therefore, we respectfully urge a **favorable** report of Senate Bill 397.