



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 397 -- CORRECTIONAL SERVICES - DIMINUTION CREDITS - EDUCATION

February 10, 2021

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

POSITION: Support

Senate Bill 397 authorizes a one-time diminution credit of 90 days to reduce the term of confinement of an inmate who successfully obtains a certificate of completion for a technical or vocational training program, a State High School Diploma by Examination, a high school diploma, an associate degree or a bachelor's degree. Senate Bill 397 would also prohibit the diminution credits to be given to individuals who are serving sentences associated with certain sexual offenses.

Each year in Maryland, approximately 36,000 people are incarcerated at a cost of more than \$1 billion per year according to an analysis by the Justice Policy Institute and the Vera Institute of Justice. When these individuals are released from incarceration, they face a myriad of challenges, including a lack of affordable housing, legal challenges, health issues, and the inability to meet basic needs, such as clothing and food. Securing meaningful employment is one of the greatest challenges faced by returning citizens, and in many ways, the most important to overcome. According to the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center, formerly incarcerated individuals who obtained employment and earned higher wages shortly after their release were far less likely to reoffend during the first year than those who did not.

One of the best ways to ensure that someone is successful upon release from incarceration is to provide education and skills training during incarceration, or "inside the fence." Program analysis performed by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy indicate strong positive outcomes for individuals who participate in correctional education and vocational training programs. Their benefit-cost analyses show a return on investment of almost \$10 for every \$1 spent on basic correctional education with a jump to \$19 for every \$1 spent in post-secondary correctional education. Many programs currently exist in Maryland, including job training through Maryland Correctional Enterprises, educational programming through the Goucher Prison Education Partnership, and other programs run by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. However, incarcerated individuals do not always take advantage of the programs available to them.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is committed to supporting policy proposals that have the potential to increase public safety and help returning citizens avoid recidivism. To address this important issue, the GBC created the Coalition for a Second Chance, a group of experts from the public and private sectors charged with examining barriers to employment for those returning to society from a period of incarceration, as well as other policy issues tied to reentry to these individuals. In December 2016, the Coalition for a Second Chance published a report, *Opening Doors to a Second Chance*, focused on improving job prospects for returning citizens and ensuring their success after leaving incarceration. The report concluded that education attainment is a major barrier for workers with a criminal record seeking jobs.

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Senate Bill 397 seeks to incentivize incarcerated individuals to take advantage of the educational programming offered to them by granting one-time diminution credits if the inmate successfully obtains either a certificate of completion from a technical or vocational training program, a high school diploma or diploma by examination, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree. If successful, this incentive could have a meaningful impact on improving inmates' ability to enter the workforce upon release.

Additionally, Senate Bill 397 is consistent with the GBC's *2021 Legislative Priorities*, which encourage policymakers to "improve public safety through enhanced coordination among criminal justice agencies, implementation of comprehensive violence reduction strategies, and coordinated re-entry services."

For the reasons stated above, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report of Senate Bill 397.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 66-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.