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HB0092 - REAP Act - INFORMATION

As a result of the 2021 FASFA Simplification Act, the Pell Grant was restored to Incarcerated Individuals beginning officially on July 1, 2023. As with any Federal program, this change came with a lot of specific requirements, which I will not detail in full. Instead, I would like to highlight several points that show the need for a in-depth conversation regarding the administrative processes that currently exist and how to build on the existing infrastructure to serve the goals of this bill without creating duplicate work or clashing with Federal requirements.

1. Incarcerated Pell Grant applicants utilize the same FASFA application that any other student would. They already receive assistance from the higher education partner that manages their program, and this information is collected and tracked. Data exists within the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) and Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) that is collected pursuant to the Federal requirements, and need only be mined in order to populate DPSCS' Offender Case Management System (OCMS). This would make it accessible and useful for the purposes of a public dashboard, legislative reports, and services provided by case managers, correctional educators, the Parole Commission, and other DPSCS staff that utilizes that system.
2. The FASFA Simplification Act requires the individual state's Department of Correction, in our case DPSCS, to have oversight of higher education programming along with other specified partners. It is not allowable to task the Department of Labor with this.
3. DPSCS already has a Director of Correctional Education whose office is responsible for this, and this is the appropriate office to collaborate with regarding this important data.
4. Maryland created the Maryland Advisory Committee on Prison Education Programs (MACPEP) about a year ago in order to perform some of the tasks required by the US Department of Education. That advisory committee is inclusive of the DPSCS Correctional Education office, MHEC, Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), and impacted individuals. While young, this advisory committee along with representation from MLDS would be in the best position to devise an administrative solution that make sure the

necessary data is copied into the right places to be useful to data analysts, legislators, decision makers, correctional education staff, and incarcerated individuals.

The REAP Act addresses an important issue of making sure people are informed and able to make the best decisions in order to improve correctional education outcomes. While the administrative portions as written do not mesh well with current administrative procedures, which have been developed to meet US Department of Education requirements, this is not a good reason to abandon this important effort. Instead, a conversation should be held with the MACPEP, a solution that works for all involved parties should be devised, and funding should be allocated to creating a pathway to transmit the data from MHEC and MLDS into the DPSCS OCMS system, whether that be an IT solution or a data entry staff solution, and utilize that data to review and improve correctional higher education outcomes.