



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
House Bill 92 – Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act
January 23, 2024
Favorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the committee, thank you for allowing the University System of Maryland (USM) the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 92.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of University USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

House Bill 92 requires the Department of Public Safety and Services (DPSCS) to set goals for the number of inmates in rehabilitation programs and establish a tracking system. More importantly, the bill seeks to assist inmates in accessing federal Pell Grants for higher education.

In response to the growing societal needs of cities across the state and nation, the USM Board of Regents began to explore the development of an expanded prison education program to provide Maryland inmates with educational opportunities while incarcerated; give them hope and employment opportunities following release; reduce recidivism; save the State of Maryland money; and grow enrollment.

In fall of 2022, an exploratory group, led by Regents Bill Wood and Robert Hur and Chancellor Jay Perman, began collecting information from higher education institutions with established prison education programs, including the University of Baltimore, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of [expanding prison education programs within the USM](#). Chancellor Perman announced the formation of a workgroup with representatives from USM institutions, the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, MHEC, and the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to explore the potential benefits of such a program.

The USM stands ready to partner in this effort to improve access for inmates in prisons to pursue higher education and in fact has been working in this space to continue expanding educational opportunities. USM's efforts, coupled with the power of The Second Chance Pell Program, led by DPSCS, offer a real opportunity for inmates to receive federal funding to enroll in postsecondary programs at colleges and universities. Maryland is unique in the number of higher education institutions to provide services to incarcerated individuals. House Bill 92 expands the Program to allow more inmates to participate and earn a postsecondary degree.

We applaud the sponsor and the legislature in their efforts in supporting this legislation.



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