



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 92: Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act

TO: Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair and members of the Appropriations Committee
FROM: Karen "Candy" Clark,
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland Criminal Justice Lead
DATE: January 23, 2024

Good Afternoon, Chairman Barnes and the House Appropriations Committee members,

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry asks for a favorable vote for **HB 92 Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act**. This bill aligns with our first principle; to honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people; which of course includes those behind the prison walls. I'm sure we all agree that the ultimate goal of prison is to have those behind the walls successfully reintegrate into their communities. Unfortunately, many are forced to resort to criminal acts in order to survive because they have not increased their skill sets due to lack of rehabilitative treatments in prison. In Maryland, 40% of those released from prison return within three years! The rate keeps climbing with time—at five years it's 76.6%. Calculating that the average cost to house a prisoner is \$38,000 per year, this is a costly and unproductive outcome.

It is extremely challenging for a returning citizen to successfully reintegrate back into one's community. Studies have shown that **rehabilitation and education** are the most effective means to lower our recidivism rates. Years ago, our prison systems had a robust educational system involving Pell Grants from the Federal Government. This helped people get decent jobs, so they had a better chance of having sustainable employment. After Congress banned the Pell Grants for prisons in 1994, the climate became more hostile, and the recidivism rate rose.

The research by the Abell Foundation of Maryland's correctional system resulted in a report which advocated for strengthening the correctional educational program. To help motivate and give recognition to those trying to improve their education level, a few years ago a bill was passed that provided diminution credits for reaching specific educational goals like earning a GED or higher-level course work. It required that peoples' educational history be kept in their records and was to provide prison teachers a competitive salary to attract more teachers.

Both the Rand and Ford Foundations stress investing in rehabilitation/educational programs for prisoners to ensure a better chance of success. In past years, both the Trump and the Obama administrations invested in pilot educational programs which produced positive results. Consequently, with this bill the Federal Department of

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Education. is expanding the Pell Grant Program to offer aid to 64% of Federal and State prisons!

THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY NOT TO BE MISSED. IT'S A WIN-WIN SITUATION.

The Correctional Department is charged to work with the inmates to access Federal Grants in connection with Maryland colleges. The Department along with the Department of Human Services will work together to establish correctional rehabilitation and educational programs and engage in a relationship between higher-level Maryland colleges and prisons. Reporting and tracking methods will be included in gathering data which will support accountability.

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry asks your support to honor our returning citizens' dignity and worth by Voting Yes for HB 92.

Respectfully submitted

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