



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB092
Resources and Education for All Prisons
(REAP) Act
Appropriations Committee
January 19, 2024

Position: Favorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Derrick Whiting, and I am honored to present favorable testimony for HB 92, also known as the "Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act." This legislation represents a crucial step towards enriching educational opportunities for justice-impacted individuals. HB 92 mandates the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to assist incarcerated individuals in accessing federal Pell Grants for higher education, offering a multi-faceted approach that empowers

individuals with the knowledge and skills crucial for successful reentry into society while concurrently reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

As a returning citizen and an Appointed member of the Baltimore City State Central Committee, Legislative District 40, I am deeply committed to initiatives that positively impact justice-involved individuals and their families. I proudly serve as the founder and Executive Director of the Flowers Whiting Initiative; an organization collaborating with community service providers and families to leverage existing resources and provide community-based outreach to those affected by criminal justice involvement.

Reflecting on my personal journey, my Uncle Rodney Whiting serves as a powerful inspiration. Incarcerated for most of the '80s and '90s, he chose to pursue education while in prison. Following his release, he earned a master's degree from Coppin State College (now the University) and has not returned to prison. His success vividly illustrates the transformative power of education and reentry support.

After my period of incarceration, I pursued education at the University of Baltimore, majoring in the Human Services Administration program. During my time at the University of Baltimore, I became aware of a similar initiative through the U.S. Department of Education's Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Sites Initiative. University of Baltimore, is among 67 other institutions nationwide,

selected to offer post-secondary correctional education programs through federal Pell Grant funding. The program, situated at Jessup Correctional Institution, aims to provide education to incarcerated students, reducing the likelihood of recidivism, and improving educational and employment outcomes upon release.

While I personally have not benefited from such programs, I bear witness to countless individuals who have. The impact of education and reentry support is immeasurable, creating pathways for individuals to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society. This initiative is crucial in breaking the cycle of recidivism and fostering positive outcomes. Expanding the implementation of this initiative in Maryland would greatly enhance the quality of life in several ways such as reducing recidivism, empowering community contributions, strengthening the workforce, saving costs, and positively shaping public perception.

Through higher education and reentry support, individual like myself and my peers can have a positive impact on our lives, our families, and not just the Baltimore community but the entire State of Maryland. I wholeheartedly request your favorable report on House Bill 92, as it aligns with the mission to enhance educational opportunities for justice-impacted individuals. This bill holds the promise of contributing to a safer and more prosperous community while providing meaningful change and opportunities for those seeking a second chance.

With Kindest Regards,

Derrick Whiting