



RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT NOTE

DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES
MARYLAND ▪ GENERAL ▪ ASSEMBLY

2026 Session
HB0438

Adult Prison School Board Model Development Committee

Bill Summary

This bill establishes the Adult Prison School Board Model Development Committee to develop a comprehensive plan, with specified elements, for a school board system to oversee correctional education (CE) for individuals subject to the criminal and juvenile justice systems, as well as a fiscal mapping project examining the needs to sustain the school board system. The committee is required to submit an interim report of findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on or before June 1, 2027, and a final report on June 1, 2028.

Racial Equity Impact Statement

The bill's establishment of the Adult Prison School Board Model Development Committee may be beneficial to incarcerated individuals in their preparations for reentry into the community to the extent that the committee addresses existing challenges in the State's correctional education system. Any programmatic improvements as a result of the committee's comprehensive plan are likely to benefit Black inmates to the greatest extent, since they are overrepresented in the incarcerated population. The findings and recommendations of the committee may also aid in future equity analyses of correctional and vocational education programs.

Analysis

The bill specifies that the comprehensive plan submitted by the committee must include (1) educational standards aligned with educational standards for school systems in the State and (2) a recommendation for the school board to be made up of individuals who are residents of the State and who represent various State agencies and professional backgrounds as specified.

The fiscal mapping project must examine the needs and options necessary to sustain a school board system, including (1) examining funding sources; (2) determining funding levels required for specified purposes; and (3) developing an independent relationship with the Department of Budget and Management to establish and manage capital and operating budgets.

In the correctional space, an adult school board refers to the governing or oversight body for adult education programs offered within prisons or jails, though the exact title can vary by state or system. Its role is similar to school governance in the grade school context, as it provides curriculum oversight, instructional standards, accreditation, and program administration for adult learners who are incarcerated.

Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission

Chapters 945 and 946 of 2024 and Chapter 110 of 2025 established and subsequently extended the Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission, which must (1) convene an advisory stakeholder group, as specified; (2) work with the advisory stakeholder group, including conducting roundtable discussion forums seeking public input in all geographic regions of the State; (3) develop an education-focused statewide framework of policies to invest in strategies to increase public safety and reduce recidivism of adult offenders, using a data-driven approach; (4) research best practices for the primary, secondary, postsecondary, and career or vocational education of those who are subject to the criminal and juvenile justice systems; (5) identify measures to mitigate risk factors that contribute to adult contact with the criminal justice system, with a focus on education; (6) evaluate current workforce programs and their effectiveness, as specified; and (7) request technical assistance from specified organizations. The commission completed an interim report of its work thus far in June 2025. Under Chapter 110, the commission must submit an interim report of its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly by June 1, 2028, and a final report by January 1, 2029.

In October 2025, the commission approved a set of recommendations for 2026, including (1) creating a plan for a school board system to oversee adult correctional education that includes various State agencies and (2) conducting a fiscal mapping project for correctional education with an interdepartmental strategic plan.

Current Educational Infrastructure in the State Carceral System

Many individuals entering the criminal justice system have gaps in their academic and occupational skills that put them at higher risk for recidivism post-release. To mitigate the consequences of these knowledge and experiential gaps, Maryland has several entities and programs housed within the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) aimed at providing educational and vocational opportunities to incarcerated individuals, such as (1) the Correctional Education Council (CEC); (2) the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL); (3) the Programs, Treatment, and Re-entry Services Unit; (4) the CE program; (5) the CE Transition program; and (6) Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE).

Correctional Education Council

CEC, under the joint jurisdiction of MD Labor and DPSCS, works to develop and recommend educational and workforce training programs for adult correctional institutions in the State and must meet the special needs and circumstances of the inmates in each correctional institution.

Maryland Department of Labor

DWDAL oversees correctional education throughout Maryland's State correctional facilities. DWDAL's Office of Correctional Education (OCE) provides career training opportunities including training in automotive skills, barbering, construction, and welding. Similar to other programs, all occupational courses lead to a portable, industry-recognized credential that contributes to an incarcerated individual's employability after release. In addition to occupational programming, OCE oversees academic and transitional courses throughout Maryland's correctional facilities. Academic programming includes GED preparation ahead of earning a Maryland high school diploma and English as a second language courses. Prior to release, incarcerated individuals may complete transitional courses to ease their reentry into society. These offerings include classes in parenting, employment readiness, financial literacy, and life skills.

The CE program offers occupational programs with nationally recognized certifications, societal reentry programs, and operates full-time and satellite libraries across the State that host reentry workshops and support professional learning. The CE Transition Program, which provides transition services and classes for students preparing to return to the community, achieved 1,387 professional certificate completions statewide in fiscal 2025.

In fiscal 2025, MD Labor served 3,110 correctional education students, 330 earned a high school diploma, and 383 earned an adult basic literacy certificate. GED pass rates were 84% in fiscal 2025, about 10% above the national average.

Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

The Programs, Treatment, and Re-entry Services Unit provides comprehensive pre-release planning for those currently under DPSCS supervision by offering professional and occupational training as well as postsecondary educational programs in partnership with various colleges and universities statewide. In 2024, DPSCS signed a memorandum of understanding with the University System of Maryland to offer courses and classes to incarcerated individuals seeking a bachelor's degree and credit-based certificates. DPSCS has collaborated with the following colleges and universities to provide educational programs to incarcerated students: Anne Arundel Community College; Bowie State University; Georgetown University; Goucher College; Hagerstown Community College; Towson University; and the University of Baltimore.

MCE describes itself as the Division of Correction's self-funded vocational training arm, and provides structured training and work programming designed to improve participants' employability upon release, enhance safety and security, and produce quality goods and services while remaining financially self-supporting. In fiscal 2024, 1,150 participants worked in 26 MCE-operated business units across 10 State correctional facilities, which offered training through production activities such as furniture manufacturing and restoration, printing and graphics, textiles and sewing, license plate production, computer-aided design, warehousing, and

distribution. These operations allow participants to develop both technical trade skills and workplace “soft skills” while producing goods primarily for government and nonprofit customers.

Challenges in Correctional Education

The Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission’s 2025 report identifies numerous structural weaknesses in Maryland’s correctional education system that limit participation, effectiveness, and post-release outcomes. Key issues include declining enrollment and completion rates, limited incentives and resources for education programs, staffing and facility constraints, and poor coordination and data tracking across agencies. The report also highlights barriers that prevent incarcerated individuals from translating education and training into employment after release.

Conclusion

While the bill’s establishment of the committee does not have *measurable* equity impacts, the comprehensive plan that would be developed by the committee for the State’s correctional education infrastructure could have future impacts on incarcerated individuals. To the extent that the committee’s plan is implemented and it improves the correctional education infrastructure and outcomes in the State, Black inmates would likely benefit to the greatest extent due to their overrepresentation in the carceral system.

Information Sources: Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Maryland Department of Labor; Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission; Department of Legislative Services

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Appendix – Maryland Demographics

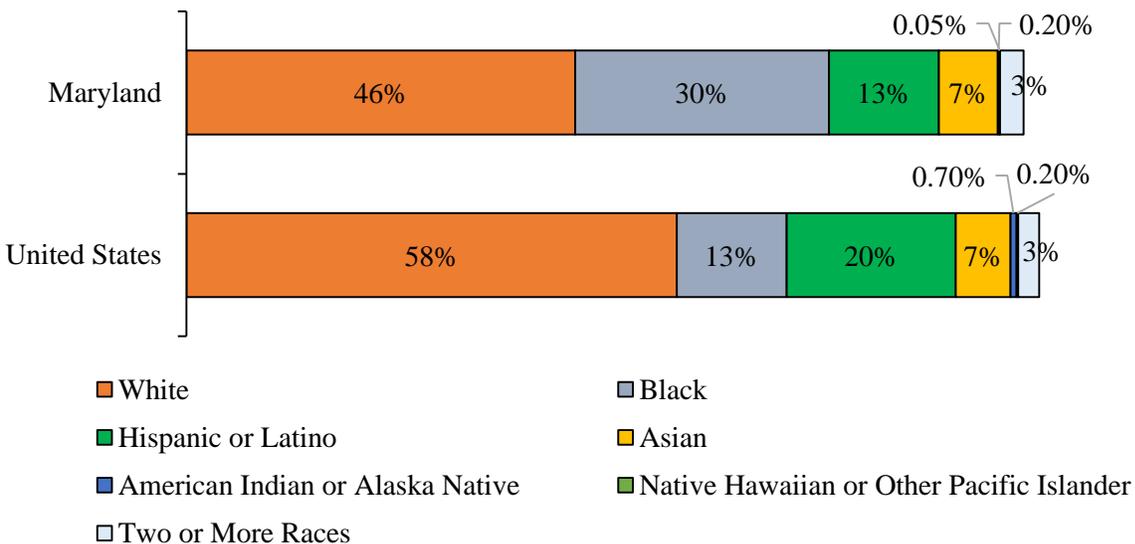
Race and Ethnicity of the Maryland Population

Maryland’s 2020 census population is 6,177,244, a 7% increase from the 2010 census count and approximately 2% higher than the 2019 census population estimates. Maryland remains one of the most racially and ethnically diverse states in the nation and is ranked as the fourth most diverse state by the U.S. Census Bureau’s [Diversity Index](#). While no single racial or ethnic group constitutes a majority, racial minorities as a group constitute a majority of the State’s population. This diversity underpins the analytical framework used in racial equity impact notes (REIN), which seek to identify potential disparities that may be exacerbated or created by proposed criminal justice legislation.

Methodology Update

Beginning in 2025, REIN will use annual population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Population Estimates Program (PEP) as the basis for disparity and disproportionality calculations. This methodological update reflects best practices in demographic analysis, as PEP data incorporate births, deaths, and migration to provide the most current population counts between censuses. Although the estimates are more temporally responsive, they do not materially change the proportionate racial and ethnic breakdown observed in the 2020 census. Instead, they conservatively reflect population changes since 2020 while preserving the overall demographic composition of the State.

**U.S. and Maryland Population by Race and Ethnicity
2024 Population Estimates**



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau