
Senate Bill 70

Date: January 30, 2020
Committee: Senate Finance
Bill Title: Correctional Education – Changes in Mandatory Education Requirement
Re: **Letter of Support**

Senate Bill 70 increases the mandatory schooling requirement for non-exempt inmates from 120 calendar days to 240 calendar days, or until a Maryland High School Diploma is achieved.

The 120 correctional education calendar days outlined in statute includes weekends, holidays, and lockdowns, which results in approximately 80-90 days of actual instruction. Due to varying levels of literacy and numeracy among Maryland's inmate population, many inmates are unable to achieve a High School Diploma within 120 calendar days.

Senate Bill 70 aligns Maryland law with the Federal Bureau of Prisons mandatory school requirement, which stipulates 240 days of attendance. With an increase to 240 calendar days, the Department estimates an increase to approximately 160-180 days of in-class instruction. This increased instructional time will ensure appropriate preparation for the GED test, better prepare inmates for sustainable employment, and promote reentry upon release.

The Maryland Department of Labor (Department) provides oversight of academic, occupational, and transitional programming throughout prisons in the State of Maryland. Maryland's academic Correctional Education programs have some of the highest adult education outcomes in the State when compared to other providers and students achieve more when they remain engaged in school for longer periods of time. Of the 524 inmates under the age of 21 served in FY19, only 55 received their High School Diploma and many opted out of school after the required 120 calendar days.

Data proves that the Department's Correctional Education courses are effective, but additional time would lead to increased success. In FY19, 41% of Adult Basic Education students enrolled in academic programming at correctional institutions were at Levels 1 and 2 (the lowest assessed measure). However, level-completion rates for these students were 57.2% and 55.6%, significantly higher than the State average of 45.2% and 41.8%. Increased instructional time will allow such students to continue onto Levels 3 and 4 and prepare for the GED test.

Senate Bill 70 will increase participation in programming, limit inmate idle time, and promote successful reentry to society. **For these reasons, the Department respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee on Senate Bill 70.**