



SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Senate Bill 800

Inmate Training and Job Act of 2021

March 9, 2021

Favorable with Amendment

Andrea Cantora

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Good Afternoon Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my views regarding Senate Bill 800. My name is Andrea Cantora and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Baltimore in the School of Criminal Justice. I am also the director of the Second Chance Program. On June 26, 2016, the University of Baltimore (UB) was selected to participate in the U.S. Department of Education's Second Chance Pell Grant Experimental Sites Initiative. UB's program is being offered at Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI), a maximum-security prison for men. As of the spring 2021 semester we have 48 students who will study toward a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services Administration degree. While taking courses at JCI students receive academic support from UB faculty and staff, community volunteers, and their incarcerated peers. I support the intent of SB 800, but request the following amendments to continue to ensure the success of incarcerated students.

I do not support the delivery of virtual vocational or educational programming in prison settings. In our experience the most effective method is to deliver programming in-person. Students living in prison benefit from the community-based learning that takes place in the classroom setting with other students and faculty present. In-person learning allows for human interaction (such as connectivity, role modeling, and mentoring) that is absent in virtual programs. Since August 2020 our prison education program has been delivered virtually. We have been using video conferencing to allow our faculty to lecture and deliver course material to a group of 15 students in the prison education space. Students (only 15 allowed in one room due to COVID safety guidelines) gather around one TV monitor to attend a virtual lecture. This was the mode of delivery set up by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Our students have struggled with this mode of delivery due to the inability to receive one-on-one support such as tutoring, academic advising, and reentry counseling. Pre-COVID, these support services and all lectures took place in-person for a total of 25 hours each week. Students were able to have individual tutoring and advising with staff. Reentry counseling also took place one-on-one to ensure confidentiality of student needs. Students who were struggling with coursework were easily identified and targeted for tutoring support. I recommend changing the



current language in section 24-1303 (C) (1) to “Courses provided under this section shall be provided through in-person formats, or hybrid if COVID restrictions are still in place.”

In section 24-1302 B, the pilot program should not be restrictive to serving those in the last 9 months of a sentence or parole date. Assuming some pilot programs may offer certificates or training that may take longer than 9 months to complete, and the fact that release/parole dates are not always clearly known, I recommend changing this to 18 months – 24 months. I strongly recommend that pilot program mentors be awarded diminution credits for their participation. In SB800 it states that “A student who participates in the pilot program shall receive course credit and a small stipend from the pilot program.” I recommend that the mentors receive diminution credits for this special project (see: 2016 Maryland Code Correctional Services Title 3 - Division of Correction Subtitle 7 - Diminution Credits § 3-707. Diminution credits -- Special projects).

Lastly, I request that the University of Baltimore is added to the public higher education institutions involved in the Pilot Program. The University of Baltimore has been educating students at Jessup since 2016 and would like to be involved in the Pilot Program. These proposed amendments would improve the experience of incarcerated students. I urge the committee to adopt these amendments. Thank you.

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