
Senate Bill 800

Date: March 9, 2021
Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Bill Title: Inmate Training and Job Act of 2021
Re: Letter of Information

SB 800 establishes the “Inmate Training and Job Pilot Program” within the Maryland Higher Education Commission. MD Labor oversees several offices and initiatives that are duplicative of items proposed in this bill, including the American Job Centers, Reentry Navigators, Office of Correctional Education, and the education tablet initiative.

Senate Bill 800 proposes the creation of an MHEC-administered telephone hotline for counseling and job coaching and an “Individualized Plan” to assist with finding a job post-release. MD Labor already fulfills this purpose through its 30 American Job Centers and 5 Reentry Navigators who work to connect pre-release inmates with specialized employment services. The AJCs provide services across the State, including virtual services, such as job search and job placement assistance, resume writing workshops, and career counseling. Jobseekers are encouraged to direct general inquiries about AJC services to a dedicated phone number and email address, both of which are regularly monitored by AJC staff ready to assist. Reentry Navigators assist individuals with criminal backgrounds by increasing their employability, providing equal access to resources, making employment referrals, and sharing information and incentives with businesses who hire returning citizens. While working with a Navigator, jobseekers create an Individualized Employment Plan outlining career goals and steps towards finding a job. If needed, the Navigators refer customers to partner organizations to assist with housing, food security, and more.

Through the Office of Correctional Education, MD Labor offers academic, occupational, and transitional programming within the prisons across the State. The department currently offers 25 different career training opportunities, all of which lead to a portable, industry-recognized credential. Academic programming includes GED preparation ahead of earning a Maryland High School Diploma. Transitional programming includes classes in parenting, employment readiness, financial literacy, and life skills.

Remote instruction is challenging at State correctional facilities due to extremely limited internet access and technology. Recognizing the value of virtual learning, the Department has partnered with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to establish an Educational Tablet initiative. The program began in 2017 and has since expanded to 8 prisons with 87 tablets total. The departments are working to dramatically expand the initiative in 2021 through a competitive procurement process. At this time, the tablets can only be used for MD Labor Correctional Education programming.

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