



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE  
*Office of the President*

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Senator Obie Patterson  
Twenty-Sixth Legislative District of Maryland (PG County)  
The Maryland General Assembly  
James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street # 201  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support for Returning Citizen and HBCU Bill (SB800)

Dear Senator Patterson:

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) writes to lend our support for the Returning Citizen and HBCU Bill (SB800) which is scheduled to be presented before Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee on March 9, 2021 and which we are excited to be part of.

Research evidence shows that postsecondary education transforms life, imparts responsibility, increases chance of better gainful employment, improves quality of life, and strengthens family cohesiveness. This is true of mainstream society, and most importantly with incarcerated inmates. As the saying goes, "an idle mind is a devil's workshop", so for the inmates, prison education occupies idle mind, boosts morale, conveys sense of belonging, keeps hope alive for better future upon release and restores some lost dignity thereby enhancing behavior modification toward better and safer prison management.

Up until about 2007, UMES ran a successful inmate undergraduate education program at Eastern Correctional Institution (ECI) and graduated several students who upon release made use of their degree to become gainfully employed. To this end, we see this pilot program as a hopeful venture based on our experience. It will also be an investment in the future of the society at large as it will greatly reduce recidivism in the community. Our previous program died when the funding dried up and the grant was not renewed. We, therefore, cannot be more elated if this similar program is reinstated.

We appreciate your initiative and are totally in support of your efforts towards advocating for this pilot program. The best aspect of the proposal is that it is a virtual program, as such UMES will play its own part to ensure its success if funded. We have the faculty and student manpower

to support it especially with the extra virtual and online experience we have acquired with the COVID-19 total shut down of face-to-face learning in Maryland.

Please count on our Hawk support and we will be glad to help in any way the program requires of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Heidi M. Anderson".

Heidi M. Anderson, PhD, FAPhA  
President



Natasha C. Pratt-Harris, MS, PhD  
Associate Professor & Criminal Justice Program Coordinator  
Dept of Sociology, Anthropology, and (Criminology/Criminal Justice)  
Morgan State University  
1700 East Cold Spring Lane  
Baltimore, MD 21251  
443-885-3506

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 800: Inmate Training and Job Act of 2021**

TO: Office of the Honorable Senator Obie Patterson – *Deputy Majority Whip* Twenty-Sixth  
Legislative District of Maryland | Prince George's County

FROM: Dr. Natasha C. Pratt-Harris  
Title: Associate Professor and Criminal Justice Program Coordinator  
DATE: March 5, 2021

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1337: Inmate Training and Job Act of 2021**

TO: Office of the Honorable Delegate Susie Proctor, Prince George's and Charles Counties

FROM: Dr. Natasha C. Pratt-Harris  
Title: Associate Professor and Criminal Justice Program Coordinator  
DATE: March 5, 2021

**Dr. Natasha C. Pratt-Harris** is an associate professor and coordinator of the Criminal Justice program in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and (Criminology/Criminal Justice) with Morgan State University. She has published in the peer-reviewed *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies* and the *Journal of Human Behavior for the Social Environment* (JHBSE). Her scholarship began nearly 30 years ago where she has examined the experiences of Black males in higher education and the criminal justice system. Black men, women, and children have been disparately represented in both.

Dr. Pratt-Harris is an expert, educator, and a resident of Maryland, from Baltimore city. In addition to her professional experiences, she has a lived experience engaging with men women, and children in the family, classroom (students and colleagues), and community. One of the most endearing experiences she has had is within collaborations with colleagues at Bowie State University, Coppin State University, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Morgan State University and in the District of Columbia, with Howard University. Her pedagogical, scholarly, and service approach has centered around HBCUs working together to address the needs of the community.

Together with Dr. Jacqueline Rhoden-Trader, Associate Professor and Criminal Justice Chair at Coppin State University, and Dr. Bahiyyah Muhammad Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminology, at Howard University, Dr. Pratt-Harris has brought the community to the classroom and the classroom to the community. During the Fall 2021 semester the three professors will lead the fourth Baltimore-cohort of Policing-Inside Out. This three-credit course is offered to students at the three institutions and allows for community members and police officers to earn continuing education credits with HBCU students together during a semester long course that is used to address crime and police-community relations. Collaborations such as these are necessary and impactful and can be effective for men, women, and children in detention.

Dr. Pratt-Harris supports SB800 and HB 1337 because she has acknowledged, in nearly three decades worth of work, educational opportunities should be the great equalizer. The opportunity, however, is thwarted due to the disparate experiences of Black people who are disproportionately under criminal justice supervision, which includes their disparate representation as jail/ prison inmates. Black people are vulnerable not only to contact within the criminal justice system but have had disparate access to educational and training opportunities. The sheer possibility of detention, coupled with disparate access to a college education and training, lessens the life chances, quality of life opportunities, and the diversity in exposure, skill training, etc. for detainees.

Dr. Pratt-Harris notes that disparate contact within the criminal justice system is not limited to persons who have not accessed educational or training opportunities but also persons who have yearnings to achieve a college degree and/or certifications so that they can be competitive. Both groups should be offered a chance at these opportunities if they are incarcerated. Empirical evidence supports the notion that with more educational and training opportunities, recidivism rates improve and men, women, and children who were once incarcerated achieve.

Dr. Pratt-Harris fully supports SB 800 and HB 1337, is looking forward to collective work statewide, and acknowledges one caveat of problems that has gone under the radar but is addressed by this bill. If a college student or an apprentice finds him/ or herself in detention the opportunity to continue their studies and/or their training is often thwarted. This bill provides the continuation of learning and the opportunity for a student to graduate even if they are detained.

*Dr. Natasha C. Pratt-Harris*