

Support SB 194– Labor, training and education

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Will Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: February 4, 2021

Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR-www.ma4jr.org) supports SB 194 for its very thoughtful approach to some of the problems central to reentry and recidivism.

The four main parts of this good bill include:

- 1) The minimum wage requirement for imprisoned Marylanders' labor – and its related provision that deduction may not be made for housing, food and clothing.
- 2) The requirement to offer “all inmates who wish to participate” job training for “marketable” skills in coordination with labor and trade organizations.
- 3) The requirement to offer education including financial literacy, civics and post-GED course.
- 4) And, maybe most importantly, DPSCS is called to file an annual report with statistics as to all the job training and education modules offered and the numbers of inmates completing these in the prior calendar year.

MAJR recognizes that the minimum wage requirement could be the bill's most costly aspect and could impact the overhead and cost of Md. Correctional Enterprises (MCE) products. With or without the full minimum wage level increase, the rest of the bill should be approved. Even if the 2021 COVID-budget doesn't allow such an immediate and substantial increase from the current pennies-per-hour, the concepts of increasing pay and permitting some savings to accumulate are extremely valuable. What if, at the time of release, a returning citizen had enough savings to put down a deposit and first month's rent on his own apartment? What if she could afford to enroll in a CDL truck-driving program? Such resources would provide a positive alternative to begging for family help or recidivism into illegal employment.

Marketable job-training for all prisoners and seeking outside organizations' support also is long overdue. MCE follows these guidelines but, per most recent years' reports, MCE serves only about 10% of the prisoner population. Yet, nearly all returning citizens would benefit immensely from such training.

The benefits of prison education are well-known as a potent, evidence-based tool for reducing recidivism by as much as 40%.

However, the statistics of exactly how many GEDs, other educational degrees and marketable skill certifications are not readily made available to the public or to legislators. See DPSCS's “research and statistics” webpage -- which makes no reference to such statistics: <https://www.dpscs.state.md.us/publicinfo/publications/statistics.shtml> . This is precisely the type of information that legislators should obtain in order to actively review Maryland prisons' efforts to reduce recidivism.

For all these reasons, Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) urges a favorable report on SB 194.

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PLEASE NOTE: Phil Caroom offers this testimony for Md. Alliance for Justice Reform and not for the Md. Judiciary.