



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