

Support HB 1245 – corrections -labor, training & education

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM
Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Luke Clippinger - House Judic. Com.
FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee
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Md. Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR-www.ma4jr.org) supports HB 1245 for its thoughtful approach to some problems central to reentry and recidivism. The four main parts of this good bill include:

- 1) The minimum wage requirement for imprisoned Marylanders' labor – which could enable prisoners to pay restitution and to earn “nest-egg” funds needed for reentry when released;
- 2) The requirement to offer all inmates education and 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 courses.
- 4) And, maybe most importantly, DPSCS is called to file an annual reports with statistics as to all the job training and education modules offered and the numbers of inmates completing these in the prior calendar year, with triennial reviews and recommendations for improvement by the Md. Department of Labor.

MAJR recognizes that the minimum wage requirement could be the bill's most costly aspect; it could impact prison 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 FY2023 COVID-era budget doesn't allow such an immediate and substantial increase from the current minimal pay, 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, even in pre-COVID years' reports, MCE served only about 10% of the prisoner population. Yet, nearly all returning citizens would benefit immensely from such training. Even if not directly related to employment, the benefits of prison education are well-known as a potent, evidence-based tool for reducing recidivism by as much as 40%. E.g., <https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-training-and-employment-for-correctional-populations/>

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 HB 1245.

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