



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

1

Testimony in Support of HB 25 – Rehabilitation and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act

TO: Chairman Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark, Lead Advocate, Criminal Justice Reform
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.

DATE: February 1, 2021

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry asks for a favorable vote for HB 25 – Rehabilitation and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act. The goal for our prisons is to be a consequence for those who disobey the laws which are meant to keep people safe and perpetuate a just society. After release, the intent is to have them successfully reintegrate into their communities; yet many repeat criminal acts and return. In Maryland 40% of those released from prison returned within three years. And the rate keeps climbing with time—at five years it’s 76.6%! Calculating that the average cost to house a prisoner is \$38,000 per year, this is a costly and unproductive system; a failed industry.

So how does one serve a sentence and then reintegrate successfully into his/her community?

Studies have shown that rehabilitation and education are the most effective means to lower our recidivism rates. Our prison systems used to have a robust educational system based on Pell Grants from the Federal Government. This helped people get decent jobs so they had a better chance of having sustainable employment after they are released. After Congress banned the Pell Grants for prisons in 1994, the climate became more hostile, and the recidivism rate rose.

In the past, the Abell Foundation’s research of Maryland’s correctional system resulted in a report which advocated for strengthening the correctional educational program. Our MGA passed a bill last year that offered recognition diminution credits for reaching specific educational goals like earning a GED or higher level course work. They advise that peoples’ educational history be kept in records and giving prison teachers a competitive salary to attract more teachers.

Both the Rand and Ford Foundation stress investing in rehabilitation/educational programs for prisoners to ensure a better chance of success. Recently, both the Trump and the Obama administrations invested in pilot educational programs which produced positive results. Consequently this year 2022-23, the Federal Department of Education will expand the Pell Grant Program to give aid to 64% of Federal and State prisons!

UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,

www.uulmmd.org info@uulmmd.org www.facebook.com/uulmmd www.Twitter.com/uulmmd

HB 25 is a “smart about crime bill”. It calls for our State Department of Education and Department of Human Services to work together to establish correctional rehabilitation and educational programs and work in relationship between higher-level Maryland colleges and prisons.

The Department is charged to work with the inmates to access Federal Grants in connection with Md colleges. Accountability, reporting and tracking methods will be included in gathering data.

THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY NOT TO BE MISSED. IT'S A WIN-WIN SITUATION.

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry seeks compassion, equity and justice which their second principle calls for to give our fellow citizens an opportunity to make a successful new life.

Please support HB 25.

Respectfully submitted

Karen Clark

UULM-MD Criminal Justice Lead

UULM-MD c/o UU Church of Annapolis 333 Dubois Road Annapolis, MD 21401 410-266-8044,

www.uulmmd.org info@uulmmd.org www.facebook.com/uulmmd www.Twitter.com/uulmmd