

David W. Hornbeck
731 Colorado Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Senators and Delegates,

I write in support of HB 416. During my tenure as Maryland's State Superintendent of Schools in the 1980s, we persuaded Governor Hughes to support the transfer of responsibility for correctional education from the Department of Corrections to the Maryland State Department of Education. Frankly, it was a pretty easy sell. Corrections prioritized safety. If there is an extra dollar in the Corrections budget, not surprisingly, it generally supported security and safety features of corrections. Education was an afterthought. By moving corrections education to MSDE, it was accorded higher status. Given the serious decline in our prison system, it is time to reassess how education is provided in Maryland's correctional institutions and who is responsible for it.

Recent research underpins the societal and financial benefits of correctional education. The RAND Corporation concluded that prison education significantly lowers ex-offender recidivism and provides a very substantial return on our tax dollars (1). While providing substantial society benefit it also reduces recidivism and makes positive changes in the lives of former offenders, their families and the community.

In years past, Maryland did much better than it does now. There are many devoted state employees in the Correctional Education Program now run by the Department of Labor (DOL), but the actual number of teachers has dropped and the number of academic and vocational program student completions has declined significantly in the last 20 years. The Abell Foundation 2017 study of students illustrates some of the numbers (2,3). Even though the inmate population had doubled between 1982 in 2017, we were not serving larger numbers of inmate students. While roughly half of the current state prison population does not have a high school diploma, few of them leave prison having completed high school. There are currently significantly fewer teachers in the state facilities than there were two decades ago. This is a classic example of shortsightedness.

The annual GED completion numbers dropped from a high around 1000 in fiscal year 2000 to less than 500 in fiscal year 2017. During COVID the number dropped to 0 (ZERO) in 2020 and 2021. In 2022 only 173 GEDs were awarded. In the last four years waiting lists for school have skyrocketed with the passage of legislation to increase mandatory school attendance for those without high school completion to 18 months. Unfortunately, many people who were court mandated to complete their GED have not been attending school. According to the 2017 Abell study of Maryland's prisons, only 15% of inmates participated in education in 2016. Unfortunately, the researchers were not able to obtain much more detail from the correctional system (DPSCS and DOL) about the educational

programs to evaluate the overall quality and effectiveness for those students who do participate.

In the early 1990s there were around 1,000 people in Maryland prisons attending college. Maryland has never provided state funds to prisoners for post-secondary education. As a result, with the federal abolition of Pell grants for inmates in 1994, the number of college students behind bars dropped abruptly. In the last two decades, Goucher College started its own privately funded program and more recently Georgetown University has initiated classes as well without Pell grant support.

During President Obama's administration experimental Pell grant funds became available. Several universities and colleges were awarded Pell grants and started additional programs. These included the University of Baltimore, Anne Arundel Community College, Wor-Wic Community College and Goucher College. For 2023 Morgan State University, the University of Maryland Global Campus, Hagerstown Community College and Georgetown University have applied for and received Pell Grant approval by the US Department of Education. These classes can begin after July 1, 2023.

The emergence and growth of so many post-secondary institutions providing classes has created a conundrum. There may not be enough eligible students. Since most Maryland inmates do not have a high school diploma and many received their GED with a score below the college readiness level, the college programs will be competing for a restricted number of students. The Correctional Education Program in DOL is the agency authorized to prepare students for post-secondary academic and career education programs. The DOL GED completion levels are at an historically low level. Additionally, there is little or no formal coordination between the Correctional Education Program and the various colleges and universities able to provide classes.

The state of Maryland correctional department is now confronted with two major problems: low numbers of students who complete secondary school and the lack of a formal mechanism to plan and coordinate with the growing number of universities and colleges approved to provide post-secondary classes. There are many state agencies that should be involved - The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, the Department of Labor, the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the aforementioned colleges and universities.

How can this problem be properly addressed? The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) endorses HB416 sponsored by Delegate Marlon Amprey. HB416 creates a Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission to research and evaluate the current educational and job training programs and make recommendations on how to coordinate and improve the coordination among DPSCS, DOL and MSDE and the many colleges and universities authorized to use Pell grants. It also recommends the development of an individualized

data collection and tracking system for prison students. A number of other ideas for a Commission to consider have been proposed in a 2020 Educational Testing Service publication (4).

It is time to improve the educational outcomes of Maryland prisoners to enhance public safety and, subsequently, to save on the costs of future incarceration. We can provide quality instruction to more incarcerated inmates to discover their capabilities and become productive citizens. There is no reason men and women cannot leave prison equipped with up-to-date skills, diplomas and certificates to succeed and become tax-paying citizens and parents. Maryland will save money because of less crime and improve the tax base as more people enter the job market with credentials for well-paying jobs. I wholeheartedly recommend the Appropriations Committee to approve HB416.

Respectfully submitted,

David Hornbeck
Former Maryland State Superintendent of Schools
Founder, Strong Schools Maryland

References

1. The RAND Corporation conducted the research that proved the connection between education participation while incarcerated and the drop in future recidivism with its 2014 study *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education*. RAND has conducted additional research in 2018 which further confirmed and refined the conclusions of the 2014 study.
2. The 2017 report of the Abell Foundation identifies the untapped potential of correctional education in Maryland to improve criminal justice outcomes. That report, *Prison Education, Maximizing the Potential for Employment and Successful Community Reintegration*, recommended an enhanced incentive system. HB416 encourages an improved planning system and authorizes the creation of just such an incentive system.
3. The 2017 report of the Abell Foundation identifies the untapped potential of correctional education in Maryland to improve criminal justice outcomes. That report, *Prison Education, Maximizing the Potential for Employment and Successful Community Reintegration*, recommended an enhanced incentive system. HB0294

encourages an improved planning system and authorizes the creation of just such an incentive system.

4. In 2020 Educational Testing Service Center for Research and Human Capital and Education published a comprehensive report *How to Unlock the Power of Prison Education* on prison education in the United States and made a number of recommendations for the improvement of educational program delivery.