



## Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

### Testimony in Support of HB 416: Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act

TO: Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair and members of the Appropriations Committee  
FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark,  
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland Criminal Justice Lead  
DATE: February 21, 2023

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry asks for a favorable vote for **HB 416: Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act**. This bill aligns with our first principle; to honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people; which of course includes those behind the prison walls. The intent of prison is to have them successfully reintegrate into their communities after they are released. Yet, after they serve their time, many repeat criminal acts in order to survive and wind up right back where they started. In Maryland, 40% of those released from prison returned within three years! 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 outcome.

It is extremely challenging for a returning citizen to successfully reintegrate back into one’s community. Studies have shown that **rehabilitation and education** are the most effective means to lower our recidivism rates. Years ago, our prison systems had a robust educational system involving Pell Grants from the Federal Government. This helped people get decent jobs, so they had a better chance of having sustainable employment after they were 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. Last year our MGA passed a bill that offered diminution credits for reaching specific educational goals like earning a GED or higher-level course work. It required that peoples’ educational history be kept in records and gave prison teachers a competitive salary to attract more teachers.

Both the Rand and Ford Foundations stress investing in rehabilitation/educational programs for prisoners to ensure a better chance of success. In past years, both the Trump and the Obama administrations invested in pilot educational programs which produced positive results. Consequently, the Federal Department of Education. is expanding the Pell Grant Program to give aid to 64% of Federal and State prisons!

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

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

[www.uulmmd.org](http://www.uulmmd.org) [info@uulmmd.org](mailto:info@uulmmd.org) [www.facebook.com/uulmmd](https://www.facebook.com/uulmmd) [www.Twitter.com/uulmmd](https://www.Twitter.com/uulmmd)

The Correctional Department is charged to work with the inmates to access Federal Grants in connection with Maryland colleges. The Department will also join with the Department of Human Services to work together to establish correctional rehabilitation and educational programs and engage in a relationship between higher-level Maryland colleges and prisons. Reporting and tracking methods will be included in gathering data which will support accountability.

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry asks your support to honor our returning citizens dignity and worth by Voting Yes for HB416.

Respectfully submitted

*Karen Clark*

UULM-MD Criminal Justice Lead

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