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HBo416 - REAP Act - SUPPORT

As a parole advocate and a returning citizen, I know that nothing is more important to reentry success than education, vocational skills and cognitive programming. In fact, PREPARE operates on the principle that a successful reentry begins at intake, and that success is created when an individual is guided through their incarceration with an eye to positive growth, development of self-efficacy and person-centered treatment and programming. But building individualized plans requires the right programming in the right places so the right people have access - and that means we need to map the current landscape of resources, assess the needs of the population, and then use that information to maximize the use of existing resources in each case.

The restoration of Pell Grants to incarcerated people is bringing an influx of higher education opportunities to Maryland prisons. Changing social views on the purpose of incarceration is reshaping the correctional system with a range of programming designed to deliver strong, productive returning citizens. An unprecedented amount of money is being invested in rehabilitation and reentry infrastructure. This is good and needed, but Maryland needs to make the best possible use of all its resources. That means investing in evidence-based, data-driven, and result-focused systems. It means ensuring that different colleges, programs and State departments collaborate rather than compete. The first step is gathering, analyzing, and studying the data necessary for effective strategic planning. This data collection is precisely what the REAP Act is designed to do.

Today there is no way to find out what cognitive programming is operational at each correctional facility. Just having an up-to-date resource map would make DPSCS Case Manager and Reentry Coordinator jobs easier, more efficient and more effective. It would revolutionize the way PREPARE and other non-profits guide our clients to success, but the REAP data would do more than that. It would allow community providers to see where the gaps exist in the system and create volunteer programs to fill them. It would allow DPSCS to see where it is investing its limited resources and how well-utilized they are, then make changes to fill classrooms and get people the help they need rather than whatever class is there. It would allow everyone to review results and do more of what works and less of what doesn't.

People who receive an education while incarcerated are 43% less likely to be arrested for another crime,¹ yet in Maryland, incarcerated people simply aren't earning GEDs, and by extension, are not able to access the college programs that have become so prevalent. There are many valid reasons why GED completion has plummeted over the past decades, including teacher shortages, process and eligibility issues that hinder registration or remove students from programming prior to completion, and lack of specialized education for people with learning disabilities, who make up about a quarter of the prison population.² With so many potential problems, it is necessary to study the problem and strategically plan solutions that deliver the greatest increase in service delivery and positive outcomes at the lowest costs. Only data will be able to identify the biggest barriers to GED completion, and only data will inform us on how to best overcome them.

The REAP Act doesn't cost a lot of money, but the data it will produce will allow Maryland to save a lot of money by efficiently delivering the necessary resources and returning productive citizens to the community. The new Administration considered reentry services to be part of Unlocking Opportunity, and truly they are. Over 95% of incarcerated people will return to the community someday, and we have the opportunity to invest wisely in them now and receive a positive contribution from them in return. The data the REAP Act collects is the key.

¹ [Trump Could End Second Chance Pell Grants for Prisoners | The Marshall Project](https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/03/28/the-uncertain-fate-of-college-in-prison)
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² [Disabilities Reported by Prisoners - Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016 \(ojp.gov\)](https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/drpspi16st.pdf)
<https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/drpspi16st.pdf>