



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 416:
Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act**

TO: Chair Ben Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica, Policy Advocate

DATE: Friday, February 17, 2023

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. **JOTF supports House Bill 0416 as a means of improving employment prospects of incarcerated individuals and of promoting successful reentry and rehabilitation.**

Formerly incarcerated individuals face immense obstacles in their reentry, including barriers to employment that affect many other aspects of life, including the ability to afford child support, healthcare, and basic necessities. These obstacles could be partially ameliorated through education, which is why JOTF supports House Bill 416.

Prison educational programs are cost-effective investments. Research shows an 13% increase in post-release employment for those who participate in prison education programs, and a 43% reduction in recidivism. A University of California study found that for every \$1 invested, taxpayers save \$5 in re-incarceration costs during the first three years post-release due to the lower recidivism rate. Benefits extend to individuals receiving education, who are more likely to have lower unemployment and improved health outcomes, as well as to the families they support and the communities they are part of upon reentry.

Higher education programs are often out of reach financially for many, and especially more so for low-income individuals, including incarcerated persons. However, the expanded availability of Pell grants to this population now allows for greater flexibility and access. Pell grant revisions and other scholarship opportunities are now available for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, reducing the cost of pursuing postsecondary education credentials. But often, incarcerated persons do not know how to access these materials, or even that they are available. JOTF specifically lauds the bill's provision to connect students to these funding opportunities, and to create best practices for doing so by consulting with institutions of higher education best poised to advise on this matter.

JOTF further supports bill provisions around collecting data on the number of participants in jail and prison education programs, as a means of determining the impact of educational programs. For these reasons, **we urge a favorable report on House Bill 416.**

For more information, contact:

Ioana Stoica / Policy Advocate / ioana@jotf.org / 240-643-0059