

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment - HB416

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We are seeking your favorable support from the Senate for HB0416 (Resources and Education for All Prisons). REAP contains important educational tracking and data collection requirements for incarcerated individuals. We also ask the Senate to include an amendment for a Commission to study the Maryland correctional education delivery system. Why is this amendment important? In the last 20 years there has been a precipitous drop in the number of

incarcerated men and women who enroll in school and attain a high school diploma and/or career vocational certifications for well-paying jobs.

A few administrations ago, in a politically motivated action, the Correctional Education Program was moved from the Maryland State Department of Education to the Department of Labor and Licensing (now the Department of Labor). While there are probably many reasons for the steep drop in program completions, the drop is now a matter of public safety. RAND Corporation research in 2014-2018 has shown education participation significantly reduces recidivism and future crime returning \$5.00 in reduced criminal justice costs for every \$1.00 investment. (1)

Around the year 2000, the Correctional Education Program at MSDE annually produced about 1,000 high school diplomas and over 2,000 career certificates. Under DOL those annual figures dropped significantly after the transfer from MSDE. (2)(3) In 2017, before the COVID crisis, the number of GEDs had fallen to 493 and then in 2018, to 432. By 2019 GED Completions were down to 238. At the height of the COVID crisis, for each year, 2020 and 2021, the number of high school diplomas was ZERO. In 2022, GEDs were back

up to 171. Similar starkly low numbers of completions are true for other education programs such as career certifications.

With the imminent return of Pell grants for incarcerated individuals in 2023 about 10 colleges and universities have been approved by the US Department of Education to provide post-secondary education in Maryland prisons. Unfortunately, the DOL Correctional Education Program has not been preparing enough incarcerated students to meet minimum standards for college entry. A large majority of the approximately 18,000 individuals in Maryland prisons either do not have a high school diploma or have not scored high enough on the national GED exam for college entry. Their reading and math skills are too low to successfully matriculate into post-secondary academic or career technology programs.

We need a Commission to study this massive failure and recommend solutions. Raising the educational and career skills of returning citizens is not only an economic and educational problem but a matter of public safety.

We hope to obtain your support and vote to move this bill forward. The new Governor's office supports the idea of a Commission in HB416. We also have

Strong Schools Maryland and various civil rights groups behind us and hope the Senate will support REAP with this important amendment as well.

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