



Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1057:
Correctional Services - Inmates - Labor, Job Training, and Educational Courses**

TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica, Policy Advocate

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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 1057 as a means of improving employment prospects of incarcerated individuals, of promoting successful reentry and rehabilitation, and of protecting workers' wages.

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 1057.

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.

The average reading level of the 19,332 incarcerated persons currently in the Maryland prison system is between 5th and 8th grade. Additionally, less than half of these persons have a high school diploma when they enter the correctional system. Empirical studies have shown that there is a symbiotic relationship between education and crime. The National Center for Education Statistics identifies that there is an inextricable connection. Specifically, states with higher levels of educational attainment also have crime rates lower than the national average. States with higher college enrollment rates experience lower violent crime rates than states with lower college enrollment rates. Education, specifically obtaining one's GED behind bars, is associated with higher rates of employment after release. Studies have shown that incarcerated persons who have a GED when released from prison recidivate at a rate that is 7.9% less than incarcerated persons overall.

JOTF also supports paying workers for their work; currently, when Correctional Enterprises employs incarcerated persons to maintain the prison or jails that are dehumanizing them, they pay criminally low wages. According to Worth Rises' report, "The Prison Industry- How it Started. How it Works. How it Harms", there are 67,000 incarcerated people working for government correctional industries at an average wage range of \$0.00 - \$0.63 while correctional industries rake in over \$14 billion from lost or stolen wages. In FY2019, according to their annual report, Maryland Correctional Enterprises had over \$52 million in sales with 1,516 inmates working 2.4 million hours per year. From 2.4 million hours of work, inmates collectively earned \$2.7 million in pay, yielding an average hourly wage of \$1.13. The disparity between sales and pay is abysmal: MCE's sales in FY2019 were 21 times the pay to its incarcerated workers.

JOTF supports fully compensating MCE employees for their skilled labor, and also supports the expansion of training and educational opportunities. For the aforementioned reasons, **we urge a favorable report on House Bill 1057.**

For more information, contact:

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