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March 27, 2024

TO: The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair, Appropriations Committee

FROM: Adam Spangler
Legislative Aide, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: Senate Bill 620 - Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act
Favorable

The Office of Attorney General urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 620 sponsored by Senator Jill Carter. This bill requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to assist individuals in its custody in accessing federal Pell grants for higher education.

A Pell grant is a federal grant given to individuals who display exceptional financial need to attend a postsecondary institution of higher education. Under most situations, a Pell grant does not need to be repaid. The Pell grant is available to all qualified incarcerated individuals to further pursue post-secondary education, however, the majority of incarcerated individuals in correctional institutions in the State are unaware of what Pell grants are and how they can be beneficial to them both while incarcerated and in their communities.

Senate Bill 620 further requires the DPSCS to set goals for the number of inmates in education programs and to establish tracking systems relating to the number of inmates and their progress in education programs. Finally, Senate Bill 620 requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission to assist DPSCS in establishing progress tracking systems. Providing individuals

incarcerated in our correctional system with an education is one of the best ways to ensure individuals returning from prison successfully reenter their communities and avoid recidivism. The return on this educational investment not only benefits the formerly incarcerated, but also taxpayers who would otherwise have to support the incarceration of recidivists.

Senate Bill 620 brings together the necessary government agencies to provide educational wrap-around services and supports for incarcerated individuals and individuals reentering their communities after a term of incarceration.

For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 620.

cc: The Honorable Jill Carter
Appropriations Committee Members