



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB0620 – Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP)
Act
Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
On February 28th 2024

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 0620 requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) to assist incarcerated individuals in accessing federal Pell grants. SB0620 also ensures that these resources are being properly utilized by establishing tracking systems in relation to the number of incarcerated individuals in these programs as well as their respective progress with their completed college credit counts. This bill was introduced last session as HB0416 and was passed in Judicial Proceedings and Education, Energy, and the Environment with amendments, so this bill is a reintroduction of HB0416 with the amendments included.

SB0620 makes education far more accessible and equitable for one of our most in-need of population groups, those currently incarcerated. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, 25% of formerly incarcerated people are without a high school diploma, GED, or college degree. Concurrently, almost half of people with at least two arrests on their record have an income below \$10,000, with that group also having a 15% unemployment rate. Homelessness is also rife within this group,

with a rate of 570 people per 10,000 being homeless, compared to the general population's rate of 21 per 10,000. And what's the strongest predictor of recidivism? Poverty and homelessness.

The strongest way to prevent recidivism is through preventing poverty, and the strongest way to prevent poverty in formerly incarcerated individuals is through education and rehabilitation while they are currently in the prison system. Currently in Maryland there isn't much help, namely correctional education programs, for incarcerated people to be rehabilitated. Therefore, after serving their sentence, they go back into society without any tools to stop themselves from re-offending. 40.5% of formerly incarcerated individuals in Maryland re-offend within three years of finishing their sentence, ranking Maryland in the top 25% of recidivism rates in the US according to the Virginia Department of Corrections.

The prevalence of recidivism in Maryland also only serves to perpetuate our mass incarceration problem. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, Maryland has an incarceration rate of 531 per 10,000, which is below the national average of 664 but five times that of a *country* like the United Kingdom, with black people being incarcerated at 5.3 times greater a rate than white people. As of 2015, Maryland spent roughly \$45,000 per inmate, whereas federal Pell Grants, on average, being at \$4,500. It simply does not make economic sense to continue to let people re-enter the prison system when far better solutions exist, including in SB0620.

As such, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 0620. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Jill P. Carter