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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL SB 620**  
**Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act**  
*Education, Energy, and Environment and Finance Committees*  
**February 28, 2024**

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 620**, which will require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to assist incarcerated individuals in accessing federal Pell Grants for higher education, require the Maryland Department of Labor to have set goals of incarcerated individuals in education programs, establish tracking systems on the amount of incarcerated individuals and their progress in education programs, and forward data to the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

**SB 620 aligns with the social work core values of social justice, and dignity and worth of a person.** This bill will provide resources and supports to help incarcerated individual overcome some of the barriers they face through access to education. Moreover, the programs proposed in this bill provide a reparation for the labor that incarcerated individuals provide for the furniture in the University System of Maryland, and is a cost-effective approach to workforce development.

**SB 620 would enhance an incarcerated person's right to an education.** A research study titled "Prison, College, and the Labor Market: A Critical Analysis by Formerly Incarcerated and Justice-Impaired Students," demonstrates the need for more inclusive education programming for those that are incarcerated as education policy tends to focus more on reducing recidivism rates, which is barrier for those that are in the system. The bill can also incentivize enrollment for colleges by using the Pell Grants as a recruitment strategy, establish a culture of encouragement and engagement will be fostered in correctional facilities, and allow incarcerated individuals to be equipped and prepared for a highly competitive labor market.<sup>1</sup>

1. Quach, K., Cerda-Jara, M., Deverux, R., & Smith, J. (2022). Prison, College, and the Labor Market: A Critical Analysis by Formerly Incarcerated and Justice-Impacted Students. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 701(1), 78-97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162221112772>
2. Delegate Young, et al. (2023). *Correctional Services - Maryland Correctional Enterprises - Minimum Wage and Inmate Financial Accounts*. Department of Legislative Services. [https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2019RS/fnotes/bil\\_0003/hb1123.pdf](https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2019RS/fnotes/bil_0003/hb1123.pdf)
3. Hogan, J. (2021, February 5). *Bill would require minimum wage pay for Maryland inmates*. NBC4 Washington. <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/bill-would-require-minimum-wage-pay-for-maryland-inmates/2563185/>
4. Burke, L. (2020, February 13). Public universities in several states are required to buy from prison industries. *Inside Higher Ed | Higher Education News, Events and Jobs*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/14/public-universities-several-states-are-required-buy-prison-industries>
5. Bent, S. (2023, November 20). Investing in prison education: A cost-effective approach to workforce development and economic growth. IAWP. <https://iawponline.org/investing-in-prison-education-a-cost-effective-approach-to-workforce-development-and-economic-growth/>

**SB 620 will be a source of reparation for the free and cheap labor that incarcerated individuals contribute to the University System of Maryland through Maryland Correctional Enterprises.** In a NBC4 Washington report, for voluntary prison employment and training, those that are incarcerated can make as little as \$0.17. The starting pay scale for incarcerated individuals for unskilled positions from \$2.16 to the state minimum wage, which is currently \$15.<sup>3</sup> The University System of Maryland and other state public university systems are mandated by the state to use correctional enterprises for their source of furniture and a bill like this would allow incarcerated individuals to benefit from the fruits of their labor.<sup>4</sup>

**SB 620 is a cost-effective approach to workforce development and would help reduce recidivism.** In their report titled, “Investing in prison education: A cost-effective approach to workforce development and economic growth,” the International Association of Workforce Professionals found that the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with over 2.2 million people behind bars and the direct costs of incarceration are estimated to be over \$180 billion per year. To reduce the costs of incarceration, the conditions of those incarcerated should improve. Prison education programs have been found to reduce recidivism rates, increase employment rates, increase employment wages, and improve cognitive skills, social skills, and self-esteem. It also increases the labor supply, reduces the skills gap, and reduces employer reliance on temporary and low-wage workers. A 2018 study found that for every dollar invested in prison education programs, taxpayers pay between \$2.50 and \$5.00 in reincarceration costs.<sup>5</sup>

This bill will give access and investment to individuals that are incarcerated that are seeking rehabilitation and professional development when they re-enter society. **Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 620.**

*Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.*

1. Quach, K., Cerda-Jara, M., Deverux, R., & Smith, J. (2022). Prison, College, and the Labor Market: A Critical Analysis by Formerly Incarcerated and Justice-Impacted Students. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 701(1), 78-97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162221112772>
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