

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 620

Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act

TO: Hon. Brian J. Feldman, Chair, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Job Opportunities Task Force

DATE: February 28, 2024

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 Senate Bill 620 as a means of improving employment prospects of incarcerated individuals and of promoting successful reentry and rehabilitation.**

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 care services, healthcare, and other basic necessities. These obstacles could be partially ameliorated through education, which is why JOTF supports Senate Bill 620.

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 rates and improved health outcomes, as well as to the families they support and the communities they return to upon reentry.

Higher education programs are often out of reach financially for many, and especially more so for low-income individuals, including incarcerated persons. However, the expanded availability of Pell grants to this population now allows for greater flexibility and access. Pell grant revisions and other scholarship opportunities are now available for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, reducing the cost of pursuing postsecondary education credentials. But often, incarcerated persons do not know how to access these materials, or even that they are available. JOTF specifically lauds the bill's provision to market the existence of these programs to the populations who need them the most, and to create best practices for doing so by consulting with institutions of higher education best poised to advise on this matter.

JOTF further supports bill provisions around collecting data on the number of participants in jail and prison education programs, as a means of determining the impact of educational programs. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 620.

For more information, contact:

Kam Bridges / Senior Public Policy Advocate / Kam@jotf.org