



**HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**  
**Senate Bill 623**  
**Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission**  
**March 21, 2024**  
**Favorable with Amendment**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 623. The bill establishes the Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission, staffed by the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP). In the crossfile version of Senate Bill 623, House Bill 209, the USM respectfully requested an amendment to insure that the Chancellor, or their designee, is at the table with other educational leaders.

**On page 2, after line 19 of the amended bill:**

**(IX) the Chancellor of the University System of Maryland, or the Chancellor’s designee;”**

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor’s degrees in the State. Each of University USM’s 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country’s largest public online institution.

In response to the growing societal needs of cities across the state and nation, the USM Board of Regents began to explore the development of an expanded prison education program to provide Maryland inmates with educational opportunities while incarcerated; give them hope and employment opportunities following release; reduce recidivism; save the State of Maryland money; and grow enrollment.

In fall of 2022, an exploratory group, led by Regents Bill Wood and Robert Hur and Chancellor Jay Perman, began collecting information from higher education institutions with established prison education programs, including the University of Baltimore, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of [expanding prison education programs within the USM](#). Chancellor Perman announced the formation of a workgroup with representatives from USM institutions, the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, MHEC, and the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to explore the potential benefits of such a program.

The USM stands ready to partner in this effort to improve access for inmates in prisons to pursue higher education and in fact has been working in this space to continue expanding educational opportunities.

For example, the US Department of Education designated Bowie State University (BSU) as a Second Chance Pell Grant Awardee through their Experimental Site Initiative, which allows incarcerated individuals the opportunity to receive Federal Pell Grants to participate in postsecondary education and training programs. BSU is one of only four HBCU's nationally to offer a four-year degree program to incarcerated citizens. Currently, there are 19 students at the Jessup Correctional Institution participating in restorative justice courses as part of a curriculum that seeks to address the whole student.

USM's efforts, coupled with the power of the Second Chance Pell Program, led by institutions like BSU and the University of Baltimore, offer a real opportunity for inmates to receive federal funding to enroll in postsecondary programs at colleges and universities. Maryland is unique in the number of higher education institutions to provide services to incarcerated individuals.

Thank you for allowing the USM to offer our support for Senate Bill 623.

