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HB0289 - DPSCS - Incarcerated Individual Apprenticeship Program - Support

At PREPARE we offer parole education and support and pre- and post-release reentry planning and coaching to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals and their families across Maryland. Our programs bridge the gap between pre-release and the community by connecting with individuals who are within 1 year of a parole hearing or mandatory release. We offer PREPARE for Home holistic pre-release reentry planning, and then a PREPARE for Success Reentry Coach follows up post-release to provide ongoing peer support and navigation services. The Apprenticeship Program would be a fantastic benefit to our clients and help them reach their goals of successful reentry and long-term stability in the community.

Currently, there is an employment gap for most individuals during reentry. This is driven by several factors, including that work release opportunities are limited in by spaces and location; vocational training opportunities are limited by sentence, security level, and location; and the current Maryland Department of Labor Apprenticeship programs don't enroll incarcerated individuals. People who aren't able to participate in work release often leave prison with \$50 cash, a trash bag of property, a list of appointments, and no job prospects. Only then are community organizations and the Maryland Department of Labor Reentry Navigators able to work with them in earnest - but it is too late. Unless the individual has family or a subsidized reentry program, they are in a dire situation.

The Incarcerated Individual Apprenticeship Program tackles this problem head on with a low-cost, high-value solution. Building upon existing work release infrastructure, which today usually connects people with dead-end, minimum wage jobs, this program opens the door to living wage, career jobs. It affords the incarcerated individual the opportunity to save money for housing, transportation and other necessities of release. The specific inclusion of State and Local government is a particularly useful one, as Baltimore Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) currently operates a small, unskilled Behind the Walls (BTW) program through Parks and Recreation in collaboration with DPSCS at MCIW and BCCC. The directive to prioritize skilled trades could shape and strengthen this program and others like it.

This program is a win for everyone involved - DPSCS, the incarcerated individual, the employers, the Department of Labor, and the State. With a cost of about \$200K per year, it is income generating when the taxes paid by participants and the reduction in recidivism is considered. The only thing that would aid the implementation of this bill would be the inclusion of the Department of Labor Workforce Development Department. They would provide important employer connections for apprenticeship opportunities, tailored to the local labor market needs, and pre-release access to post-release local job placement. I urge a favorable report.

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