



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

House Bill 1311

Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals –

Alterations

March 11, 2026

Favorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 1311. The bill requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to assist incarcerated individuals in accessing both federal and state student financial assistance and ensures that individuals who meet eligibility requirements are able to receive this aid. It also directs DPSCS to work collaboratively with the Maryland Higher Education Commission and institutions of higher education – including all University System of Maryland (USM) institutions – to facilitate access to Pell Grants and state financial aid programs.

The University System of Maryland (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 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.

House Bill 1311 strengthens Maryland's commitment to educational equity and successful community reintegration and builds upon the USM's leadership as a national model for higher education in correctional settings. In 2024, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and the USM entered into the [nation's first agreement](#) between a state corrections division and an entire public university system, establishing a comprehensive framework to deliver Prison Education Programs in every Maryland state correctional facility. Through this systemwide partnership, incarcerated Marylanders are gaining the opportunity to earn bachelor's degrees and credit-bearing certificates from any of the twelve USM institutions, supported by federal Pell Grants, with curricula designed to meet the needs of justice-involved learners and structured pathways for continued education or workforce entry upon release.

USM institutions already play a direct and meaningful role in educating incarcerated students. Bowie State University, Maryland's first historically Black public university, offers a [full Bachelor of Science in Sociology](#) and an optional certificate in entrepreneurship inside the Jessup Correctional Institution – the first four-year HBCU degree program available to incarcerated Marylanders.

The University of Baltimore operates a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services Administration at Jessup Correctional Institution, and Towson University will launch a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies at the Maryland Correctional Training Center in Hagerstown beginning in Fall 2026.

Additionally, the USM recently secured a [\\$4.1 million Ascendium grant](#) to expand these statewide prison education efforts, creating regional hubs and providing annual grants to institutions and partners working to support incarcerated learners and returning citizens.

These ongoing initiatives reflect a clear and demonstrated commitment to student success – regardless of circumstance. Meaningful rehabilitation requires more than confinement; it requires structured access to education, advising, tutoring, career preparation, and the opportunity for individuals to re-think and transform their trajectories. As data consistently show, higher education access within correctional facilities reduces recidivism, strengthens families, and produces long-term benefits for communities.

The USM urges a Favorable Report on House Bill 1311.

