

**Appropriations Committee; and Government, Labor and Elections Committee
Testimony on HB1311: State Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals
Testimony on HB1313: Higher Education – Tuition Exemption – Incarcerated Students
March 11, 2026
SUPPORT**

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Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the Appropriations Committee; Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor and Elections Committee:

My name is Thomas Anderson, and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of HB1311 and HB1313, which expand access to higher education for incarcerated students in Maryland.

I offer this testimony both as the Executive Director of Manumission House, a Baltimore-based nonprofit organization that supports justice-impacted individuals pursuing higher education, and as someone whose life was personally transformed by higher education while incarcerated.

I spent 22 and a half years incarcerated, serving a life sentence. During that time, I had the opportunity to begin my college education while still inside prison. Becoming a college student fundamentally changed the direction of my life. Education gave me the tools to reflect on my past, develop discipline and responsibility, and begin envisioning a productive role for myself in society.

Higher education programs in prison do more than provide academic instruction. They help individuals develop critical thinking skills, improve decision-making, and prepare for successful reintegration into the community. Education helps incarcerated individuals begin to see themselves not simply as prisoners, but as students, parents, workers, and future contributors to society.

When I was released in 2019, the education I began while incarcerated helped me rebuild my life. I went on to complete my bachelor's degree from the University of Baltimore through the Second Chance College Program, and I am currently pursuing a Master's degree in Nonprofit Management and Social Entrepreneurship. Today, I lead Manumission House, an organization dedicated to supporting justice-impacted individuals who are pursuing higher education and seeking stable housing while working toward long-term independence.

My story is not unique. Across the country, research consistently demonstrates that individuals who participate in higher education while incarcerated are significantly less likely to return to prison, more likely to obtain employment, and more likely to earn higher wages after release compared to those who do not have access to educational opportunities.

Education in prison also has profound impacts on families and communities. When incarcerated parents pursue postsecondary education, they model the value of education for their children.

Studies show that children with parents enrolled in college are more likely to pursue higher education themselves, helping break intergenerational cycles of incarceration and poverty.

Passage of HB1311 and HB1313 would expand access to higher education for incarcerated students in Maryland and ensure that financial barriers do not prevent motivated individuals from pursuing educational opportunities that can transform their lives.

If enacted, Maryland would join several other states, including Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Washington, that have recently passed legislation allowing incarcerated students access to state financial aid and tuition assistance. These states recognize that education is one of the most effective tools available for reducing recidivism, improving reentry outcomes, and strengthening communities.

Investing in higher education for incarcerated individuals is not only a matter of fairness and opportunity, it is also a matter of sound public policy. Education reduces recidivism, lowers correctional costs over time, and increases the likelihood that returning citizens will become productive members of society.

For individuals like me, education was the bridge between incarceration and meaningful participation in the community. Expanding access to higher education will allow many more individuals to walk that same path.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to vote favorably on HB1311 and HB1313.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Thomas Anderson
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Baltimore, Maryland