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FAVORABLE REPORT on HOUSE BILL 1311

Dear Chair and Members of the Maryland Senate Committee:

I write on behalf of Bowie State University's Prison Education Program (BPEP) to express our strong support for House Bill 1311 and to urge a favorable report. As a historically Black university that provides postsecondary educational opportunities to incarcerated learners in Maryland, Bowie State University has seen firsthand the transformative impact that higher education has on the lives of justice-impacted individuals, their families, and their communities.

House Bill 1311 represents an important advancement in Maryland's commitment to educational equity, rehabilitation, and successful reentry. The bill would require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, in consultation with the Maryland Higher Education Commission and institutions of higher education, to assist incarcerated individuals in accessing federal Pell Grants and State student financial assistance. It also clarifies that eligible incarcerated individuals may receive State student financial assistance under the same standards applied to other students. These changes are critical to removing barriers that have historically limited access to higher education for incarcerated people.

At Bowie State University, we work directly with incarcerated students who are committed to academic achievement, personal growth, and long-term success. Our experience confirms that access to college-level education while incarcerated creates meaningful opportunities for intellectual development, increases self-confidence, and strengthens students' capacity to return to society with purpose and direction. Financial aid access is essential to this process. Without it, too many capable and motivated students remain excluded from educational opportunities that could significantly alter the course of their lives.

House Bill 1311 also reflects sound public policy. Higher education in prison has been widely recognized as one of the most effective tools for supporting successful reentry and reducing recidivism. When incarcerated individuals are given the resources necessary to pursue a college degree, the benefits extend beyond the individual student. Families are strengthened, communities are made safer, and the State benefits from a more educated and productive citizenry. By expanding access to both federal and State financial aid, this legislation supports the development of sustainable prison education programs and affirms Maryland's investment in second chances and long-term public good.

BPEP strongly supports House Bill 1311 because it aligns with the principles of fairness, opportunity, and educational access. Incarcerated individuals who meet eligibility requirements should not be categorically denied the financial support necessary to pursue higher education. This bill removes unnecessary obstacles and helps ensure that educational opportunity is determined by readiness and eligibility, not by incarceration status alone.

We respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1311 and to support this important measure to expand educational access for incarcerated individuals across Maryland.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to educational opportunity and justice in Maryland.

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