

Favorable Testimony HB0612 – Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs & Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Aaron Wright**, and I am here today in strong support of this bill—not only as a behavioral health leader, but as **someone in long-term recovery who has personally experienced incarceration**.

During my own time involved in the justice system, I did not lack motivation or potential—I lacked **access**. Access to education that mattered. Access to workforce training that led to real employment. And access to peers who understood that I can change my life and find meaning and purpose. This bill directly addresses those gaps.

By requiring the Director of Education and Workforce Skills Training to consult with the **State Correctional Ombudsman**, this legislation strengthens transparency, accountability, and effectiveness within correctional education programs. It ensures that training is not only offered, but meaningful, relevant, and responsive to the real conditions that many of have and still face.

Most importantly, this bill establishes the **Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for Incarcerated Individuals**. This is a powerful and forward-thinking investment. It recognizes that people who have experienced substance use, incarceration, and recovery are not liabilities—but assets. Training individuals while they are incarcerated creates a pathway to employment, stability, and service immediately upon release. It reduces recidivism, supports public safety, and strengthens Maryland’s behavioral health workforce at the same time.

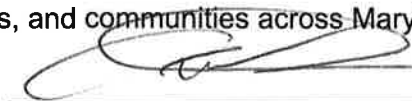
As someone in recovery, I know firsthand that peer support saves lives. And we look now to help those that are still struggling or in the grips of addiction. Providing certification and workforce preparation *before release* gives people dignity, purpose, and a real chance to succeed—rather than setting them up to fail or finding employment that may not bring meaning and purpose.

This bill also wisely authorizes ongoing funding beginning in fiscal year 2028, recognizing that sustainable programs—not short-term pilots—are what create lasting change.

This legislation is about **hope with structure, accountability with compassion, and public safety through opportunity**. It transforms incarceration from a dead end into a starting point for recovery, employment, and community leadership.

I strongly urge a **favorable report** on this bill and thank the sponsors for recognizing the power of lived experience to heal individuals, families, and communities across Maryland.

Aaron Wright- Voice of Hope, Maryland



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