

Testimony for House Bill 0612 Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs – State Correctional Ombudsman and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for Incarcerated Individuals

By Stephen J. Steurer, PhD, Chair, Prison Education Delivery System Commission

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Members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

Please accept my wholehearted support for HB0612 sponsored by Delegate Pasteur and others. Currently, I am the Chair of the Governor's Prison Education Delivery System Reform Commission and have been working very closely with Delegate Pasteur during the past year on issues related to the education of incarcerated individuals. Because the Commission has been advised by the Governor not to get directly involved with sponsoring bills, my testimony today does not represent the opinion of the Commission per se. The Commission, however, has created more than 15 recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, some of which are reflected in HB0612.

My support is based on more than 50 years of service working in criminal justice as a teacher, educational and correctional administrator in Maryland and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, researcher and as a professor in Maryland. As a correctional education administrator, I saw how effectively we were able to train and utilize incarcerated high school graduates as tutors to assist in the academic classroom. Many of those who worked as tutors were released and continued to work with other formerly incarcerated individuals who had not completed high school. We provided classroom space in some state office buildings and never encountered any problems. More recently, I have observed how effective Peer Recovery Specialists have been in one of the Jessup institutions. The warden testified that they were effective not only counseling their peers but also in assisting security staff in cooling down tense situations. Many of them have been released and are working in similar positions in the community.

In summary, my professional experience and research have taught me the value that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals can have in the rehabilitative process. Many of them become positive forces who communicate effectively with their peers. Of course, formerly incarcerated individuals should be subject to the same screening and investigation used to hire anyone who works in the correctional environment. I believe most correctional officials will be very supportive in the employment of formerly incarcerated individuals inside their facilities.