

Testimony for House Bill 1340

State Government – Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission Establishment

*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 HB1340 sponsored by Delegates Amprey and Ruff. Currently, I am the Chair of the Governor's Prison Education Delivery System Reform Commission and have been working very closely with Delegate Amprey and others 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.

My support is based on more than 50 years working in criminal justice as a teacher, educational and correctional administrator and professor in Maryland and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. In 2014 the RAND Corporation published a definitive research study which proved that education reduces future crime significantly, returning several times the original investment in reduced criminal justice expenses.

It is most important that Maryland's extremely under-educated prison population complete as much education, job training and career technology certification as possible before they are released. Currently, most incarcerated individuals return to the community without completing high school and are inadequately prepared for the job market.

In its first year the Commission has already created more than fifteen recommendations to the Governor and Legislature and the and its work has resulted in at least 6 pieces of legislation to improve prison education in Maryland. Some of these will take several years to implement. A long-term Commission that conducts research and monitors prison education program lasts more than its currently authorized five years can bring about much needed permanent improvements. The Commission's membership is either volunteers or currently employed by the state and community-based groups and non-profits. Therefore, this bill requires no funds, a great deal for the taxpayers of Maryland.

In summary, my professional experience and research have taught me the value that correctional education provides in the rehabilitative process. Research has shown that educational achievement is the most effective tool generally available for crime reduction and public safety. Maryland still does not reach and adequately prepare most of its incarcerated individuals before release. So much more needs to be done. I urge the members of this Committee to support HB1340.

