

Testimony for House Bill 0108 Division of Correction - Release Preparation Program

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 HB0108 sponsored by Delegate Pasteur. Currently, I am the Chair of the Governor's Prison Education Delivery System Reform Commission and have been working very closely with the Delegate during the past year on issues related to the education of incarcerated individuals. My testimony today does not represent the opinion of the Commission which I chair. The Commission has not had a chance to review and vote on the bill.

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. As a Maryland correctional education administrator, I saw how effectively we were able to train and utilize 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 issues. More recently, I have observed how effective Peer Recovery Specialists have been at one of the Jessup institutions. The warden testified how effective they were in 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 the community.

In summary, my professional experience and action research have taught me the value that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals can be 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.