

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC & STUDENT AFFAIRS

Judicial Proceedings Committee
Testimony on HB1311: State Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals
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SUPPORT
Andrea Cantora
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Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and member of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

I, Andrea Cantora, am testifying in support of Higher Education HB1311, State Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals.

Passage of HB1311 would expand access to post-secondary education for incarcerated students in Maryland Prisons. From 2016-2026 I was the director of the University of Baltimore's (UBalt) Second Chance College Program that operates at Jessup Correctional Institution. This program has graduated 17 students with their bachelors degree. UBalt's graduates, who started their education in prison, are doing incredible things. They are working in living wage jobs at the University of Baltimore, Time Organization, Amazon, Healthcare for the Homeless, and many other places around the state. Others have started their own business or non-profit organization. They are contributing taxpayers, homeowners, and civically engaged in their communities.

Their success would not be possible without federal financial aid (Pell Grants), university support, and private funding. The majority of an incarcerated student's tuition is covered by Pell Grants. Pell Grants, however, do not cover the full cost of a student's tuition. Under federal regulations, colleges who have approval to administer Pell Grants to incarcerated students, are not permitted to charge them the remaining tuition. Higher education institutions are left to figure out alternative ways to cover that tuition difference. UBalt has been fortunate to be able to sustain their program through the financial support from the university and private funds.

Unfortunately, I have witnessed programs shut down – in Maryland and in other states – because they do not have the financial resources to sustain their program efforts. College and universities who provide post-secondary education to incarcerated students do not make money. Instead, they must figure out ways to pay for tuition and administrative costs.

Not every college and university in the state is able to cover the tuition cost, or has the capacity to raise private funding. There are many colleges and universities in the state who are interested in providing post-secondary education to incarcerated students. The problem is the financial burden of starting and sustaining such programs. But, **if** incarcerated students had access to **both** federal

and state financial aid colleges and universities would be better positioned to provide post-secondary opportunities.

Supporting HB1311 means supporting **education access for all** college students in Maryland. Non-incarcerated Maryland college students have access to a wide variety of scholarship and grant programs through the Maryland Higher Education Commission. Allowing incarcerated students to access the same resources is a way to ensure equity for all Maryland college students. We took a huge step towards access for all when the state removed the criminal history question from public university admission applications in 2017. HB1311 will remove additional barriers. If passed, Maryland would join many other states who recently passed legislation to allow incarcerated students access to state financial aid (e.g., Michigan, NJ, NY, and Washington).

Everything we do to expand access has great impact on our state. When an incarcerated student participates in higher education programming they are less likely to return to prison, more likely to find work, and more likely to earn a higher income than those who do not participate. As incarcerated parents earn post-secondary credentials they are disrupting the generational cycle of crime and incarceration for their children. As research shows, children who have a parent in college are more likely to enroll themselves.

Today, there are approximately 300 incarcerated students in the state taking college courses. I believe that number would increase if HB1311 were to pass. I also believe HB1311 would further advance the mission of our state to “leave no one behind.” For these reasons, I encourage you to vote **favorably** on **HB1311**.

Sincerely,



Andrea Cantora, Ph.D.