

Cantora - HB1311 - Judicial Proceedings .pdf

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Position: FAV

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC & STUDENT AFFAIRS

Judicial Proceedings Committee
Testimony on HB1311: State Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals
April 1, 2026
SUPPORT
Andrea Cantora
Director of Higher Education in Prison
University System of Maryland

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.

HB1311_USM_FAV_XJP.pdf

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Position: FAV



SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

House Bill 1311

Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals –

Alterations

April 1, 2026

Favorable

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 1311. The bill requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to assist incarcerated individuals in accessing both federal and state student financial assistance and ensures that individuals who meet eligibility requirements are able to receive this aid. It also directs DPSCS to work collaboratively with the Maryland Higher Education Commission and institutions of higher education – including all University System of Maryland (USM) institutions – to facilitate access to Pell Grants and state financial aid programs.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

House Bill 1311 strengthens Maryland's commitment to educational equity and successful community reintegration and builds upon the USM's leadership as a national model for higher education in correctional settings. In 2024, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and the USM entered into the [nation's first agreement](#) between a state corrections division and an entire public university system, establishing a comprehensive framework to deliver Prison Education Programs in every Maryland state correctional facility. Through this systemwide partnership, incarcerated Marylanders are gaining the opportunity to earn bachelor's degrees and credit-bearing certificates from any of the twelve USM institutions, supported by federal Pell Grants, with curricula designed to meet the needs of justice-involved learners and structured pathways for continued education or workforce entry upon release.

USM institutions already play a direct and meaningful role in educating incarcerated students. Bowie State University, Maryland's first historically Black public university, offers a [full Bachelor of Science in Sociology](#) and an optional certificate in entrepreneurship inside the Jessup Correctional Institution – the first four-year HBCU degree program available to incarcerated Marylanders.

The University of Baltimore operates a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services Administration at Jessup Correctional Institution, and Towson University will launch a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies at the Maryland Correctional Training Center in Hagerstown beginning in Fall 2026.

Additionally, the USM recently secured a [\\$4.1 million Ascendium grant](#) to expand these statewide prison education efforts, creating regional hubs and providing annual grants to institutions and partners working to support incarcerated learners and returning citizens.

These ongoing initiatives reflect a clear and demonstrated commitment to student success – regardless of circumstance. Meaningful rehabilitation requires more than confinement; it requires structured access to education, advising, tutoring, career preparation, and the opportunity for individuals to re-think and transform their trajectories. As data consistently show, higher education access within correctional facilities reduces recidivism, strengthens families, and produces long-term benefits for communities.

The USM urges a Favorable Report on House Bill 1311.



XHB1311_MACC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Drew Jabin

Position: FAV

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

April 1, 2026

**HB 1311 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals –
Alterations**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), representing Maryland’s 16 community colleges, supports **HB 1311**. Maryland’s community colleges play an important role in expanding access to postsecondary education for individuals who are incarcerated and those preparing to return to their communities. Educational programs offered in correctional facilities help individuals build skills, earn credentials, and prepare for successful reentry into the workforce.

House Bill 1311 helps ensure that incarcerated individuals who meet eligibility requirements are able to access available State student financial assistance. By requiring the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to assist incarcerated individuals in accessing student financial aid and coordinating with the Maryland Higher Education Commission and institutions of higher education, the bill helps remove administrative barriers that may otherwise prevent eligible students from pursuing postsecondary education.

Community colleges already work closely with correctional institutions to provide educational opportunities for incarcerated students. Ensuring that eligible students are able to access State financial aid will help strengthen these programs and support pathways to industry-recognized credentials and degrees.

Expanding access to postsecondary education opportunities supports workforce development, strengthens communities, and helps individuals successfully transition back into the workforce. Accordingly, MACC urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on **HB 1311**.

Please contact Brad Phillips (bphillips@mdacc.org) or Drew Jabin (djabin@mdacc.org) with questions.

HB1311 Higher Education - Student Financial Assist

Uploaded by: Marlene Durholz

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL COMMITTEE

HB1311 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals

Position: Favorable

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: April 1, 2026

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD), a nonpartisan organization, favors policies that provide an equitable and quality education for all. Accordingly, the LWVMD supports HB1311, which extends financial support for postsecondary education to the state's incarcerated students.

HB1311 establishes that individuals who are incarcerated in Maryland are exempt, subject to certain conditions, from paying tuition at the state's public higher education institutions. To be eligible, an incarcerated student must apply for available federal and state financial aid, excluding student loans. The bill's exemption will cover the remaining tuition balance after other received financial aid is applied.

Incarcerated students are eligible for federal Pell Grants. This option took effect in July 2023 through the FAFSA Simplification Act, ending the nearly 30-year prohibition on need-based federal postsecondary financial aid for incarcerated people. According to the Act, the federal government allows eligible incarcerated students to receive Pell Grants as long as they are enrolled in a U.S. Department of Education-approved higher education prison program (HEP). Under the law, "confined or incarcerated" refers to an individual who is serving a criminal sentence in a federal, state or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility or other similar correctional facility.¹

However, in practice, incarcerated students are ineligible to access state funding for student aid. Colleges and universities cover the cost of tuition and fees after Pell Grants are awarded, as these Grants do not cover the full cost, and incarcerated students cannot be charged for the award difference. This is a financial burden that colleges must fund through philanthropic grants or institutional support. Additionally, colleges that run HEP programs

¹U.S. Department of Education. (2023, March 29; Updated 2024, September 30). *GEN-23-05: Eligibility of Confined or Incarcerated Individuals to Receive Pell Grants*. Federal Student Aid Knowledge Center. <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/dear-colleague-letters/2023-03-29/eligibility-confined-or-incarcerated-individuals-receive-pell-grants-updated-sept-30-2024>

are required to secure funding for operational costs. While some colleges that operate Maryland HEP programs have been successful at sustaining their programs, others have been unable to do so. Lack of funding has been a barrier for any new college seeking to start up a HEP program.² In addition, the U.S. Congressional Budget Office has predicted a cumulative 10-year shortfall for the Pell Grants.³

Maryland provides some support for incarcerated students enrolled in some programs through a grant for regional education hubs, the Inmate Training and Job Pilot Program, and in the case of bachelor degrees, a partnership with the University of Maryland (USM) system.⁴

HB1311 expands access and affordability for prisoners' higher education through the tuition exemption. Educational programs have been shown to reduce recidivism and promote more successful transitions back into communities for adults returning from incarceration. Nevertheless, currently incarcerated students continue to face barriers to receiving high-quality postsecondary education. HB1311's tuition benefit is a necessary component for expanding access to higher education for those convicted of a crime.

For this reason, LWVMD supports a **Favorable** report on HB1311.

²Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy. (June 30, 2025.) Prison Education Delivery Commission 2025 Report House Bill 877/Chapter 110, 2025. <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-06-30-Prison-Education-Delivery-Reform-Commission-2025-Report.pdf>, p.10

³Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. *Pell Grant Program Faces Serious and Immediate Shortfall*. (Feb. 20, 2026). <https://www.crfb.org/blogs/pell-grant-program-faces-serious-and-immediate-shortfall>

⁴University System of Maryland. (2025, October 31). *USM awarded \$4.1 million grant to support prison education programs*. <https://www.usmd.edu/newsroom/news/2517> <https://www.usmd.edu/newsroom/news/2517>

Witness Testimony in Response to HB1311rev.pdf

Uploaded by: Timothy Stock

Position: FAV

Witness Testimony in Response to HB1311

Timothy Stock, Professor of Philosophy (Salisbury University)

Disposition: Favorable

Comments:

I write in strong support of HB1311 to allow state support for incarcerated people who seek opportunities in higher education. This bill would have a dramatic impact on the ability for institutions of higher learning to make fiscally sustainable Prison Education Programs available to all incarcerated Marylanders. Without this bill incarcerated Marylanders of the Eastern Shore and Western Maryland would face continued discrimination in access to higher education.

I have acted as coordinator of the Eastern Correctional Institution (ECI) Book Discussion Program from 2012-2024, and as coordinator and coach of the ECI Ethics Bowl Program since 2020. These are all volunteer programs facilitated by the Department of Philosophy in partnership with the ECI Libraries since 2000. They replicate collegiate level discussions, and confer skills in critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and oral communication. They are also deeply humanizing activities, and allow the opportunity to discuss questions of responsibility, forgiveness, the common good, and freedom in a way that is rehabilitative.

By measure of plaudits and kudos the program has been a success. It received an Official Citation from the General Assembly 2016 led by a delegation of Eastern Shore representatives and these activities were a component of my recognition by the University System of Maryland for Excellence in Teaching in 2024, as well as several other university and community awards. After 12 years of recruiting and training volunteers, over a thousand hours of volunteering my own teaching services, yearslong efforts engaging in program development and advocacy, I can confidently assert that I have as much experience with carceral education as is possible for a lay person. Yet this success has never translated into college credit for my students.

Plaudits and kudos are cheap. As committed as I am to volunteer service, my goal has always been to convert this legacy partnership into a properly resourced Eastern Shore Prison Education Project (PEP) at SU, and in collaboration with other Eastern Shore institutions of higher education. Incarcerated people are

underserved when it comes to opportunities to engage in rehabilitation through higher education, and ECI currently has no access to higher education at all.

I see two problems with this situation. First, I find it ethically problematic that I am forced by circumstance to bring “zero dollar” initiatives to an under-resourced population. Sustaining them, getting them registered for diminution credits, conducting research and even getting supplies have all been major challenges (for clarity—a student taking a college class is paid a \$2/day student wage and receives time off their sentences, in my program, students doing similar college-level work are not receiving these benefits). The volunteer status means that staff can cancel my students’ movement and access at the drop of the hat. My students’ work is often the lowest priority.

Secondly, there are questions of equity for the incarcerated people themselves; access to higher education should not be an arbitrary function of the facility in which a person resides. I struggle to recruit and develop students, and yet success does not mean I get to work with them—it means they transfer somewhere else. What of the remaining men for whom a transfer is not practical or possible? They must make do.

I have advocated vociferously to three separate SU presidents, and three separate SU provosts, as well as numerous Deans and program directors, that SU needs to step into the gap and provide these services. Despite great sympathy and appreciation for my work, the fiscal barriers have always proved insurmountable.

Tuition at SU is not fully covered by Pell. Were an income-qualifying student on SU’s campus to fall short of tuition funds awarded by Pell, state higher education funds would fill the gap. My incarcerated students, the majority of whom (if not all of whom) are income-qualifying, cannot currently access those funds. Pell itself will not create a large enough funding stream for a higher education program to be sustainable. Without these fiscal guarantees, it’s impossible for an SU administrator to commit to the staffing needs and the massive logistical enterprise of running a PEP. Wor-Wic Community College recently withdrew their support of several certificate programs for this very reason.

Allowing my students access to additional state funding would directly solve the fiscal problem at the heart of our lack of an Eastern Shore PEP despite well-intentioned efforts to make it happen. **Passing this legislation would be the difference between providing the opportunity for higher education to the**

incarcerated population of the Eastern Shore, or not. Quite simply, it would allow deserving students to pay for college as would any other Maryland resident, and it would allow institutions of higher learning to effectively dedicate resources to this population and allow SU to realize its public mission through engagement, inclusion, and rehabilitation of incarcerated people.

After so many years of engaging in volunteer rehabilitation, I've had the good fortune of meeting many of my former students after successful release. Just three months ago, I was contacted by a former captain of our Ethics Bowl team that he was enrolled at the University of Baltimore on the outside and is pursuing his dream. Another is starting a business, and a third is intervening with addicted youth on the verge of being system-involved. From each I hear consistently that our programs are the first time they had seen themselves in a collegiate frame of mind. There are excellent potential students in our state prisons, many of whom have conflicted feelings about the value of education, or ambivalence about the under-resourced educational experiences they have had in the past. They have skills and life experiences that they can bring as benefits to others in our community and have deep awareness of the areas of our incarceration system that need improvement and reform. College would be necessary to realize many of these benefits. Time and again my students move from the tiniest sliver of a view into the world of higher learning, to college enrollment, graduation, and reintegration. Please address this structural fiscal inequity so that more of our incarcerated people can find their way to that productive and humane mindset.

HB 1311_ Higher Education – Student Financial Ass

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: UNF

HB 1311: Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance for Incarcerated Individuals
– Alterations: Please vote to **OPPOSE** this bill.

Dear Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am writing to strongly urge you to **OPPOSE HB 1311** during committee consideration or floor votes.

State financial aid resources are limited and should prioritize students who are not currently incarcerated—particularly low-income, working-class, and middle-class families who pay taxes and struggle to afford college for themselves or their children. **Diverting need-based grant dollars to individuals who are serving sentences for criminal convictions (some for violent or serious offenses) reduces the pool of aid available to law-abiding residents and sends the wrong message about accountability and justice.**

Maryland already offers educational opportunities in prisons through federal Pell Grants (restored in 2023), Second Chance Pell programs, and some state-supported initiatives. Expanding state taxpayer-funded grants to incarcerated individuals—beyond what is already available federally—adds unnecessary costs to the state budget at a time when tuition, housing, health care, and other priorities are straining families and state resources.

Taxpayers should not be required to subsidize college degrees for people who have been convicted of crimes and are still serving their sentences. Rehabilitation is important, but it should not come at the expense of reducing financial aid for law-abiding students who are trying to build better futures outside the criminal justice system.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask you to **vote against HB 1311**.

Thank you for your attention to this important fiscal responsibility, equity, and public safety issue.

Sincerely,

Trudy Tibbals