

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



Education for Prisoners

What's the Problem?

Too many Maryland prisoners fail to acquire fundamental skills and the educational credentials necessary to support successful reentry. Too often prisoners complete a period of incarceration without addressing their educational needs. Education behind bars reduces recidivism. Maryland could be using education more extensively and effectively to reduce recidivism, to improve public safety, to improve the lives of formerly incarcerated persons and their family members, and to build the human capital of Maryland residents. The educational status of entering prisoners is not assessed or reflected in correctional treatment plans. Terms of incarceration are not reduced when individuals attain significant educational credentials indicating preparation for release. Those who prepare successfully for release remain incarcerated as long as those who have not prepared. This wastes resources.

What's the Proposal?

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is endorsing two inter-related bills introduced by Delegate Pamela Queen. These promise to improve the educational outcomes of Maryland prisoners, to enhance public safety, and to save on the costs of incarceration. Under the provisions of Maryland's justice reinvestment initiative, some of these savings may expand and improve educational opportunities available to prisoners.

HB291 provides for the identification of educational needs among prisoners being admitted to the Maryland State prison system. The companion bill, HB 295, authorizes the Department of Public Safety and Corrections to establish time-off-sentence incentives for the attainment of major educational milestones such as a high school diploma or college degree. When these incentives are awarded, the successful prisoner students, now better equipped for post release success, will serve fewer days of incarceration. This will incentivize enrollment in educational programs as well as goal focused effort by prisoner students. If bed-day savings are realized, some portion of these savings may be utilized to expand and improve the educational programs offered to prisoners.

Will this Work?

Logic dictates that educational needs be identified upon admission so an individual's appropriate program goals can be established for the term of a confinement. HB291 establishes that practice, and serves as an important companion to the projected incentive system for educational attainment.

A 2017 report of the Abell Foundation identifies the untapped potential of correctional education in Maryland to improve criminal justice outcomes. That report, [Prison Education, Maximizing the Potential for Employment and Successful Community Reintegration](#), recommended an enhanced incentive system. HB295 authorizes the creation of just such an incentive system.

Many States have adopted a similar system of time-off-sentence credits for educational milestone attainment. In November of 2017 the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) published a report titled [Incarceration to Reentry, Education and Training Pathways in Indiana](#). This report noted that the use of education milestone attainment credits in Indiana significantly reduced "bed days" of incarceration and that this practice was responsible for a reduction in incarceration costs of an estimated \$68 million in a single year. The report further noted

that that this figure did not include additional cost savings associated with prisoners being less likely to return to prison.

As noted in the aforementioned Abell Foundation report, current educational offerings in Maryland prisons are limited in capacity and scope. HB295 would authorize an educational milestone attainment time-off-sentence program. Once implemented, resultant savings could free resources to invest in expanded and enhanced educational offering in Maryland prisons. A multi-year virtuous cycle of reduced incarceration and enhanced educational opportunities would be in the best interest of all Marylanders. This is no quick fix, but it is potentially a significant step forward within the context of Maryland's justice reinvestment initiatives.

Status of the Legislation

Delegate Pamela Queen has introduced two bills endorsed by the MAJR. HB 291, is titled "Correctional Services — Inmate Case Record — Educational, Vocational and Job History." The companion bill, also introduced by Delegate Queen, is HB 295, "Education Services — Diminution Credits — Education." Both bills are scheduled for a hearing before the House Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, January 30, 2018.

Learn More!

Federally funded study establishing the recidivism reducing potential of education behind bars: "National Evaluation of Correctional Education," The RAND Corporation.

Recent Abell Foundation review of correctional education in Maryland: Prison Education, Maximizing the Potential for Employment and Successful Community Reintegration, July 2017.

Recent report by the Center for Law and Public Policy citing (on page 5) the recidivism and cost benefit of Indiana's educational milestone time off sentence credit award system: Incarceration to Reentry, Education and Training Pathways in Indiana. November 2017.

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan association of over forty community organizations and churches with members in every part of the state, formed to support justice reinvestment. Individual supporters include judges, attorneys, corrections professionals, as well as returning citizens, victims, and service providers.

Links in this document can be activated by going to <http://www.ma4jr.org/education-2018/>