

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



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TO: Chair Bobby Zirkin and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: February 21, 2019

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) strongly supports SB621/ HB294 which will serve to restore incentives for Maryland prison inmates to achieve the most effective forms of rehabilitation available to them while incarcerated – that is, meaningful education and valuable vocational skills.

It is well-established in research around the U.S. and internationally that education of prison inmates can reduce recidivism rates by 40 to 50 percent. See, e.g., 2013 Rand Corporation report. Regular employment, enabled by marketable vocational certificates, also has similar proven value in reducing recidivism.

However, in recent years, Maryland law has expanded – and diluted—the opportunities for diminution credits, giving equal time to any “assigned tasks”(which could be sweeping the floor) or “training courses” (which may not be vocationally-related), regardless of their potentially minimal value towards rehabilitation. See Correctional Service Article, sec. 3-703 and 3-704.

The result is that inmates have flocked to these easier opportunities for earning credits with interests and waiting lists for education programs disappearing. Now, only about 15 percent of all inmates are reported to participate in educational programs. Current participation in the valuable Md. Correctional Enterprises has dropped below 10 percent.

For all these reasons, MAJR strongly urges adoption of SB621/ HB294 to restore the incentive for inmates to participate in the most valuable educational and vocational rehabilitation programs that the State can offer during incarceration.

NOTE: Phil Caroom joins this testimony on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform executive committee and not on behalf of the Maryland Judiciary.