Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission Meeting Minutes

December 5, 2024
10am-11:30am

Virtual Meeting

Commission Attendees: Dr. Charles B. Adams, Dr. Andrea Cantora, Meredith Conde, Danielle Cox, Adam Cummings, David Domenici, Del. Elizabeth Embry, Jamel Freeman, Mary Gable, Christian Gant, Karen Jones, Stephanie King, Initia Lettau, Gordon Pack, Del. Cheryl Pasteur, Secretary Sanjay Rai, Del. Karen Simpson, Dr. Stephen Steurer, John Feaster III (representative for Deputy Secretary Jason Perkins-Cohen)
Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy Attendees: Ainsley Moench, Arinze Ifekauche, Brandi Cahn, Lindsey McCullough
Advisory Stakeholder Group Attendees: Dr. Judith Lichtenberg, Alyssa Fieo, John Griffin, Nick Moroney, Anita Wiest, Rose Dailey, Victoria Devore, T. Shekhinah Braveheart
General Public Attendees: Keith Wallington, Kenneth Weeden, Dr. Anthony J. Jackson, Alice Wirth

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I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 10:33am.

Ainsley Moench did a roll call.

II. Approval of November 7th Minutes

The minutes of the November 7th meeting were approved unanimously.

III. Update on Commission Vacancies

Chair Stephen Steurer went over Commission vacancies. The Commission has three open seats for senators.

IV. Updates on Data Collection

Chair Stephen Steurer talked about how he and Ainsley Moench have been researching historical correctional education data. The Maryland State Department of Education published reports on correctional education starting in 1978 until 2008 when correctional education was moved to the Department of Labor. Reports frmo 1997 onward were not digitized and are missing. Ainsley Moench developed charts displaying historical correctional education data and trends from the Maryland State Department of Education Fact Books.

Danielle Cox, the Director of Education at the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, explained that the Department of Labor is responsible for providing Adult Basic Education (ABE) and

General Education Degree (GED) programming as well as Career and Technical Education (CTE). The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is responsible for providing post-secondary education. The Department of Labor and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services coordinate services through the Correctional Education Council, which meets quarterly and is chaired by the secretaries of the agencies. There are currently five college programs overseen by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services with four more in development due to PELL Grant reinstatement. The college programs are the University of Baltimore, Bowie State University, Goucher College, Wor-Wic Community College, and Georgetown University. Hagerstown Community College is developing a welding program for college credit and operates a CDL program in Hagerstown. The Wor-Wic Community College program will end after the spring semester due to lack of funding. Colleges that would like to establish a program inside must go through the approval process of the US Department of Education, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services advisory committee, and the Maryland Higher Education Council. The Maryland Longitudinal Data Systems Center is assisting in data collection for all correctional programs and Danielle mentioned that the data looked encouraging.

Adam Cummings, Executive Assistant at Maryland Correctional Enterprises, talked about data collection at Maryland Correctional Enterprises and available jobs for returning citizens. Maryland Correctional Enterprises employs a majority of the eligible incarcerated population. There are many jobs available in state agencies to returning citizens who have been employed by Maryland Correctional Enterprises.

V. Advisory Stakeholder Group

Chair Stephen Steurer introduced the Maryland Equitable Justice Coalition Prison Education Subcommittee and mentioned the letter their chair, Dr. Judith Lichtenberg, submitted to become part of the Advisory Stakeholder Group for the Commission. He explained that the Prison Education Subcommittee has members that are representative of the requirements set out in the law for the Advisory Stakeholder Group. He recommended that the Prison Education Subcommittee be part of the Advisory Stakeholder Group.

Secretary Sanjay Rai suggested that the Advisory Stakeholder Group add Dr. Brad Phillips, the chair of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges. He expressed an interest in having a list of colleges who are currently providing educational services inside prisons. Danielle Cox replied that she has that list, but she would not know about colleges that are providing educational services inside jails or other correctional institutions.

Gordon Pack expressed his approval of the idea. He also mentioned that colleges may consider providing Associate's Degrees inside of prisons as not every incarcerated individual may want a full college degree. Danielle Cox replied that some colleges are already providing Associate's Degrees, and that the big issue is funding. She requested to be on the Advisory Stakeholder Group.

Chair Stephen Steurer clarified that you can be a Commissioner on the Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission and be a part of the Advisory Stakeholder Group. The Advisory Stakeholder Group will serve as the workgroup of the Commission and will report to the Commission.

Chair Stephen Steurer asked if there was any opposition to the proposal. There were no objections.

Dr. Judith Litchtenberg said that the Advisory Stakeholder Group will meet directly after each Commission meeting and will additionally meet every two weeks. Anyone is welcome to attend the meetings.

VI. Task Prioritization

Chair Stephen Steurer introduced the tasks the Commission is legislatively mandated to do. He mentioned that some of these tasks will take longer than others, and asked for feedback on prioritizing each task.

Danielle Cox asked if there was a plan to tackle one issue at a time, or if the Advisory Stakeholder group will be looking at these issues and coming back to the Commission. Chair Stephen Steurer replied that there is not currently a plan to tackle these tasks, and it will be developed after feedback. There is a possibility of creating subgroups or using a decision matrix.

Chair Stephen Steurer reviewed the Commission requirement to host public roundtables across geographic regions of the state, and told the Commission that some of these roundtable discussions will occur in correctional institutions. Public roundtables will invite stakeholders and the public to provide input on Commission activities, and will be hosted in accessible locations.

VII. Logistics

Ainsley Moench explained that the Commission will recieve a link to a DropBox. This DropBox will contain meeting materials and relevant research for the Commission.

Chair Stephen Steurer went over future meeting dates. Del. Karen Simpson asked if meetings could be moved to 9am for February and March so legislators could participate. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if the Commission would meet on January 6th. Chair Stephen Steurer clarified that the Commission would be meeting on the 6th, as that is before the legislative session.

VIII. Open Discussion

Chair Stephen Steurer asked if the Commission had any closing thoughts before the meeting adjourned.

Gordon Pack said it would be important to get information about what is occurring in correctional education.

Del. Cheryl Pasteur expressed that she would like more clarity about what the Commission will be doing in the future. The Commission should come out with strong recommendations to the Legislature.

Del. Elizabeth Embry requested that the Commission get information on the percentage of incarcerated individuals in correctional education programming. Chair Stephen Steurer replied that the percentage of incarcerated individuals in correctional education is lower than it was historically, and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and Department of Labor are working the best they can with the resources available to them. Some states plan education program attendance through case management starting at the point of entry.

Chair Stephen Steurer thanked everyone for participating. This Commission will keep a positive light and look to improve correctional education services.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:51 am.

The meeting transitioned to the Advisory Stakeholder Group meeting.

Convening an Advisory Stakeholder Group is legislatively mandated by Senate Bill 623. The Advisory Stakeholder Group must include organizations with experience in criminal justice policy reform, advocating for individuals with learning disabilities and those from marginalized communities, restorative justice, and peer recovery and support services.

John Feaster III, Del. Cheryl Pasteur, and Jamel Freeman requested to be added to the Advisory Stakeholder Group, and Judith Lichtenberg replied that they could be added.

Nick Moroney asked if the meeting recordings and minutes of the advisory stakeholder group would be publicly available. He also asked if there were equal incentives for incarcerated individuals who choose to obtain an education rather than a job, as well as if there were plans to address incarcerated individuals who obtain credits while incarcerated and are unable to transfer credits after release. Danielle Cox responded that incarcerated individuals pursuing education can move up to different wage tiers the same as incarcerated individuals who are employed. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services was awarded a grant to fund two education specialists coordinating education post-release along with higher education institutions administering prison education programs.

Dr. Stephen Steurer went over data collection that is made public in annual reports. The Commission would like data on time spent on waiting lists to obtain education, number of school days, number of incarcerated individuals who are required to obtain a GED, number of staff and vacancies, special education data, and average time for GED completion. He asked for feedback on the other type of data the Commission may want to receive.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg replies that comparative data over time and from other states would be useful.

Anne Bochinni Pack asked if the post-release education coordination from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services would apply retroactively and if the coordinators would be able to find funding for tuition if Pell Grants did not cover all tuition costs.

Danielle Cox responded that Pell Grants for prison education programs require colleges to accept transfer credits. Colleges also work with their students to ensure support and funding for continuing education post-release.

Dr. Andrea Cantora mentioned that colleges and universities try to support their students when returning home by raising money and obtaining grants to continue their education. Anne Bocchini Pack asked if that applies retroactively, and Dr. Andrea Cantora clarified that at the University of Baltimore, it does apply. Danielle Cox responded that the education coordinators will work with the colleges.

Karen Jones asked if educational data is separated by gender, as the lived experiences of men and women returning home can vary. Danielle Cox answered that data is comprehensive and covers age, gender, program length of time, number of times a participant has been incarcerated, and more. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services has begun working with Smart Sheets to collect comprehensive data and will capture data required by Pell Grant reinstatement. The data will be used to inform future programming.

Alyssa Fieo introduced herself. She is the education attorney for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender and has an interest in special education services for students with disabilities.

Anita Wiest expressed concern that the Eastern Correctional Institution will be losing higher education programming and asked if there was a possibility of getting other colleges to provide programming Danielle Cox responded that federal regulations make college approval processes complicated; colleges must be approved by five different agencies, including the Department of Education, and Pell Grants do not cover all tuition. Colleges must also pay for programming, and some colleges cannot afford a prison education program. Dr. Stephen Steurer added that the Commission may look into recommending a higher budget for prison education programs, but the state is low on funds.

Nick Moroney asked if there was a way to approve an entire system of colleges at once, such as the University of Maryland system, to avoid delays in approval. Danielle Cox responded that the University of Maryland system already has an MOU in place that allows incarcerated students to earn college credit, however, federal law requires that each institution must be approved individually.

David Domenici asked if the Commission could obtain data on the length of time it takes to obtain a GED, and also wondered if K-12 funding could be appropriated towards adult education in correctional facilities. A school district may choose to run satellite high schools inside of a correctional facility. John Feaster III responded that funding for adult education in correctional facilities comes from both the Department of Labor and K-12 education. The Department of Labor also has data on how long it takes a student to complete Adult Basic Education and obtain a GED. Dr. Stephen Steurer added that not everyone who completes a GED is college-ready.

Dr. Stephen Steurer thanked everyone for their participation and added that the Commission will have a lot of work to do.

Ainsley Moench said that the next Advisory Stakeholder Group meeting will be held on December 19, 2024 at 10am, and she will send out a Google Meets invite.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:56 am.