Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission Meeting Minutes

May 8, 2025
10:00am-11:30am

Virtual Meeting

Attendees: John Feaster III, Christian Gant, Dr. Stephen Steurer, Ainsley Moench, Andrea Cantora, Ruschelle Reuben, Danielle Cox, Gordon Pack, Ian Genove, Del. Elizabeth Embry, Del. Cheryl Pasteur, Del. Karen Simpson, Adam Cummings, John Griffin, Yvonne Briley-Wilson, Diana Bailey, Ramieka Robinson-Peoples, Meredith Conde, Jamel R. Freeman, Mary Gable, Richard Gibson

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I. Welcome

Dr. Stephen Steurer welcomed everyone at 10:04am.

II. Housekeeping

A. Approval and discussion of minutes from April 3, 2025

Dr. Stephen Steurer asked for clarification on the correctional education data system. Ruschelle Reuben clarified that there is one database where data is collected that is created and managed by one person. The database relies on accurate input from institutions and verification from James Boden. The Department of Labor has had to create internal Excel spreadsheets to track GEDs. For a while, the student database was not synced with the case management system. Having a user-friendly, accessible data system is a priority.

Dr. Stephen Steurer asked about the procurement of a new data system. Ruschelle Rueben answered that they are interested in utilizing a software that allows the Department of look at the existing database and examine programmatic outcomes, such as tracking employment post-release. Danielle Cox added that the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services only receives education data when the data is sent from the correctional education student database to the case management system. Alternative databases are not currently feasible due to the lack of internet in the facilities.

The meeting minutes from April 3, 2025 were approved.

B. HB 877 update from Ian Genove

Ian Genove, the Chief of Staff for Del. Marlon Amprey, went over the changes that HB 877 created for the Commission. He thanked the Commission for their work so far. While there were amendments to the bill to align the bill to the Commission's desired reporting dates, due to time constraints, the original bill passed. Possible next steps include following the original reporting structure and amending the new reporting dates next legislative session. The Delegates agreed that the amendments were lost due to time constraints.
Dr. Stephen Steurer offered that the Commission could write interim and annual reports each year and thanked Ian Genove for his time.

III. Discussion on correctional education delivery systems

Ainsley Moench gave a presentation on a survey sent to correctional education directors in the Correctional Education Association regarding their thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of their correctional education models.

John Feaster III suggested that the presentation clarify that it represents nationwide feedback to prevent future confusion with viewers thinking it is representative of Maryland.

Ruschelle Reuben asked if the survey tracked which model each respondent represented and if it included employment information (such as pay scales) for those who selected insufficient staffing as a struggle. Ainsley Moench responded that the survey was meant to be brief, so that information was not asked, though further research would be done on the topic. Dr. Stephen Steurer agreed that the Commission would study the topic of different correctional education delivery models in further detail.

John Griffin highlighted the importance of having adequate correctional staffing for education to occur, and Dr. Stephen Steurer agreed.

Adam Cummings asked if there was any research or statistics backing up a specific model. Ainsley Moench said that she did not want to make any conclusions on what model was best without more research, and Dr. Stephen Steurer added that the RAND corporation has done research on this topic and would be willing to present to the Commission.

John Feaster III asked if the presentation would be included in the interim report. Dr. Stephen Steurer said they could discuss it, but he wanted to keep the report short. John Feaster III mentioned that the presentation could be construed as reflecting Maryland's perspectives. He would also like to include the Department of Labor's perspective on their correctional education program. Danielle Cox added that Maryland's correctional education model is unique; no other state has correctional education housed in the Department of Labor. Instead, most are in the Department of Corrections or a school district. She also clarified that the Department of Labor was not contacted, as the survey was sent to members of the Correctional Education Association.

Yvonne Briley-Wilson introduced herself as the Correctional Ombudsman and asked to receive a copy of the survey.

Ruschelle Reuben brought up that correctional education was transferred to the Department of Labor to have a closer alignment with workforce development and improve employment outcomes for returning citizens. She would like the conversation on correctional education models to include data on returning citizen and recidivism outcomes, and Dr. Stephen Steurer agreed that data is critical.

IV. Review the outline of the interim report

Ainsley Moench presented the outline of the interim report, including sections on background information, commission activities, and key issues.

Dr. Andrea Cantora went over the Higher Education workgroup section, mentioning that each workgroup should write something about reentry support. Danielle Cox added that reentry support is a requirement of Pell Grant restoration.

Christian Gant asked if the Commission had evaluated the efficacy of the GED curriculum, teaching, and support systems for test preparation. Stephen Steurer agreed the Commission should look into that issue, highlighting the importance of professional development for teachers and potentially using Correctional Education Association standards for program evaluation. Ainsley Moench suggested incorporating these into the "Future Items for Review" section of the report.

Adam Cummings emphasized the need for the Department of Parole and Probation to keep education data. The Department of Labor may not have the most accurate post-release employment data, as returning citizens may not be employed in a sector that shows up in the Department of Labor data. Adam Cummings suggested that one agency should be responsible for collecting and maintaining all relevant data to avoid incomplete data sets. Dr. Stephen Steurer asked what departments and agencies collect post-release employment data. Danielle Cox replied that the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center has all of the education, post-secondary, and labor data. The Commission could look into including Department of Parole and Probation data as well, but the Department does not have access to all data, as some people may be released not on probation.

Danielle Cox discussed the incentives portion of the interim report, clarifying that existing COMAR regulations provide post-secondary and occupational diminution credits after GED completion. Gordon Pack asked if credits vary based on conviction and when people were incarcerated. Danielle Cox responded that credits do vary. Dr. Stephen Steurer said the group would meet to refine this issue.

Ruschelle Reuben mentioned that there is a new professional development framework launching this year for correctional education teachers, and the GED pass rate in correctional education is higher than the state's. She disputed the statement that low GED completion rates hinder entry into post-secondary programs, noting that post-secondary programs are housed within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, while GEDs are housed in the Department of Labor. Danielle Cox added that outreach efforts are made to ensure students are aware of postsecondary programs.

Dr. Stephen Steurer commented that everyone would have a chance to contribute to and refine the interim report. The report is meant to outline what the Commission has worked on so far, and will not include any recommendations. Danielle Cox emphasized the importance of highlighting the voices of returning citizens' experiences in the report. Del. Cheryl Pasteur agreed.

Del. Cheryl Pasteur said that the interim report gives a good overview of why the Commission needed to be extended.

Diana Bailey went over the Career Technology and Workforce Development section. She agreed that there needs to be a focus on reentry support and the barriers returning citizens face in gaining employment.

Ramieka Robinson-Peoples spoke about how the priorities for returning citizens are employment, housing, and education. She stressed the importance of job preparation, including professional development, resume building, and mock interviews, as well as the importance of building up reentry supports state-wide in areas that may not have as robust of a network as Baltimore.

Adam Cummings talked about how Maryland Correctional Enterprises hires formerly incarcerated individuals at every level, and he would like to see other state agencies do the same. He recommended a portal where formerly incarcerated individuals could apply for state jobs.

Christian Gant brought up Maryland's Medicaid Section 1115 waiver, which provides access to Medicaid funds for incarcerated individuals up to 90 days before release as a potential resource.

Del. Elizabeth Embry asked if federal funding is being utilized effectively. Ainsley Moench and Dr. Stephen Steurer listed some of the federal grant programs that fund correctional education, and Dr. Steurer said they could highlight how some of the federal funding is being used in the annual report. Danielle Cox cautioned that federal funding may be changing, so the Commission may want to wait to look into it.

Dr. Stephen Steurer went over the next steps the Commission would take to finish the interim report.

Gordon Pack suggested that the report should not blame any Department for any issues, and Dr. Stephen Steurer agreed that the Commission should always have a positive outlook and look for ways to improve.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:38am.