Goals and Process of the Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission

Dear Commission Members and Members of the Advisory Stakeholder Group,

The purpose of the Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission bill is to recommend the best model for delivering all education programs in Maryland prisons.

The Commission was created to improve the number and kind of programs delivered by the DPSCS and Department of Labor (DOL). The Commission will conduct a thorough study to determine the optimal number and types of programs in Maryland's prisons.

There are likely critical staff and program shortages. We understand that there is an acute shortage of correctional officers in many facilities which hinders the ability of programs to operate effectively.

The Commission, however, is most concerned about the educational and job training needs of the incarcerated population. Therefore, it will focus its recommendations on the kinds and levels of programs needed to address these educational issues so that its citizens can return to the community prepared to lead a crime-free and productive life as parents, citizens, and workers. The Commission will identify problems and shortages in staff, space, and resources. Implicit in its charge are recommendations to provide first-class educational programs to Maryland's incarcerated population.

Background

The state prisons within DPSCS are run by its Division of Corrections (DOC). Primary, secondary, and career technology education programs are currently administered by the Department of Labor (DOL). Post-secondary programs are provided by several private and public colleges and universities in Maryland and Washington, DC. They include Goucher College, Georgetown University, Bowie State University, Wor-Wic Community College, and the University of Baltimore. Several other colleges and universities are considering providing classes and are applying for approval by the US Department of Education (USDOE).

The DOL/CE programs include state-funded elementary adult basic education (ABE), secondary adult education or high school (GED), secondary career technology (CT), and certain transition programs. Within the ABE and GED programs are Special Education and Title I programs, which are partially federally funded. Until 2008, these programs were provided by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The Correctional Education program was transferred to DOL in 2009.

In 2023, the USDOE was authorized to provide Pell Grants to federal and state prisoners. The law authorizes the state Departments of Corrections to oversee and coordinate

post-secondary education provided by colleges and universities that approve their applications. Pell Grant legislation requires colleges and universities to meet requirements and provides for the collection of certain data by the state departments of corrections. In Maryland, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is the state agency authorized by federal law to coordinate and collect data from the colleges and universities approved by USDOE.

Federal Pell legislation only provides funds for tuition and related services. The departments of corrections and colleges/universities providing post-secondary education must provide other funds related to staff and related services. Maryland has historically NOT authorized any state funds for post-secondary education in its prisons. As a result, some colleges and universities decided not to apply for federal Pell Grants. This has also been the case in many other states that do not provide state funds for post-secondary funds in their prisons.

Rationale for Education Program Data Collection

The number of programs and the various agencies delivering them demonstrate the need for current and accurate data for facilities planning for each incarcerated individual. The Governor's Office and the Legislature have a vested interest in understanding how funds are spent and what the citizens of the state are getting for their money. Research conducted by the RAND Corporation since 2014 has demonstrated conclusively that educational programs at all levels, primary through college, significantly reduce future crime and save money. Every dollar invested in education returns at least $5 in future crime reduction.

The overriding concept for the future improvement of an incarcerated person's life is reentry planning. Reentry planning is an individual life plan created to include services to help a person change their behavior so that they become law-abiding citizens, workers, and family members. A person can be assigned a series of programs which include substance abuse and mental health treatment, education, and job skills. The Commission has been given the mandate to recommend a better educational delivery system than is currently in place in DPSCS as provided by DOL. These include all education and job skills programs from basic literacy to postsecondary education. As a result, the Commission will write reports to the Governor and the Legislature about the best model for all the programs currently delivered by DPSCS, DOL, and the various colleges and universities.

The Process for Achievement of the Goals of the Commission

To accomplish the goal of a better delivery model, the Commission has approved an Advisory Stakeholder Group (ASG) to do the day-to-day tasks listed in the law. The major tasks written in the law are:

1. *"Develop an education-focused statewide framework of policies to invest in strategies to increase public safety and reduce recidivism of adult offenders, using a data-driven approach.*
2. *Research best practices for the primary, secondary, postsecondary, and career or vocational education of those who are subject to the criminal and juvenile justice systems.*
3. *Identify measures to mitigate risk factors that contribute to adult contact with the criminal justice system, with a focus on education.*
4. *Evaluate current workforce programs in which incarcerated individuals participate and the programs' effectiveness in training for employment opportunities that result in living wages; and*
5. *Request technical assistance from: the Abell Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Council of State Governments, the Vera Institute of Justice, the Coalition of Adult Basic Education, the RAND Corporation, and other organizations similar to the organizations above."*

The ASG will be divided into smaller workgroups to work on key activities implied or mentioned in the five tasks. For example, the ASG will work to schedule a series of roundtable discussion groups (forums) across the state, conduct visits to various prison education programs, perform interviews of experts in prison education, collect key data and information on DOL and DSPCS education programs, and request technical assistance from entities listed in the authorizing legislation.

The first meeting of the ASG will be on December 19th to discuss Commission tasks, set priorities and timelines, and divide itself into appropriate work groups.

The ASG will share its findings and activities with the Commission. The result will be a report on the improvement hoped for in the delivery of Maryland's correctional education programming and how it can increase public safety, reduce recidivism, and mitigate risk factors that contribute to adult contact with the criminal justice system. The report will include a review of correctional education best practices around the country. There will be a framework for education-focused state policies along with a specific recommendation on how to re-organize Maryland's primary, secondary, post-secondary, and career-vocational prison education programs in a more efficient and coordinated delivery model. It will detail a data-driven approach for the evaluation and improvement of programs over time.

The Commission has already begun to schedule regional forums, interview various correctional and educational administrators, conduct research, and collect and analyze data. A statewide Correctional Education Forum is being planned at the University of Baltimore in October 2025 where we can update participants on the status of the report and possible recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor.

To guide the Commission and the ASG in its work, the Chair and Commission staff have proposed the following data collection framework.

Proposed Data Framework for Evaluation and Planning

After a preliminary review of several decades of annual correctional education reports from MSDE and DOL, the requirements of the USDOE for colleges and universities receiving Pell grants, correctional education research, and recommendations from correctional education staff and certain experts, the following list of data elements has been created for consideration by the Commission and ASG in their next meeting.

This is not a comprehensive list, and the Commission and ASG may recommend new data elements to study.

- Individual student history
    - Previous public school and job history of a student
    - Educational and job requirements from a student's court sentence
- DPSCS recordkeeping and data collection
    - Data systems including Offender Case Management System (OCMS), SmartSheets (post-secondary data), Best Interest Determination (BID), Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS)
    - Mandatory education requirements (240 days for people with at least an 18-month sentence) and "good time" for school participation
    - Incentives for program completion (sentence reduction for ABE, GED, CT, and higher education)
    - Wages for program participation and institutional jobs
- Federal requirements
    - Special education
    - Title I
    - Pell Grants – PEP Approval Process, SOP
- DOL Program Information (institutional and overall system) and CEC minutes
    - Programs available
    - Number of school days
    - Program enrollments (daily and annual)
    - Program attendance (daily and annual)
    - Instructional intensity (hours per day, per week)
    - Program completions (ABE, GED, CT, higher education)
    - Waiting lists (each program, time on waiting list)
    - Testing statistics (pass/fail, pass rate)
- Funding and expenditure
    - State funding (state budget and K-12 sharing)
    - Federal funds
    - Grants
    - Private sources
- Classroom and educational program space
    - Current and 25-year history
- Staffing (institution and system)
    - Full-time teachers and administrators
    - Part-time teachers

    - Current vacancies
    - 25-year history of staff positions
    - Salaries
    - Teacher credentials and staff training
- Instructional best practice delivery models
    - Face-to-face, digital, and hybrid models
- Educational instruction technology
    - ViaPath Tablet content (Edovo, CypherWorx), Orijin tablets and higher education platform, PDF Slides
    - Teacher digital resources
    - Software and classroom materials and resources
    - Internet access/security for instruction and student/teacher communication
- Record-keeping software and research tools
    - StateStat
    - Maryland Longitudinal Data System
    - Smartsheet, Lexus Nexus
    - Pell grant requirements
- Program evaluation and Planning data
    - Role of education in the overall reentry system
    - Program completions
    - Job market outcomes
    - Education continuation after release

Thank you for your dedication to improving the correctional education system in Maryland. I look forward to working with each of you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Stephen Steurer
Chair, Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission