

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5127

AN ACT REQUIRING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE DELIVERY OF

**Title:** POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN PRISONS.

**Vote Date:** 3/7/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/22/2024

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Anne M. Hughes, 135<sup>th</sup> District.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would require the Department of Corrections to conduct a needs assessment of the facilities, materials, and staffing require for the delivery of postsecondary education programs in correctional institutions. Postsecondary education programs in correctional institutions have been shown to reduce recidivism rates, increase employment rates for formerly incarcerated people, an increase in hours worked, and an increase in wages. It also leads to increased safety in communities and lower incarceration rates. This would help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals as well as their family and community.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The proposed substitute language in this bill would change the entity conducting the survey from the Department of Corrections to the Secretary of the Office of Policy Management and will include former students of these postsecondary education programs in correctional institutions, along with any other person or group of people that the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division deems necessary.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Office of the Chief Public Defender, Assistant Public Defender, Benedict R. Daigle](#): supports this bill stating that education is key to an individual reaching and maintaining socioeconomic stability. They state that, other than completely avoiding the carceral system, an individual leaving the system equipped with knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources to support

greater stability and success afterwards is the best outcome. This would benefit individuals, families, communities, and the whole state.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Connecticut State Community College, Interim Associate Dean of Non-traditional Transition Programs, Teresa Foley](#): supports this bill stating that a needs assessment would provide the Department of Correction and higher education institutions the information they need to provide programming and services for the students who are incarcerated. Realistically, a full array of all services available to students on campus will not be available to incarcerated students, but tutoring, academic and career advising, and library services certainly can be. This would establish the foundation for developing higher educational programming that meets students' needs and prepares them for full employment upon reentry.

[YWCA Greenwich, President & CEO, Mary Lee A. Kiernan, Director of the Center for Equity and Justice, Simone Quartey, and Gender & racial Research Analyst, Zachary J. Kyle](#): support this bill and states that, while Connecticut has made progress since the mass incarceration projects of the 1980's through 2000's, The states incarceration rate is still alarmingly high at 394 per 100,000 people. They then state the difference in incarceration rates for different races and different genders, noting that the population of women in prison has increased 438% between 1980 and 2017, mostly driven by women of color. They state that the more education you have, the less likely you are to recidivate or engage in harm and violence.

[New England Board of Higher Education, Director of Transfer Initiatives, Sarah Kuczynski](#): supports this bill and states that it is in alignment with the recommendations put forth in their report. They then state some examples from the report that the bill is in alignment with such as an inventory of infrastructure and staffing, taking stock of technological capacity, and the emphasis on cross-sector collaboration. They emphasize the need for access to secure empty space, which would require correctional personnel. They also emphasize the historically poor access to technology like wi-fi and laptops. Other states in New England either have significantly better access to technology like Maine with its consumer grade wi-fi in correctional facilities or are considering it like Massachusetts with wi-fi hot spot pilots.

[American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, Smart Justice Leader, Brittany Lamarr](#): supports this bill and recommends including consultation with incarcerated learners about their needs and expanding the assessment to include an expectation for higher education institutions to outline their supports for incarcerated learners. They want to point out that neither proposed section can be fulfilled without consulting incarcerated learners. They state that every dollar invested in prison-based education yields four to five dollars in taxpayer savings. It is also expected that employment rates for returning incarcerated learners will increase 10%.

[American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, Smart Justice Leader, Luis Mattei](#): supports this bill because of their experience as an individual who was incarcerated from 2002 to 2022. They state that for the first 15 years of their sentence, the only post-secondary education opportunities they had were vocational training that did not offer any certification or pay out-of-pocket costs to earn a correspondence degree from a predatory institution. They recommend that this assessment be conducted by HEP programs that currently exist within

facilities. They believe the Department of Corrections is too far removed from education to understand the needs of a student.

[Connecticut Voices for Children, Research & Policy Director, Lauren Ruth, Ph.D:](#) supports this bill and states that evaluations of other states' postsecondary education programs found that earning a postsecondary degree while incarcerated is associated with individuals working more hours when they return to their communities and earning higher wages. They state that studies suggest that postsecondary education programs in Connecticut would benefit the incarcerated individuals, their families, community public safety, and the states economy. They state that the Second Chance Pell Program is only available in seven of Connecticut's fourteen carceral institutions, college credit opportunities were only available in six institutions, and non-accredited college educational opportunities were only available in two.

[American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, Smart Justice Leader, Abraham Santiago, and Policy Counsel, Jess Zaccagnino:](#) supports this bill but states they believe it does not go far enough because it does not include the incarcerated or former incarcerated in the needs assessment. Many formerly incarcerated people have been advocating, teaching, building programs, and helping to write policy for decades. They believe the exclusion of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people would be excluding a vital expert on the needs of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. They recommend Connecticut creates a formal, multi-stakeholder group to develop a detailed, multi-year state prison education strategic plan that considers existing programming, staff, resources, infrastructure and explicitly includes the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated.

[The Hartford Foundation, Senior Public Policy Officer, Chris Senecal:](#) supports this bill and states that they recommend that legislators identify immediate and long-term resources that can enhance, support, and sustain programs in correctional facilities that can address racial and economic disparities. They also recommend addressing the need for additional resources to support the Department of Corrections Unified School District #1 to ensure adequate basic education, career, and technical education programming. They also suggest, alongside the DOC, considering immediate funding needs that can address critical needs for education programs, including funding to conduct a thorough assessment to avoid straining the limited facility staff and resources.

[Braxton Swanbeck:](#) supports this bill stating that their mother is a Mental Health Worker with the Department of Corrections. They state that this would destroy the survivalist culture in our state's prisons. They also state that inmates who participate in correctional education programs have 43 percent lower odds of returning to prison than those who do not, according to a DOJ archived document. This bill would make work safer for prison workers.

[The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, President, Jennifer Widness:](#) supports this bill and states that the Department of Corrections has limited capacity. This needs assessment would identify areas where investments are needed to support post-secondary training in prison.

[Prospective Student, J'Waka Steele:](#) supports this bill.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Patrick Buckley**

**Date: 3/12/2024**