SUPPORT HB 812/SB 922: DIMINUTION CREDITS IN CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

Access to correctional educational and vocational opportunities creates pathways to employment and reduces recidivism.

**THE CHALLENGE**

- The average reading level of the 19,332 inmates currently in the Maryland prison system is between 5th and 8th grade. Less than half of these inmates have a high school diploma when they enter the correctional system.
- Maryland’s mandatory education law in corrections require inmates to enroll in educational or workforce skills classes if they lack a high school diploma, have at least 18 months remaining on their sentence, and is not exempt due to medical, developmental, or learning disabilities. Inmates must participate for a minimum of 120 days.
- According to the 2018 Correctional Education Council report, there are between 300 and 600 youth under the age of 21 incarcerated in adult prisons. All inmates under the age of 21 without a high school diploma are placed in class within 30 days of their arrival. In FY 2017 only 55 students under the age of 21 attained their GED while enrolled in Correctional Education classes.
- Studies have shown that recidivism rates for inmates with a high school diploma/GED or college degree is 7.9% less than inmates overall.

**CURRENT POLICY**

Diminution credits are defined as inmates sentenced to prison in Maryland are entitled to earn diminution of confinement credits that reduce the length of incarceration. Inmates who may not receive such credits are those who are serving a sentence for first or second degree rape or sexual offense against a victim under age 16; an inmate who is serving a repeat sentence for a third-degree sexual offense against a victim under age 16; and an inmate imprisoned for a lifetime sexual offender supervision violation. In addition, an inmate whose mandatory supervision release has been revoked may not be awarded any new diminution credits on the term of confinement for which the inmate was on mandatory supervision release. If an inmate violates rules of discipline, the inmate’s good conduct or special project credits may be revoked.

Currently, inmates may earn up to 30 days per month in diminution credits if they participate in required educational and vocational programs. Inmates convicted of sex offenses, violent crimes, or high-volume drug offenses, are ineligible, and can instead earn a maximum of 20 days a month, according to specific guidelines based on offense type.

**THE SOLUTION: INCREASE DIMINUTION CREDITS FOR CREDENTIALING**

- Education, specifically obtaining a high school diploma, college degree or occupational skills training behind bars, is associated with higher rates of employment after release.
- The proposed legislation would establish a diminution credit bonus to be awarded to those who earn their high school diploma/GED and/or successfully complete a literacy or occupational skills program, post-secondary educational certificate or degree, or 2- or 4-year college degree.
- By passing this legislation, Maryland will join 13 other states in offering diminution credit bonuses for educational achievement.

For more information, please contact:
Derrell Frazier / Policy Advocate / 443-854-1413 / derrell@jotf.org