

February 6, 2022

**Written Testimony in Support of Restoring TAP Funding to Incarcerated Individuals
Submitted to the February 7, 2022 Higher Education Committee Hearing**

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee:

This past year, after 14 years, I was released from prison. Unlike the majority of people, I walked out of prison with an education that changed the trajectory of my life. A year into receiving my associates degree, I had no doubt that I would continue to receive my Master's degree. College in prison gave me the confidence I needed in myself to radically change my life. However, the current ban on TAP to incarcerated individuals denies the vast majority of people such as myself to earn a college education behind bars. There are countless other individuals who would benefit from greater access to college in prison and whose education will benefit communities across New York. In her January 5, 2022 State of the State address, New York Governor Kathy Hochul pledged to "restore the Tuition Assistance Program for incarcerated people." I urge the legislature to work with the Governor to repeal the ban on TAP to incarcerated individuals. I am a constituent of Assembly member, Brian Barnel, 30th district, and Senator Joseph. P. Addabbo Jr.

Providing college opportunities in prison has been found to deliver strong employment outcomes, develop employer-demanded skills, make prisons safer, and strengthen pathways to successful reentry. These programs also hold the unique potential to improve students' lives, help narrow racial and economic equity gaps in postsecondary attainment and workforce participation, strengthen local economies and communities, and disrupt cycles of incarceration that continue to target, harm, and limit opportunity for Black and Brown people and people from low-income backgrounds.

In December 2021, *Justice Quarterly* released a study by the Yale Policy Lab further demonstrating how higher education in prison reduces recidivism. In that study, Denney and Tynes find that participation in a college in prison program leads to a "large and significant reduction in recidivism rates" and that people with "higher levels of participation" in a college in prison program recidivate at lower levels. **The recidivism rate for BPI students who earn an AA degree is 8.7% but that of students who go on to earn a BA degree falls to 3.1%.** In New York, 90% of BPI alumni have never returned to prison over the past 20 years. That's a rate of success in stark contrast to New York's average recidivism rate of about 40% within three years.

As you know, restoring TAP funding to incarcerated people will increase public safety, save taxpayer dollars, and create extraordinary inroads to college in communities we most often fail to engage in higher education. It is how the state can invest in people and education over prisons and punishment.

Thank you,

Adam Bloom

Alumni, Bard Prison Initiative