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CAROLE EADY
TESTIMONY REGARDING REPEALING PARAGRAPH SUBDIVISION
b(1-v) and 6(d) OF EDUCATION LAW
2022 JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING – HIGHER EDUCATION
FEBRUARY 7, 2022

I seek the repeal of paragraph b(i-v) and 6(d) of section 661 of education law. In other words I seek the repeal of the ban on the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for incarcerated people. In other words, I seek what is owed.

It was February 1985. My brother, Ray, wrote me a letter letting me know he had been accepted to an educational program at Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, NY where he would be able to get his GED while taking college classes. Little did I know, just a scant 14 years later, in 1999, he would be home, and I would be the one writing to him that I was going to continue my education behind bars. I had always wanted to return to my education after giving birth to my daughter, but I was hired by the telephone company as an operator and the work schedule did not allow me to continue my studies. I figured that later when I was working a steady shift I'd return to school. This did not happen outside of jail because I lost my job after becoming addicted to drugs during a domestically violent relationship. That's how I ended up in jail - possession with intent to sell.

Anyway, I was told I had been accepted to an educational program at Bedford Correctional Facility. It was a part of the Sarah Lawrence - Mary Mount College Program. I was glad to take my mind off the everyday occurrences at the prison and focus on my family. What I was going to be able to do for my children when I returned home with some education under my belt, although I wouldn't be there long enough to complete it. I was just hoping I would still be able to access my TAP and BEOG (now FAFSA) to finish school once I was released. But for now, just being chosen to continue with the few credits I had from Taylor Business School's secretarial science courses - math, english, etc, was exciting to me. This represented that someone on the decision board saw something in me that I was still struggling to see in myself. It wasn't even my idea to apply for the program - it was my bunkie's. After the drug addiction and being physically and emotionally abused the way I had been by my boyfriend, I didn't have the self-worth to believe in myself. My bunkie just kept telling me you'll get all the books you can read if you're going to school. She had been at Bedford a long time so she knew what she was talking about. I thought it was a long shot but I applied anyway and I got through.

Starting those classes gave me a sense of pride, a feeling of hope that I could change my life and get a job, perhaps a career. I could learn something new, brush up on my love of reading. They would supply us books - I had read everything I could get my hands on while incarcerated.

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Women would read books and pass them along. I'd stay up at night reading sometimes. Now I would get to do this during the day without the correction officers asking where I was supposed to be.

When Professor Mack entered class on the first day he addressed us as if we were truly college students, and I felt the walls melt away. For the time we spent in the class I could fantasize that I was not incarcerated but free and living my life like I was supposed to before the drugs and incarceration took over, and all my hopes and dreams wound up on a shelf on the back porch of my existence.

When I was released I entered John Jay College of Criminal Justice. I studied there for six years and graduated with a BA/MA in Forensic Psychology. The first thing that happened was I felt this sense of exhilaration and accomplishment. I couldn't believe I was a college graduate. The next thing was I was hired by the College of New Rochelle as an adjunct professor teaching a psych course called the Addict, the Family, and the Community. This was right up my alley and I learned even more about how the drugs not only affected me but my children as well. I received a promotion on my job from a secretary with the Dept. for the Aging to a case worker with Special Services at NYC HRA. Finally I was hired to teach psych courses at my alma mater. That is when my self-esteem really soared. I believe that if incarcerated folks are allowed to continue their education the way I was, there would be so much less recidivism.

We ask that you extend the same to the thousands behind bars in New York State. The federal government has restored Pell. NY is now in the minority of states with a ban on its financial aid. Please prioritize repealing the ban on TAP, as it appears in the Executive Budget in each of the one-house budgets. We cannot afford to wait.