



February 3, 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:

I spent twelve years in prison, was released less than 5 years ago, and today am the Senior Adviser for Strategic Outreach at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. But I am not an exceptional person, rather, I had an exceptional opportunity. The education I received, and two degrees I earned, through the Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) radically changed the trajectory of my life. If more incarcerated people had access to programs like BPI, more of them, like me, would go on to defy expectations of who college is for & where it might lead.

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,” and has included a repeal of the language banning TAP to incarcerated individuals in the Executive Budget. I urge the legislature to include S4464 (Jackson) and A2322 (Aubry) in the respective one-house budgets.

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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dyjuan Tatros".

Dyjuan Tatros,
Senior Government Affairs Officer & Alumnus