

February 7, 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 served ten years in prison, during which time I was very fortunate to enroll with the Bard Prison Initiative. BPI afforded me a chance to pursue something positive in spite of the negative circumstance. More specifically, BPI offered me an opportunity to work towards something meaningful, something useful, and ideally, something that would not only prepare me to reintegrate back into society, but, in turn, also act as an incentive for society to welcome me back. I am only one of countless others who has been able to benefit from college-in-prison programs, such as BPI, both prior and subsequent to being released, which stands to reason that if there was greater access to education in prisons, then even more people could be similarly impacted by the positive effects of having earned a college education.

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 **Mark Walczyk** and Senator **Patty Ritchie**.

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. Please find time to consider this matter. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jeffrey Fineout
BPI alum and TAP Advocacy Fellow

