

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:

I was incarcerated at 19 years old, and I served nineteen and a half years. I've been home for about 6 months. Today I am a published author, a writing consultant, and a writing tutor for BPI's Microcollege in Harlem. This June I'll take the LSAT and apply to law school shortly after. None of my accomplishments would've been possible and none of my aspirations conceivable had I not had the opportunity to earn a college education. I credit the Bard Prison Initiative, my professors, and my fellow students for creating a safe space for me to grow as a thinker and as a person. Being a responsible citizen, a person committed to improving his community, became a central focus of mine. I'm certain that if more incarcerated citizens had access to programs like BPI, more of them would experience a similar transformation.

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 Dr. Anna R. Kelles and Senator Thomas F. O'Marra.

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,

Rodney Spivey-Jones  
Author & Alumnus, BPI