

A Letter to Senator Charles Schumer to Cosponsor the “Promoting Reentry through Education in Prisons Act of 2019” United States Congress Federal Bill S.1337

April 3, 2020

From: Kelly Smith, New York, NY and Gurleen Bajwa, New York, NY

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Leo O'Brien Federal Building
1 Clinton Avenue
Room 420
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Senator Charles Schumer,

We write to ask you to cosponsor the “Promoting Reentry through Education in Prisons Act of 2019,” or the Prep Act. This recently proposed federal bill by Senator Byran Schatz (D-HI) would combat recidivism rates through an establishment of correctional education. The purpose of the Prep Act is to create a dedicated office within the Bureau of Prisons to improve correctional education, ensure access to quality programs across all federal, penal, and correctional institutions, and to create partnerships with education providers to offer quality programs. The dedicated office that would be established in order to ensure these three factors of the act's purpose would be named the Office of Correctional Education. They would ensure that the correctional institutions will provide sustainable and quality education while serving as a nationwide repository for research, policies, and the most efficient practices for present and future correctional education.

As of 2018 “the American criminal justice system holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 109 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories.”(3) The total amount of spending for the prison system in the state of New York is \$3,688,356,319 and the average amount of spending for each inmate in New York \$69,355 per year (6).

“Inmates who participate in any kind of educational program behind bars—from remedial math to vocational auto shop to college-level courses—are up to 43 percent less likely to reoffend and return to prison”, the study found. They also appear to be far more likely to find a job after their release, and the social stability that comes with it. Every dollar invested in correctional education, (the Research and Development aka) RAND concluded, saves nearly five in re-incarceration costs over three years.” (2). Studies have shown that people who are already in

prison that take part in educational programs while inside are less apt to return to prison once released. This is an important fact to know when discussing the importance of education and how it correlates with decreased recidivism rates. Going even further, in a study conducted by the University of California: Los Angeles and Northwestern University, it was found that criminal history is associated with better performance overall in customer service positions and is ambiguous in sales positions. They also found that employees with a criminal record have a longer tenure and are less likely to quit their jobs voluntarily than other workers (2). Like Lois Davis has once stated, “regardless of what you think about inmates, what do you want for your community? You have to understand that they all come back eventually, if you don't rehabilitate them, how are they going to successfully rejoin society?” (2). These are important questions to ask yourself when weighing the costs and benefits that come with protecting and preserving the community in which you reside in.

Formerly incarcerated people need stable jobs, ones that can support themselves as well as their families. In an article written by the Prison Policy Initiative, they estimated that over 27.3% of formerly incarcerated people are unemployed, significantly higher than the national unemployment rate of 5.8% (4). The Prep Act’s “correctional education programming [will] prepare individuals for the contemporary workforce pre-release, ensuring that upon release the individuals are best situated to be productive members of their communities (1).” Data included in the Prep Act displays that “Employment is 13 percent higher for individuals who participated in either academic or vocational programs in prison, and 28 percent higher for individuals who participated in vocational programs alone (1).” Corrections education will not only help inmates but also promote safer environments in prison for correctional officers (1). In terms of a monetary impact, “Every dollar spent on funding correctional education programs reduces incarceration costs by 4 to 5 dollars (1).” This is significant because the impact will not be instant but it will be more than worth the while. Not only will you save money, decrease crime rates, and increase employment rates, but our state will have less inmates that will be incarcerated in the future.

The Prep Act indicates that the following “educational services [will be] provided: adult literacy, basic skills development, education toward a regular high school diploma or its recognized equivalent, postsecondary education, career and technical education, workforce development that leads to an industry recognized credential, certificate, associate degree, pre apprenticeship, or registered apprenticeship, and lastly expanded opportunities for individuals with a disability (1). The type of institutions providing the education would be the following eligible providers: an institution of higher education, a local educational agency, a community-based organization or faith-based organization, a volunteer literacy organization, a public or private nonprofit agency, a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, and institutions, and a partnership between an employer or entity, all of which must have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities” (1).

Implementing educational programs via the Prep Act into prisons and jails will rehabilitate people, giving them the tools to return to being a productive member of society as educated, law abiding, and socially prepared citizens. Implementing the Prep Act will also result in a net cost savings to society, making the decision to support this legislation a win-win. We can break this repetitive cycle, and you can help. It can be a change where the future will glance into the rear view mirror and say “never again”. Be a part of this change by cosponsoring the “S. 1337 : Promoting Reentry through Education in Prisons Act of 2019”.

Sincerely yours,

Kelly M. Smith & Gurleen Bajwa, Pace University

1 Pace Plaza

Room Y31

New York, NY 10038

Footnotes

(1) Schatz, and Brian. “All Info - S.1337 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): PREP Act.” *Congress.gov*, 7 May 2019, www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1337/all-info.

(2) Lois M. Davis. “The Case for Correctional Education in U.S. Prisons.” *RAND Corporation*, 3 Jan. 2016, www.rand.org/blog/rand-review/2016/01/course-correction-the-case-for-correctional-education.html.

(3) Sawyer, Wendy, and Peter Wagner. “Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019.” *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019 | Prison Policy Initiative*, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html.

(4) Couloute, Lucius, and Dan Kopf. “Out of Prison & Out of Work.” *Out of Prison & Out of Work | Prison Policy Initiative*, www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html.

(5) Dylan, et al. “Criminal Background and Job Performance.” *SSRN*, 11 May 2017, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2851951.

(6) “Vera Institute.” *Vera*, 11 Mar. 2020, www.vera.org/publications/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends-prison-spending.

(7) Shanahan, Ryan, and Sandra VA Agudelo. “The Family and Recidivism .” *PrisonPolicy.org*, 2012, www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/vera/the-family-and-recidivism.pdf.

Project Proposal

Goal:

The goal for our project is awareness and advocacy. The best way to understand the complex prison system in the United States, more specifically how it can impact our society today, is by having a discussion. The recidivism cycle is often overlooked, because people are simply unaware of the immense impacts it has on our families. There needs to be a discussion held highlighting the inability to find work or getting an education after prison. It is hard getting back into the ways of society after prison especially when there are unethical obstacles in your way. Our goal is to present the facts surrounding recidivism to bring more awareness regarding this topic, and engage in a conversation with our peers. We hope that the awareness can encourage advocacy for change in the recidivism cycle.

Plan:

In order to accomplish our goal we will begin by creating a social media presence. Social media has become a source for current news and information. This allows us to provide information at the current most convenient source. Throughout, Summer 2020 we will build a following on Instagram to make connections to bring more awareness to the current prison system. We will also engage with activists in local communities, highlight how they are making a change, to demonstrate the change we can make in our communities as well. Beginning Fall 2020 we will announce that we are holding a panel discussion at Pace University. The Center for Community Action and Research will help assist in planning this event. We want to invite speakers from The Osborne Association and Getting Out and Staying Out. We are seeking support from these two exemplary non profit organizations because they adhere to the visions we so vividly have. We will paste flyers all over the Pace University Campus as well as the surrounding area and advertise on social media. Also, we will stream the info session on our social media platform for our viewers, who could not attend in person. There will be a discussion regarding what can be

done in our communities to combat the recidivism rates, and how we can advocate for change. At the end of the info session, we will encourage the viewers on our social media and attendees to sign a petition agreeing with the letter sent to Senator Charles Schumer. After the session we will set up an information table at Pace University to collect more petition signatures. We will then present the signed letter accompanied by the petition at Senator Schumer's Office in NYC during our desired lobby visit.

Advertising for Info Session: Social Media & Flyers	\$150
Refreshments for panel discussion	\$100
Table Setup for Petition Signing	\$150
Trip To Senator Charles Schumer's Office	\$100