

## **Restoring Pell Grant Eligibility to Prisoners: Improving Public Safety through Education**

**The Problem:** In 1994, Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which removed state and federal prisoners from Pell Grant eligibility. As a result, access to college-level education in prisons throughout the country plummeted. The recent enactment of the First Step Act signaled a shift towards a strong commitment to evidence-based programming within our federal prison system, but the majority of federal prisoners still have limited access to one of the few proven recidivism-reducing tools: an education.

**The Solution:** Congress must restore Pell Grant eligibility to all federal and state prisoners.

### **Educational attainment reduces recidivism, improving public safety for the country:**

- According to a 2018 Rand Corporation Report, prisoners who participated in correctional education programs were 28% less likely to recidivate.<sup>1</sup>
- Correctional educational programs also increase the chances of employment upon release by 13%.<sup>2</sup>
- A U.S. Sentencing Commission analysis of federal prisoners released from custody in 2005 found that prisoners with college degrees had a significantly lower rate of recidivism (19.1%) than prisoners with only high school diplomas (50.7%).<sup>3</sup>

### **Current educational opportunities in federal and state prisons are inadequate:**

- Currently, 64% of individuals incarcerated in federal or state prisons are academically eligible to enroll in a postsecondary educational program.<sup>4</sup>
- Despite being proven to reduce recidivism, college education is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain in most federal and state prisons.
- Even where available, college courses are virtually never free in prison, and with extremely low prison job wages, the costs are far too high for the average inmate.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Lois Davis, Susan Turner, “Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, Vol. 14, No. 3, September 2018.

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/external\\_publications/EP67650.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP67650.html)

<sup>2</sup> Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, Jeremy N.V. Miles, “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education” RAND Corporation, August 22, 2013, xvi.

<sup>3</sup> “Recidivism Among Federal Offenders: A Comprehensive Overview,” United States Sentencing Commission, March 2016, 24. [https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2016/recidivism\\_overview.pdf](https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2016/recidivism_overview.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Oakford, Cara Crumfield, Casey Goldvale, Laura Tatum, Margaret diZerega, and Fred Patrick, “Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison,” Vera Institute of Justice, January 2018, 3. [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy\\_downloads/investing-in-futures.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison/legacy_downloads/investing-in-futures.pdf)

- According to a 2017 FAMM survey of federal prisoners, the most common form of education in federal prison is adult continuing education (ACE) classes, which are often taught by fellow prisoners and seldom rigorous.<sup>5</sup>
- Currently, only 12,000 prisoners in both state and federal prisons have access to the Second Chance Pell Grant pilot initiative – less than 1% of the U.S. prison population.<sup>6</sup>

**Increasing access to postsecondary education in prison is a taxpayer-friendly policy:**

- The 2013 Rand analysis found that college programs have a 400% return on investment over 3 years, saving taxpayers 4 to 5 dollars for every dollar spent.<sup>7</sup>
- A 2019 Vera Institute analysis estimates that increasing access to postsecondary education would result in savings of \$365.8 million.<sup>8</sup>

**Pell Grants in prisons will not take away grants from students outside of prison:**

- Pell Grants are guaranteed to every student who meets the criteria for the award.<sup>9</sup>
- If the awards granted exceed the discretionary appropriation, the program borrows on future appropriations to ensure all eligible students receive the award.<sup>10</sup>
- Despite having the ability to enter into a shortfall, the Pell Grant program has maintained a funding surplus since FY 2012.<sup>11</sup>
- When Pell Grants were removed from prisons in 1994, the number of students outside of prison who were able to receive a Pell Grant award did not increase – showing that no one outside of prison had been deprived of a grant because someone inside prison received one.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Molly M. Gill and Kevin A. Ring, “Using Time to Reduce Crime: Federal Prisoner Survey Results Show Ways to Reduce Recidivism,” FAMM, June 2017, 9. [https://famm.org/wp-content/uploads/Prison-Report\\_May-31\\_Final.pdf](https://famm.org/wp-content/uploads/Prison-Report_May-31_Final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> “12,000 incarcerated students to enroll in postsecondary educational and training programs through Education Department’s new Second Chance Pell Pilot Program,” Department of Education, June 24, 2016. <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/12000-incarcerated-students-enroll-postsecondary-educational-and-training-programs-through-education-departments-new-second-chance-pell-pilot-program>

<sup>7</sup> “Education and Vocational Training in Prisons Reduces Recidivism, Improves Job Outlook,” RAND Corporation, August 22, 2013. <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2013/08/22.html>

<sup>8</sup> Oakford et al, 3.

<sup>9</sup> “Federal Pell Grant Program of the Higher Education Act: Primer,” Congressional Research Service, November 28, 2018

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Linda G. Morra, Memo to The Honorable Harris Wofford, Government Accountability Office, Health Education and Human Services Division, August 5, 1994 <http://archive.gao.gov/t2pbat2/152342.pdf>