Legislative Testimony

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**Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 5127, An Act Requiring a Needs Assessment for the Delivery of Postsecondary Education Programs in Prisons**

Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Ranking Members Kelly and Haines, and members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of House Bill 5127, An Act Requiring a Needs Assessment for the Delivery of Postsecondary Education Programs in Prisons.

The ACLU-CT believes that making education available for all people in prison is essential. Every person living with a criminal record, should have an equal opportunity to build a successful and fulfilling life. Increasing access to education within prisons is a promising strategy in helping people find work after their release and breaking the cycle of incarceration.

We know that when people participate in any kind of educational program within a prison, their chances of recidivism drop. The evidence shows that when people who are living with a criminal record are given a fair chance to earn an education or job, find housing, get insurance, and reintegrate into society, we all succeed. Education is correlated to a 43 percent reduction in recidivism rates.[[1]](#footnote-1) At the same time, people leaving incarceration have lower levels of education than people without records,[[2]](#footnote-2) a huge competitive disadvantage in the employment market.[[3]](#footnote-3) Investments in post-secondary education in prisons is also an investment: the RAND Corporation found that for every dollar invested in education in prisons, taxpayers will save between $4 and $5 in reincarceration costs.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Urban Institute conducted a large survey of post-secondary education in prisons and found its benefits to be numerous. Focus groups found that people had a variety of reasons for pursuing education within prison, such as the desire to own and operate their own businesses and the ability to be hired for a better job in which they could invest in their futures.[[5]](#footnote-5) Participants also reported that post-secondary education “positively affected their self-esteem. Among the most common examples offered were: ‘learning that they could complete something,’ ‘learning that they are more intelligent than they had previously believed,’ and ‘having a renewed sense of confidence.’”[[6]](#footnote-6) Participants at every study site also noted that participation in post-secondary education programs motivated them to avoid prison conflicts, in turn creating a safer prison environment.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Expanding access to post-secondary education in Connecticut’s prisons is vital to ending mass incarceration. House Bill 5127 is a small first step towards this goal. Requiring the Department of Correction to conduct a needs assessment will allow the legislature to better address education access in prisons in future legislation. In conducting this needs assessment, the Department of Corrections must center the voices of people directly impacted by Connecticut’s carceral system.

All people in Connecticut have paid the price of mass incarceration, yet we cannot afford the cost. Let’s work to build stronger individuals and stronger communities by eliminating barriers to post-secondary education for people incarcerated in Connecticut’s prisons. The ACLU-CT strongly urges passage House Bill 5127, a critical bill to create a more just and equitable Connecticut.

1. Megan Quattlebaum & Haley Glover, *Rejected*, Inside Higher Ed Views (Mar. 18, 2020), *available at*:<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/03/18/new-study-illuminates-why-barriers-higher-education-incarcerated-people-confront>*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lucius Couloute, *Getting Back on Course: Educational Exclusion and Attainment Among Formerly Incarcerated People*, Prison Pol’y Initiative (Oct. 2018), *available at*:<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/education.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lois M. Davis, et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*, RAND Corp. (2013), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Laura Winterfield, et al., *The Effects of Postsecondary Correctional Education*, Urban Inst. (May 2009), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/30626/411954-The-Effects-of-Postsecondary-Correctional-Education.PDF>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)