

Since Adults in Custody were not able to offer live testimony in this public hearing of the Senate Education Committee on 3/8/2021, regarding SB 234, 235, 241 and 756, what follows is a compilation of statements from current college students inside Oregon's prisons.

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“Prison is a critical turning point in many people’s lives. If the issues that brought a person to prison are addressed, recidivism can be reduced. The Bard Prison Initiative opines that *“expanding educational opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated people within the communities where they live – or to which they will return – is an essential component of ending mass incarceration and promoting public health.”* This connection is vital, because these men and women being educated are mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers who can pass on this knowledge to their loved ones, and practice these healthy behaviors in the community.”

“The primary obstacle that students in prison are confronted with is a lack of meaningful access to 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. There is no virtual learning platform for students who wish to participate in college programming because there is no technological infrastructure in place to address this need. Students, therefore, must rely solely on in-person learning – an option that is no longer tenable due to the public health impact of Covid 19 - or, college correspondence courses, which is an equally untenable option because it is outdated, antiquated, and fails to adequately address the realities of the digital age of education.”

“Prior to my enrollment in college, I saw my re-entry as daunting. Since I have begun my studies, I now have a new focus on my future, which gives me hope. However, it is imperative that I know how to utilize technology. If a firewall were to be installed, we could access the internet for research, thus learning yet another needed skill. The lack of in-person learning during the pandemic could be rectified if we were allowed remote learning access with Zoom type classes. Investing in higher education in prison is a win-win situation.”

“These courses have been more than me just getting an education; they have reminded me that there is so much more beyond these walls. We lack stimulation in here as well as solid connections and communication with the outside world, and this has helped to reestablish those things. It has helped to make me feel normal again and has strengthened not only my mind but also my confidence. Higher education not only brings value to our lives, but gives us a sense of purpose, and is crucial to our rehabilitation.”

“Through the pandemic, there has been a disconnect between the student-classmate-teacher relationship. I can imagine this is the same throughout all institutions. The ability to have conversations with each other and with our professor is a “must” in understanding the

curriculum. Not having each other has been discouraging for all parties involved with education.”

“Learning environments cultivate a foundation for civic social membership. By creating and supporting an educational pathway for AICs, it can save taxpayers money. I propose webcams, webinars, interactive videos, laptops and a plethora of internet technology, security and software. This is a whole new pedagogy is a viable and sustainable solution during Covid-19 restrictions and any future similar health concerns. This would be an intentional investment with unlimited potential!”

“Educating incarcerated men and women changes lives, opportunities and circumstances for generations. We learn and teach our children and grandchildren the importance of education.”

“We will be out, eventually, and we want to be successful. Please help us get to that place.”