



Date: April 28, 2023  
To: House Committee on Higher Education  
From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Senior Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland  
Re: Support for Education Programs for Adults in Custody, SB 270

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs McIntire and Ruiz, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 270. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

Data collected from the Sentencing Project in 2019, "shows in Oregon the Black imprisonment rate per 100,000 is 1,932 (# 8 highest among all states). Compared to the White imprisonment rate per 100,000 is 344 (#17 highest among all states). The Black to White imprisonment ratio is 5.6:1."<sup>1</sup> Black Oregonians are being imprisoned at higher rates in comparison to our percentage of the population and given all the social disparities, are less likely to receive the support and education to make life changes to prevent recidivism after incarceration.

If incarceration is meant to rehabilitate incarcerated individuals, rather than punish and demoralize adults in custody, access to educational programs or the ability to confer one's degree is pivotal to facilitating successful reintegration into society. In addition to the basic benefits expected of receiving a formal education, such as better critical thinking skills, enhanced interpersonal communication, and social mobility through additional employment opportunities, education for adults in custody yields specific outcomes benefitting all Oregonians:

- "The key finding from this comprehensive study of correctional education in the United States is that correctional education is effective in reducing recidivism for incarcerated adults and that there is reasonable evidence that it is also effective, especially vocational training, in improving individuals' likelihood of post-release employment. Our cost analysis further showed that correctional education is highly cost-effective for incarcerated adults—for every dollar spent on correctional education, five dollars are saved on three-year reincarceration costs."<sup>2</sup>
- "When focusing on studies with the highest caliber research designs, we found that inmates participating in correctional education programs were 28% less likely to recidivate when compared with inmates who did not participate in correctional education programs. However, we found that inmates receiving correctional education were as likely to obtain post-release employment as inmates not receiving correctional education."<sup>3</sup>
- "The vast majority of people in prison will eventually be released, Kimberlee A. Johnson says, founder of Eastern's prison education program. But finding employment after incarceration can be difficult. Many lack education credentials. And some employers require applicants to disclose their criminal history, limiting formerly incarcerated individuals' job options. Though some states have enacted ban-the-box laws – which prevent employers from inquiring about criminal history – not all have. Prison education programs can help: The

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<sup>1</sup> KTVZ News Channel 21, [Incarceration Rates Demographics in Oregon](#), 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Davis, Lois M.; Steele, Jennifer L.; Bozick, Robert; Williams, Malcolm V.; Turner, Susan; Miles, Jeremy N. V.; Saunders, Jessica Saunders; and Steinberg, Paul S., *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here*, 2014, pg. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, Lois M.; Steele, Jennifer L.; Bozick, Robert; Turner, Susan, *Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Post Release Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States*, 2018, pg. 389–428.



2018 meta-analysis found that rates of employment post-release increase by 12% for individuals who participate in any type of correctional education."<sup>4</sup>

- "College in prison programs can reduce violence, making facilities safer for both incarcerated individuals and staff, experts say. "Corrections officers and staff work in really difficult, stressful, and potentially violent environments," Ruth Delaney says, associate initiative director at the Vera Institute of Justice. "A prison is not a safe place to be. It's not safe for incarcerated people and it's not safe for staff. As we see these programs expand in different parts of the country, we are hoping that staff also benefit so they are not bringing these experiences of violence home."<sup>5</sup>

When contextualizing the benefits of expanded educational opportunities for adults in custody, the intersection between marginalized populations and incarceration must be recognized and addressed. Expanded educational opportunities would improve the socioeconomic conditions and lives of members of the Black community, helping to close some of the racial inequity existing today. Maintaining the status quo by denying educational access to adults in custody will only continue the revolving door of recidivism and incarceration. Offering educational opportunities to adults in custody allows individuals to better themselves and help prepare themselves for their transition back into society. Senate Bill 270 is a step towards creating a fairer and more just society. By enabling adults in custody to access educational opportunities, we can help them to reform and reintegrate into society in a positive and productive manner. This is crucial to the Black population who face higher imprisonment rates and education gaps before-during-after prison. If we do nothing, recently incarcerated people will struggle to find employment upon their release, and we will continue to face workforce shortages in all sectors.

I urge the Committee to support Senate Bill 270, Oregonians need a second chance and education is the right path to support them.

Respectfully,

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<sup>4</sup> US News & World Report, [Prison Education Programs: What to Know](#), 2022.

<sup>5</sup> US News & World Report, [Prison Education Programs: What to Know](#), 2022.