



## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts General Court

December 19, 2022

**Carol Mici, Commissioner**  
Massachusetts Department of Correction  
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### ***RE: Concerns Regarding Post-Secondary Educational Programs in Prisons***

Dear Commissioner Mici,

We are writing to you today to express several concerns that were recently brought to our attention regarding post-secondary educational programs in prisons. One of the issues facing prisoners who are currently enrolled in post-secondary education programs is being classed down before they can finish their coursework. Because of the language of the [2018 CJR Bill](#), prisoners are supposed to be kept in the least restrictive environment according to their eligibility. This is a crucial statute, ensuring that prisoners are not kept in unnecessarily confined housing. **Still, it has the unintended effect of forcing prisoners to leave a particular facility, even when they have requested not to, and forcing them not to complete their college programs.** Currently, only Northeastern Correctional Center has granted permission for college programs to continue there, but in a part-time manner, and students who are transferred there immediately fall behind in their college progress.

In our conversations with many such prisoners, they claim that as they became eligible for lower custody, they are told that they would have the option to remain in their current facilities for the duration of their classes. But the issue seems to be that while there has always been a written exception for prisoners in education programs, it is exercised very conservatively. **We respectfully request that the Department implement a universal exception for prisoners enrolled in post-secondary education programs.** One possible course of action could be implementing Educational Holds, similar to what they have in New York, where prisoners stay at that particular facility until they finish their degree program unless there is a disciplinary incident.

Another way that post-secondary programs in prison can be supported is by running their admissions programs through the DOC as a system-wide admissions process. Currently, these programs are limited to operating in only a handful of prisons and, in some cases, multiple

schools are forced to administer coursework in the same facility. It is logistically very difficult to expand such programs to more prisons, not only because of the difficulties of finding staff and materials but also the lack of applicants. As a result, post-secondary education in prison is hard to acquire for people in some facilities where programs do not operate. **One solution would be for the DOC itself to run these programs.** From there, the DOC would relocate individuals who are admitted to college-in-prison programs to facilities where they can carry out their education. Institutions such as Tufts and Emerson, which both have programs at MCI Concord, have expressed an interest in expanding their programs but have noted that the lack of applicants is a primary obstacle. Thus their programs have remained smaller than they could be.

There is also a concern relating to the issue of Re-Entry Volunteer Post-Release Contact. Educators in prisons are reportedly not consistently being approved to serve as re-entry volunteers. The lack of approvals, which appear to be arbitrary, and as a result undermine schools' abilities to support re-entry processes. Teachers are thus prevented from interacting with their students once they leave prison and are unable to help them reintegrate into society. Re-entry programs are proven to reduce recidivism rates and promote public safety<sup>1</sup> by creating a path for those leaving prison to become healthy and productive members of society. **We ask that the restrictions on post-release contact be re-examined so that teachers can continue their important work of helping those recently released from prison.**

Also, many programs have noted that finding classroom space has been yet another obstacle to successful and efficient prison education programs. Teachers continue negotiating space with other vocational programs, showing the lack of prioritization of college in prisons. In addition, requests for more educational resources have been largely unsuccessful. Most prisons do not have college-dedicated spaces, and their resource corners are often inadequate. MCI-Concord, in particular, still doesn't have a bookshelf that students and faculty can easily access for college materials. Books are either in the public library or the office of the school. In other prisons, students have to write essays with typewriters. The materials available to students in prison should be of modern quality and available to facilitate learning in line with college norms. **We ask for reinvestment into the resources available to students in prison, from computers to reading materials.**

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We look forward to addressing these matters with you soon.

Respectfully,

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<sup>1</sup> Mosteller, Jeremiah. "Why Reentry Programs Are Important." HOPE for Prisoners, 6 Aug. 2020, <https://hopeforprisoners.org/why-reentry-programs-are-important/#:~:text=Successful%20reentry%20programs%20give%20former,recidivism%20and%20improving%20public%20safety.>



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