

Education and Training Opportunities in Prisons and Jails

Citations:

- Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, [Public Law 103-322](#)
- Second Chance Act of 2007, [Public Law 110-199](#)
- Higher Education Opportunity Act, [Public Law 110-315](#)

Background: Individuals often receive training in jail or prison that prepares them for jobs that are either scarce in the labor market to which they will return or unavailable to the individuals because of their criminal justice status. Further limiting opportunities for people to obtain the education and training that will make them competitive in the labor market, section 20411 of Public Law 103-322, the “Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994,” eliminated Pell Grant eligibility for individuals incarcerated in prison or jail despite the fact that only 0.1 percent of the Pell Grant budget was provided for in-prison education.

Scope of the Problem: Individuals leaving prison are severely disadvantaged in the labor market by stigma and policy barriers that exacerbate the challenges of competing in a labor market that is rapidly changing and becoming more focused on employing individuals with specialized training and post-secondary education. It is imperative that individuals returning to their communities be equipped to the greatest extent possible with the tools to compete, but often they are prepared for employment opportunities that don’t exist. And because of Pell Grant ineligibility for in-prison education, between 1995 and 2005, the number of college degree programs inside state prisons plummeted from about 350 to about 12, a devastating reduction in the number of opportunities for self-improvement available to incarcerated individuals.

Potential Administrative Remedies:

- The Departments of Justice, Education, and Labor should provide guidance and create incentives to encourage state corrections professionals to implement in-prison education and training programs tied to high growth labor markets and industries that can and typically do hire individuals with criminal records.
- The Department of Education should undertake a review of available funding streams that could be used to support education and training opportunities in prisons and jails.

Potential Legislative Remedies:

- The Administration should encourage Congress to restore Pell Grant eligibility for in-prison post-secondary education.
- The Administration should encourage Congress to appropriate significant funding for programs authorized by Section 932 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, Public Law 110-315, which authorizes the Secretary of Education to provide grants to states for workplace and community transition training programs that provide education or training to individuals incarcerated in state prisons who are under 35 years of age and have obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent.