

Testimony in support of LD 1979
to the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
May 19, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in support of LD 1979, Resolve, Directing the Department of Corrections to Convene a Working Group to Examine the Establishment of a Program to Award Earned Time Credit for Educational Achievement to Persons Who Are Incarcerated.

Research is available showing how educational programs make a prison environment safer for everyone, reduces recidivism, increases earning potential and rebuilds families and communities. One [Vera Institute Fact Sheet](#) cites research and benefits of education in prison.

“Public safety: Incarcerated people who participate in prison education programs are 43 percent less likely to recidivate than those who do not. Fewer crimes and less rule-breaking on post-release supervision lead to fewer crime victims and enable probation and parole agencies to concentrate their resources on their riskiest supervisees.”¹

Facility safety: Prisons with college programs have fewer violent incidents, creating safer working conditions for staff and safer living environments for incarcerated people.”²

Preparing for post-release jobs and successful reentry: By 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school.”³ However, only 11 percent of incarcerated people in state prisons and 24 percent of those in federal prisons have completed at least some postsecondary education.”⁴

Taxpayer savings/Return on investment: Every dollar invested in prison-based education yields \$4 to \$5 of taxpayer savings in reduced incarceration costs.”⁵

¹ This finding came out of a landmark meta-analysis of correctional education programs, covering 30 years of research—the largest ever completed. Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, and Jeremy N. V. Miles, Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 32, <https://perma.cc/AVZ9-JZSG>

² Correctional Association of New York, Education from the Inside, Out: The Multiple Benefits of College Programs in Prison (New York, NY: Correctional Association of New York, 2009), 8-9, <https://perma.cc/678G-979E>; Michelle Fine, Maria Elena Torre, Kathy Boudin, Iris Bowen, Judith Clark, Donna Hylton, Migdalia Martinez, “Missy,” Rosemarie A. Roberts, Pamela Smart, and Debora Upegui, Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison, (New York: Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001), 21-22, <https://perma.cc/5LX2-MQEG>; Laura Winterfield, Mark Coggeshall, Michelle Burke-Storer, Vanessa Correa, and Simon Tidd, The Effects of Postsecondary Correctional Education (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2009), 8-10, <https://perma.cc/H4ZJ-7KTG>

³ Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2020 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), 15, <https://perma.cc/2RPN-8K6Q>

⁴ Caroline Wolf Harlow, “Education and Correctional Populations,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, January 2003) <https://perma.cc/NJ8Y-UCNU>

⁵ Lois M. Davis, Jennifer L. Steele, Robert Bozick, Malcolm V. Williams, Susan Turner, Jeremy N. V. Miles, Jessica Saunders, and Paul S. Steinberg, How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here? The Results of a Comprehensive Evaluation (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 81, <https://perma.cc/Q4RQ-DMZW>

Stronger families and communities: When parents — including those who are incarcerated — complete college, their children are more likely to do so, thereby disrupting the typical cycle of poverty and incarceration.”⁶

Participating in educational programs in the stressful environment of prison is challenging on many levels. Programs with the possibility of earning time off of a sentence are highly motivating for incarcerated individuals as well as their families. Earned time is just that, time back with their families that individuals work hard for under stressful circumstances. This earned time is a basis for pride and self esteem that can't be measured in a study. From 2018-2022 I was an educator in a women's prison in the southwest where students could earn time off their sentences for completing GED, AAS, cognitive and behavioral health programs. Women enrolled in these classes for the education and hope of the positive impact on their lives and their families. The opportunity to earn time off their sentence was motivational and fostered hope that was shared by all. Participation required constant 'clear conduct' and strong focus and commitment in a stressful environment. Our students came to class while working full time in maintenance repairing broken water and sewer lines, or in the warehouse processing every item that entered or exited the prison, or in ID handling intakes and transfers. During covid they also worked tirelessly to keep the prison spotless so that we could continue education. They came to morning classes after having worked overnight on wax and paint crews. They came to afternoon classes after pulling weeds all morning. When it was determined that earned time for a program completion would allow one mother to release 3 weeks before her daughter's high school graduation it was electrifying for everyone. Many of these women have reunited with their families, and some are still earning their good time and are highly motivated by the successes of their fellow students. Every woman who is back at home is working and helping to support their family. These women are heavy equipment operators, diesel mechanics, administrators of a university health care outreach program, peer support workers, restaurant assistant managers, media director for a non profit, case worker for Social Security Disability and IT support in a hospital. Their earned time allowed them to help with ailing parents sooner, meet and care for newly born grandchildren sooner, volunteer for their churches, AA and NA programs sooner. They are proud to have earned the time, their families are proud, and their friends still earning time are proud as well.

I hope you will support LD 1979 and convene this working group to establish a policy for Mainers to earn time off their sentences for educational achievements.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Sarah Johnson, Sanford

<https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/postsecondary-education-in-prisonfactsheet-for-corrections-leaders.pdf>

⁶ Correctional Association of New York, 2009, 3, <https://perma.cc/678G-979E>; James Conway and Edward Jones, Seven out of Ten? Not Even Close, (New Britain, CT: Central Connecticut State University, 2015), 10-14.