Increasing Postsecondary Opportunities for Incarcerated Tennesseans

Tennessee lawmakers have the opportunity to expand postsecondary education for our incarcerated population. These four benefits reflect data-driven evidence for state policy intervention and reform.

**BENEFIT 1  It expands education opportunity**

Tennessee is heralded for the education innovation that has occurred under Governor Bill Haslam’s Drive to 55 initiative. However, many of the Drive to 55 policy reforms - Tennessee Promise and Reconnect - do not yet extend to Tennessee’s incarcerated population. In fact, only 2 percent of the total incarcerated population participated in postsecondary education in 2018. The Tennessee Department of Corrections has a target goal for postsecondary enrollment: 10 percent of the total population. In order to reach this percentage, the Department needs the expanded partnership of Tennessee colleges/universities and education advocacy nonprofits to help increase postsecondary enrollment by more than 300 percent.

**CURRENT: POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT IN TENNESSEE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES**

Source: Tennessee Department of Corrections, 2018; TDOC Annual Statistical Reports, 2018

- **Postsecondary Enrollment**: 2.3% (587)
- **Remaining Population**: 97.7% (24,841)

**WHAT COULD BE: A TARGET PERCENTAGE FOR POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT IN TENNESSEE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES**

Source: TDOC Annual Statistical Reports, 2017-18

- **Target Postsecondary Enrollment**: 10.0% (2,543)
- **Remaining Population**: 90.0% (22,885)

**BENEFIT 2  It provides Cost-Effective Solutions to the Status Quo**

Under current practice, incarceration is costly to the taxpayer. Tennessee spends over double the dollar amount per individual in the carceral system than in our K-12 or postsecondary education systems combined. Considering the average 12-year sentence for an incarcerated individual in Tennessee, taxpayer cost is far greater than the estimated cost to educate that same individual in two-year or four-year postsecondary programs. State leaders and stakeholders must consider expanding postsecondary education in prison to not only expand access for incarcerated people, but reduce taxpayer burden and spur further economic development.

**COST ESTIMATES: COST OF INCARCERATION VS. COST TO GRADUATE INCARCERATED INDIVIDUAL (2016-2017)**

Source: TDOC Annual Statistical Reports, 2016-17; THEC Factbook, 2016-17; NJ-Step Average Time-to-Completion, 2018; Tennessee Higher Education Initiative, 2017

- **Cost for Average Sentence**: $420,657
- **Direct Cost for Incarcerated AA Graduate**: $17,500
- **Direct Cost for Incarcerated BA Graduate**: $58,500
- **Direct Cost for Incarcerated AA to BA Transfer Graduate**: $42,250
Expanding postsecondary opportunities for the incarcerated also benefits our state’s postsecondary institutions. First, public and private colleges and universities have the opportunity to further their institutional missions in serving these students. Currently, about 1/3 of individuals enrolled in postsecondary coursework enroll in out-of-state institutions. Additionally, Tennessee’s outcomes-based funding formula has several existing components that would provide institutions with an economic incentive to increase their encarcerated student enrollment. Institutions have an opportunity to address existing demand that is unmet for some in our correctional facilities.

Research points to the role of education programming in reducing recidivism and improving post-release employment for the formerly incarcerated. By incentivizing and investing in increased postsecondary options for those incarcerated in our state facilities, Tennessee would also be taking steps to reduce crime and improve community stability.

**TENNESSEE RECIDIVISM RATE (2013-2017)**
*Source: TDOC Annual Statistical Reports, 2013-2017*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TENNESSEE UNEMPLOYMENT RATES (AUGUST 2018)**
*Source: Tennessee Department of Corrections, 2018*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Population</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formerly Incarcerated Population</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**About the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition**

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition is a group of diverse civil rights and education advocacy organizations that have built a shared policy agenda to address chronic disparities in achievement and opportunities for students of color in the state of Tennessee.

The Coalition was formed in the spring of 2016 and is convened by Conexión Américas, a long-standing Nashville-based nonprofit serving the Latino community.