



Statement of Support for Governor Cuomo's Announcement to Bring Back State Funded College Courses to New York State Prisons

February 26th, 2014

We are university educators and prison-based educators working within New York State writing to express our support for Governor Cuomo's decision to restore state funding for college programs in prison. For decades, researchers have demonstrated the positive impact of college in prison on women and men in prison, the prison environment, the children of persons in prison, recidivism rates, employment upon reentry, public safety, and the tax burden of mass incarceration. College in prison saves lives, builds families, cultivates non-violence, and humanizes our society.

In 1994, after President Clinton withdrew Pell grants from people in prison, college in prison programs shut down across the country. At Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, women in the prison brought together a coalition of college presidents, professors, correctional administrators, and community members to work with the women in prison to create College Bound, a consortium of colleges committed to restoring college in prison. Once college was reestablished, a systematic evaluation was conducted by a team of women in the prison and university researchers, in collaboration with the New York State Department of Corrections. The study found that with college, women's recidivism rates dropped dramatically to 7.7% from 29.9% (for those without college) over 36 months.

This finding was published in *Changing Minds* (2001) which also documented other profound impacts of college in prison, specifically on discipline and peace in the prison, women's commitment to "giving back" and "paying taxes," educational outcomes of women's children, and ultimately the savings of tax dollars that did not have to be used for prisons. This is just one example of the more than 20 years of research, with virtually every study demonstrating the benefits of college in prison. It is a rare achievement for a social intervention to show such consistent evidence.

Today, two decades since Pell grants were withdrawn, we applaud Governor Cuomo for his commitment to restore tax dollars for college in prison. Both conservatives and progressives agree that college in prison is critical if we seek to build a society based on non-violence, dignity, second chances and our collective well-being. As Janice Greishaber, Executive Director of the Jenna Foundation for Non-Violence and the designer of Jenna's Law states, *"Educating the incarcerated is not an exercise in futility, nor is it a gift to the undeserving. It is a practical and necessary safeguard to insure that those who have found themselves without the proper resources to succeed have these needs met before they are released. It is a gift to ourselves and to our children, a gift of both compassion and peace of mind. We are not turning the other cheek to those who have hurt us. We are taking their hands and filling them with learning so that they can't strike us again."*

College in prison is a necessary investment in our collective future. We look forward to a time when public funding makes college available for all eligible incarcerated persons. It is the most cost effective strategy for reducing recidivism, strengthening families and communities, and increasing public safety.

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