

# LATE TESTIMONY

## COMMUNITY ALLIANCE ON PRISONS

76 North King Street, Suite 203, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96817  
Phone/E-mail: (808) 533-3454/ communityallianceonprisons@hotmail.com



### COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Sen. Will Espero, Chair

Sen. Clarence Nishihara, Vice Chair

Thursday, January 31, 2008

2:45 PM

Room 225

**STRONG SUPPORT - SB 2302 - EDUCATION**

Aloha Chair Espero, Vice Chair Nishihara and Members of the Committee!

My name is Kat Brady and I am the Coordinator of Community Alliance on Prisons, a community initiative working on prison reform and criminal justice issues in Hawai'i for a decade. I respectfully offer our testimony, always being mindful that Hawai'i has more than 6,000 people behind bars with more than 2,000 individuals serving their sentences abroad, thousands of miles away from their homes and their loved ones.

SB 2302 appropriates funds to the department of education for adult education for prison inmates to assist with their transition to the community upon release.

Community Alliance on Prisons strongly supports this bill. Education is definitely a route from poverty and it is a powerful tool for a person exiting incarceration. Educational programs that start during incarceration and continue upon release are best because they help to create a relatively seamless reentry back to the community.

Below is an excerpt from an article entitled, *Educating Prisoners Is Cheaper Than Locking Them up Again* <http://citybeat.com/2002-04-04/statehouse.shtml>

"... Virginia study of 3,000 randomly selected inmates found that participation in prison education programs cut recidivism from 49 percent to 20 percent. At the Central Utah Correctional Facility, education programs cut recidivism by 18 percent. A recent Florida study revealed that on average, recidivism drops 2.9 percent for each year of academic competence, as measured by testing.

Other states, including New York, Massachusetts and Maryland, similarly report that inmates who participate in education programs have significantly lower recidivism rates than those who do not.

Focusing on post-secondary education, a 1991 study performed by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice found that while the state's overall recidivism rate was 60 percent, the rate was 13.7 percent for inmates holding associate degrees, 5.6 percent for holders of bachelor's degrees and 0 for those with master's degrees.

Texas' findings reinforce studies showing a nationwide 10 percent recidivism rate for those who have completed at least two years of college and a 60 percent recidivism rate overall.

Ohio has also performed a study of the correlation between education and recidivism. The ODRC based its study on all 18,068 inmates released from the state system in 1992. Of those inmates, 30.4 percent, nearly 5,500, returned to Ohio's prison system within two years of their release. The recidivism rate of those inmates who earned or worked toward a college degree while in prison was 26.6 percent, a reduction of 12.5 percent.

The state's post-secondary education program impacted women to a greater degree than men. While the overall recidivism rate for women in the study was 30.3 percent, the rate for women who worked toward a degree at the time of their release was only 16.9 percent. The rate for those who earned a college degree was even lower, 8.3 percent.

Post-secondary education also had a significant effect on certain classifications of prisoners. The overall recidivism rate for first-degree felons was 35.6 percent, but the rate for those who earned a college degree was only 25.3 percent, a reduction of nearly 30 percent. The overall recidivism rate for drug offenders, who comprise nearly one-third of Ohio's current prison population, was 26.6 percent, while the rate for drug offenders who earned and worked toward college degrees was only 16.5 percent, a 38 percent reduction.

Other studies have shown that only 40 percent of those inmates who receive no higher education while in prison find employment upon release, leaving 60 percent unemployed. Of those inmates who receive a post-secondary education, however, 60 to 75 percent find employment shortly after release.

Research conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the number-crunching arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, shows that two important factors affecting the likelihood that an individual will become a criminal are a lack of education and lack of employment opportunities.

All of this research dovetails to show one reason that education reduces recidivism: Education helps ex-convicts find employment, which provides an alternative to criminal activity, thus keeping them from returning to prison.

The benefits of prison education are a bargain for the taxpayer. While costs vary from state to state, providing a post-secondary education to a prisoner for one year generally costs about one-tenth as much as annual incarceration expenses.

In 1996, CURE-NY, a prison reform organization, created a theoretical analysis of savings resulting from post-secondary prison education. The group assumed this education reduced recidivism by 20 percent, a conservative assumption given the studies cited above. When applied to court, education and imprisonment costs in New York at the time of the study, this reduction resulted in hypothetical savings of \$2.7 million for each 1,000 inmates receiving college education.

These savings represent only reductions in direct court and imprisonment costs. When other costs of crime, such as theft and destruction of property and lost earnings for murdered or incapacitated victims, savings associated with reduced recidivism increase significantly.

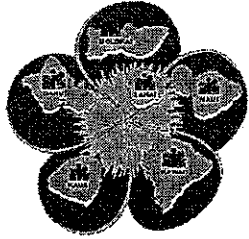
But the value of inmate reform cannot be measured solely in dollars. Ninety-seven percent of the current prison population will someday be released to walk the streets with us. Do we want those people to be uneducated, unskilled, unemployable and likely to return to crime? ..."

Former U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger answered that question.

"We must accept the reality that to confine offenders behind walls without trying to change them is an expensive folly with short-term benefits -- winning battles while losing the war," Burger said."

Community Alliance on Prisons urges the committee to pass this bill.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



**Maui Economic  
Opportunity, Inc.**

Est. 1985

99 Mahalani Street  
Wailuku, Hawai'i 96793  
808-249-2990  
Fax: 808-249-2991



**BEST Reintegration Program**  
**Being Empowered  
and Safe Together**



**LATE TESTIMONY**

**COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY**  
Senator Wil Espero, Chair  
Senator Clarence K. Nishihara, Vice Chair

Thursday, January 31, 2008  
2:45 PM in Room 225

Re: SB 2302 – Relating to Education

Aloha Chair Espero, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ken E.K. Hunt and I am the Program Director of Maui Economic Opportunity's Being Empowered and Safe Together (BEST) Reintegration Program. Over the past five years, BEST has demonstrated that providing comprehensive training and support services to individuals during their incarceration and upon their release into the community is critical to successful reentry.

Nationwide studies have demonstrated that adult basic education, vocational education and higher educational programs for incarcerated persons are effective and cost-effective in reducing recidivism. As the old adage goes, "Knowledge is power." Education prepares incarcerated people to lead thoughtful and productive lives inside and outside of prison, provides them with skills to obtain meaningful employment, and to prepare them to become leaders and examples for their families and communities.

In short, an investment in education is an investment in public safety. Mahalo for this opportunity to testify on SB 2302.

Sincerely,

Ken E.K. Hunt, Director  
Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. BEST Program

cc: Sandy Baz, MEO Executive Director

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY  
Sen. Wil Espero, Chair  
Sen. Clarence Nishihara  
Thursday, January 31, 2008  
Room 225 at 2:45pm

LATE TESTIMONY

**SUPPORT W/ AMENDMENT: SB 2302 RELATING TO EDUCATION**

Aloha Chair Espero, Vice Chair Nishihara and Members of the Committee:

My name is Carrie Ann Shirota, and I am writing in strong support of SB 2302. My experiences as a former Public Defender and Civil Rights Enforcement Attorney, current staff member of a reentry program on Maui and member of Community Alliance on Prisons have shaped my advocacy efforts to improve our criminal justice system. I firmly believe that we must enact policies that promote accountability and transparency within corrections, and improve how individuals are prepared in prison for release as law-abiding, contributing members of their 'ohana and community.

I strongly support SB 2302 for the following reasons:

1. The most educationally disadvantaged population in the United States resides in prisons. Incarcerated adults have among the lowest academic skill levels and highest disability and illiteracy rates of any segment in our society – factors that likely contributed to their incarceration.
2. Studies demonstrate that education provides inmates with marketable skills that can help them better prepare for their transition back into the community.
3. According to the Three State Recidivism Study commissioned by the Office of Correctional Education in 2001, inmates who participated in correctional educational programs exhibited lower recidivism rates at the end of the three year study period and were one-third as likely to be re-incarcerated as non-participants. In addition, participants also earned higher wages than non-participants for each of the three years they were followed.
4. A study by the Graduate Center of the City University of New York concluded that inmates who take college classes while in prison are four times more likely to stay out of trouble when they are released. The study also found that college prison programs save taxpayers about \$900,000 per 100 students every two years.

**Suggested Amendment**

Although I support this bill, I recommend that the Committee specify that educational opportunities for incarcerated persons would include higher education, not simply general education development. This will allow men and women to start earning college credits or continuing adult education (i.e. VITEC, etc.) as soon as possible, and perhaps even earn degrees. This will better prepare individuals for their release into the community.

In a nutshell, this bill is a win-win situation! It provides incarcerated people with enhanced educational opportunities to help turn their lives around, and increases their likelihood for successful reintegration into the community.

Sincerely,  
Carrie Ann Shirota, Esq.  
Kahului, Hawai'i  
[cashirota@aol.com](mailto:cashirota@aol.com)