



Unlock Higher Education is a coalition of stakeholders dedicated to advocating for policy solutions that increase educational access for individuals with criminal convictions.

AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE

The First Step Act is just that – a first step. Providing education opportunities to the 71 million Americans with criminal convictions is an investment in people, not broken systems, that both reduces crime and eliminates taxpayer burden.



It's Smart.

Higher education leads to higher incomes and more stable employment opportunities, which means criminal justice involved people will be able to more fully contribute. **By 2020, 65% of all jobs in the economy will require post-secondary education.**¹



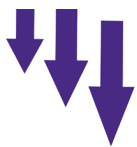
It's People-Driven.

Access to higher education gives criminal justice involved people a fair chance to care for themselves, which lessens the need for public assistance. **Overall, the unemployment rate for individuals formerly incarcerated is nearly five times higher than the unemployment rate for the general United States population.**²



A Better Use of Resources.

Higher education significantly decreases tax support for an already bloated prison and jail system. **According to the Vera Institute of Justice, incarceration costs an average of more than \$31,000 per inmate, per year, nationwide. In some states, it's as much as \$60,000. However, the cost of one year of college while incarcerated is \$1,400 to \$1,744.**³



Reduces Crime.

Higher education decreases the likelihood that someone will end up back in prison. **Research shows that recidivism rates drop 28% when individuals obtain a bachelor's degree.**⁴

ELIGIBILITY FOR PELL GRANTS MUST BE UNIVERSAL

Regardless of conviction and sentencing, Pell should be available to everyone. For two decades, incarcerated people serving life without parole were eligible for Pell⁵

Participation in post-secondary education reduces in-facility forms of misconduct which in turn helps correctional officers maintain safety.⁶

Facility culture is often determined by people serving life sentences, many of whom serve as mentors for people in prison, thus if those with life sentences choose to participate all within the faculty will⁷

¹https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_Web_.pdf

²<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

³https://www.bja.gov/Publications/RAND_Correctional-Education-Meta-Analysis.pdf

⁴https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP67650.html

⁵<http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-Second-Chance-Pell-Pilot-Program.pdf>

⁶https://www.urban.org/research/publication/effects-postsecondary-correctional-education/view/full_report

⁷<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/news/2019/04/18/468904/congress-repeal-ban-pell-grants/>



VIRGINIA

At A Glance

By the Numbers

69,000

Number of people in state prison, federal prison and local jail¹

12,650

Number of people released each year²

\$3.6 million

Incarceration cost savings associated with post-secondary prison education programs³

Cost Comparison

128%

Increased spending on corrections from 1989-2013⁴

Vs.

11%

Decreased spending on higher education from 1989-2013⁴

Does VA have Second Chance Pell?

The Second Chance Pell (SCP) Experimental Sites Initiative was launched by the U.S. Department of Education in 2015. Reporting is ongoing but so far demonstrates success.⁵

Yes



No



Legislative Ask

The Unlock Higher Education Coalition is calling on Congress to include these key policies within the Higher Education Re-Authorization Act or other legislation:

1 Restore Pell Grant eligibility for all incarcerated students regardless of the length of sentence or conviction type. Including incarcerated students in the Pell Grant eligible population will not only give people exiting the system a fair chance at finding a job but will ultimately make communities safer.

2 Repeal the Aid Elimination Penalty to remove Question 23 from the FAFSA and remove criminal history questions from college admission applications. Removing such questions will decrease barriers to educational opportunities & increase employment rates for individuals with criminal or juvenile justice history.

¹<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/VA.html>

²<https://vadoc.virginia.gov/about/facts/research/recidivism/recidivism-at-a-glance-november-2017.pdf>

³<https://www.vera.org/publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison>

⁴<https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/expenditures/corrections/education/brief.pdf>

⁵<https://www.vera.org/publications/second-chance-pell-experimental-sites-initiative-update>