

EMBARGOED UNTIL WED. MARCH 4, 6:00 A.M. P.T.

FACT SHEET

Degrees of Freedom: Expanding College Opportunities for Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Californians

What: A new report, [*Degrees of Freedom*](#), finds that California lacks adequate and effective college opportunities for students in the criminal justice system, despite the fact that such access will help the state build safer and more economically viable communities. The authors call upon California to increase the number and quality of opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals to become college graduates.

The report was jointly written by the Stanford Criminal Justice Center at Stanford Law School and the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at UC Berkeley School of Law.

The report is available here: <http://bit.ly/1AysaAB>

When: The report is embargoed until Wed., March 4 at 6:00 a.m.

On Tuesday, March 10, the California State Senate Public Safety Committee, chaired by Senator Loni Hancock, will hold an oversight hearing on Effective Inmate Educational Programming. Testimony will be provided by the report's co-authors, Douglas Wood from the Ford Foundation, Robert Bozick from the RAND Corporation, representatives from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and from the California Community College Chancellor's Office. The hearing will take place at 10:00 a.m. in Room 3191, State Capitol Building, Sacramento.

Who: The report is based on 175 interviews, extensive academic research and historical investigation. Profiles of formerly incarcerated students who are currently pursuing or have completed their college education are included; some are available for interviews.

The report targets policymakers, potential students and college administrators in California, as well as leaders wishing to create pathways to high-quality college education for those in the criminal justice system in other states.

Why:

The Need

- **California's need for college-educated workers is growing and is projected to outpace the number of residents with a college degree.** By 2025, 41 percent of jobs will require at least a Bachelor's degree, while only 35 percent of working-age adults in California will have earned this level of education. Around 60 percent of new jobs in California this decade are estimated to require at least some college education.

- **All individuals sentenced to jail and 96 percent of those in prison will eventually return home.** It is estimated that over 50,000 people will be released from California's prisons over the next two years, and thousands more will be released from county jails.
- Proposition 47 is expected to result in the release of thousands; many California counties are not prepared to provide reentry support for this new flood of individuals.
- On any given day, approximately 400,000 Californians are living under supervision by probation or parole; 96 percent of them live in a zip code that is within 15 miles of a public college campus.
- On any given day, 83,000 men and women are incarcerated in California's jails. Due to sentencing changes made by Public Safety Realignment in 2011, jail inmates now have lengthier sentences but their access to college and other educational programming is limited. Nearly 90 percent of them are housed within 10 miles of a community college campus.
- Twenty-one of the 35 state prisons are located within 20 miles of a community college campus.
- **College is an effective vehicle to facilitate effective reentry.** A recent [RAND](#) study shows that individuals who participate in college programs while in custody have 51 percent lower odds of recidivating than those who do not; after release, those who participate in education have a 13 percent higher chance of obtaining employment than nonparticipants.

The Finding: California Is No Longer Providing Adequate or Effective Access to College Pathways

- **California once led the nation in correctional education.** In 1979, in-person college courses were available in every prison in California, nine of 19 California State University (CSU) campuses provided on-ramp programs designed to support these students as they transitioned into the college environment, and 15 community colleges had programs that supported students with criminal histories on their campuses.
- College programs in the state's prisons were decimated in the early 1990s and replaced with low-quality correspondence-based distance education. Campus-based transition and support programs for formerly incarcerated students were also cut.
- The number of state prisoners enrolled in college courses, which had been 8.6 percent of all inmates in 1976, dropped nearly in half to 4.4 percent by 2013.
- **Twenty years after the funding cuts, California's prisons continue to rely on outdated and non-interactive distance education for college courses; these courses have the lowest success rate of all education delivery methods.**
- **Senate Bill 1391 – passed and signed in 2014 – offers the opportunity for state prisons and community colleges to partner to deliver high-quality college education if implemented effectively.**
- Fewer than 28 percent of those with verified high school diplomas or GEDs are enrolled in college classes, and these prisoners are subject to involuntary transfers that disrupt their education by moving them in the middle of their studies.
- **Today, there is only one in-person college program in all of California's 35 prisons** (San Quentin, run by the Prison University Project). In contrast, New York has at least 21 in its 54 correctional facilities.
- The state has only one CSU program for formerly incarcerated students, and, among the state's 112 community colleges, long waiting lists exist for the small handful of outreach and support programs.
- The state's community colleges and county jails have been operating in silos, rather than collaborating to achieve mutual goals, including increasing college graduation rates, preparing students to meet the demands of the labor market, and increasing the chances of reentry success.

- Students studying in county jails and state prisons are often released prior to completion of an education program, and almost all counties lack any sort of transition mechanism that can support students who want to continue their education upon release.

Degrees of Freedom shows how to leverage California's existing structures and policies to enhance college opportunities for those in the criminal justice system. It is a resource for policymakers, potential students and college administrators, as well as individuals who would like to create similar pathways in other states.

Detailed recommendations are available in [the report](#) beginning on page 57.

Funding: The research and publication of this report has been supported by the Ford Foundation as part of its [Renewing Communities](#) initiative to improve educational access in California's correctional facilities and beyond.

For more information and interviews:

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