

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

New Report Offers Higher Education Roadmap for Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Students

BERKELEY, Calif., March 4, 2015 – A new report released today finds that California lacks adequate and effective college opportunities for students in—or released from—prison and jail, despite the fact that such access will help the state build safer and more economically viable communities.

The report is a joint project of 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.

[*Degrees of Freedom: Expanding College Opportunities for Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Californians*](#) documents the state’s need for college programs for these students, examines the state’s existing institutions and reveals the numerous challenges that result in inadequate access to education. Its co-authors cite a recent [RAND](#) study that found that those who participated in college programs while in custody had a 51 percent lower chance of recidivating than those who did not and, after release, individuals who participated in education had a 13 percent higher chance of obtaining employment than nonparticipants. The report explains how the state’s 112 community colleges and 33 public colleges and universities can provide affordable, high-quality gateways to help students learn and succeed while in custody and after release.

On Tuesday, March 10, 2015, 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, as well as Douglas Wood from the Ford Foundation, Robert Bozick from the RAND Corporation, representatives from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the California Community College Chancellor’s Office. The hearing will take place at 10:00 a.m. in Room 3191, State Capitol Building in Sacramento.

“College changes lives, strengthens economies and decreases the likelihood that a person will return to crime. But high-quality college opportunities are few and far between for currently and formerly incarcerated students. This report provides a roadmap to build sustainable and replicable pathways to college for these aspiring students,” said co-author Debbie Mukamal, executive director of the Stanford Criminal Justice Center at Stanford Law School.

“We cannot ignore the thousands of potential students waiting to improve their lives and break the cycle of incarceration. We know how to help these students succeed, and it is time to use that knowledge,” said Rebecca Silbert, executive director of the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at UC Berkeley School of Law and report co-author.

The report notes that California has the largest public higher education system in the nation and is known for its innovative approaches to social issues. The vast majority of its colleges and universities are located near a prison, or jail, or in a community with high concentrations of formerly incarcerated residents. But California's current commitment to educating individuals in custody often stops with a general equivalency diploma (GED) or high school degree, and there are long waiting lists throughout California for the few programs that help these underserved students become college graduates.

"Through mass incarceration we have chosen a punitive path over a rehabilitative one. The time has come to reverse this decades-long, wrong-headed approach to our justice system. We must pay close attention to the important lessons in this report, and forge a path toward dignity in California and the entire country to strengthen our communities and, by restoring justice, our democracy as well," said Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, which supported the research and publication of the report, as part of its [Renewing Communities](#) initiative.

The 154-page report is based on 175 interviews, extensive academic research and historical investigation. It targets policymakers, potential students and college administrators in California, while providing a valuable blueprint for other states seeking to build pathways to education for those in the criminal justice system.

Degrees of Freedom is available here: <http://stanford.io/1aK5d8S>.

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To arrange interviews about the report with formerly incarcerated college students, report co-authors, or program experts, please CONTACT:

- **Debbie Mukamal**, executive director, Stanford Criminal Justice Center at Stanford Law School, dmukamal@law.stanford.edu, (o) 650-724-5786, (m) 718-938-8450
- **Rebecca Silbert**, executive director, Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy, UC Berkeley School of Law, rsilbert@law.berkeley.edu, (o) 510-643-7321, (m) 510-484-6072
- **Susan Gluss**, deputy communications director and media relations director, UC Berkeley School of Law, sgluss@law.berkeley.edu, (o) 510-642-6936, (m) 510-926-1383
- **Terry Nagel**, associate director of media relations, Stanford Law School, tnagel@law.stanford.edu, (o) 650-723-2232, (m) 650-678-7082