**Correctional Education Council (CEC) Board Meeting Minutes**

**December 7, 2023**

**In Person Meeting & Zoom Webinar**

**Council Members**

Secretary Carolyn J. Scruggs, Co-Chair, Deputy Secretary Jason Perkins-Cohen, Jack Weber, Jennfier Gauthier, Ruschelle Reuben, Theresa M. Shank, Sarah Sheppard, Trish Gordon-McCown, Monica Thomas, Dr. Sylvia Lawson,Dr. Sanjay Rai

**Staff and Guests**

Renard E. Brooks, Brittney Hansen, Casey Tiefenwerth, Danielle Cox, Deron Crawford, Diana Dabbs, Donna Rojas, Dwayne Lovett, Elizabeth Marts, Dr. Erica DuBose, Janay Harris, Janell Johnson, Julia Givens, June Brittingham, Kari Pompilii, Katharine Lander, Kenneth Jessup, Leza Griffith, Laura Martin, Lloyd Day, Logan Dean, Marsha Briley, Mary Keller, Patrick Hruz, Peggy Stanford, Richard Chambers, Robin Conley, Shannice Anderson, Shea Zwerver, Dr. Tamara Barron, Terende Thomas, Theodore Hunter, Tricia Hopkins, Nancy Banwait, Benjamin Mourad

**Absent**

Rachael Stephens Parker

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Maryland Department of Labor (Labor) Deputy Secretary, Jason Perkins-Cohen called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. A quorum was reached.

**Welcome**

Labor Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen welcomed attendees to the meeting, and, in the interest of time and a packed agenda, he transitioned immediately into the agenda.

**Introductions**

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen invited attendees in person and online to introduce themselves.

**Updates from MD Labor (Deputy Secretary Jason Perkins-Cohen)**

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen thanked everyone for their attendance. He stated that a lot of great progress was made in the last meeting and emphasized the importance of identifying action items in the CEC meetings. He then invited Secretary of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Carolyn J. Scruggs, to make any opening remarks.

**Updates from DPSCS (Secretary Carolyn J. Scruggs)**

Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) Secretary Scruggs wished everyone a good morning and thanked them for being present. She echoed Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen’s sentiment.

**The Open Meetings Act (Leza Griffith)**

Assistant Attorney General, Leza Griffith, informed the Council and attendees that a designee is needed to take the open meetings act training.

Jack Weber made a motion to designate Director of CE, Ms. Ruschelle Reuben, as the individual to take the OMA training, Secretary Scruggs seconded and the Council unanimously approved Ms. Reuben as the designee.

**Approval of Minutes**

A motion to approve the November 13, 2023, minutes was made and seconded. Jack Weber motioned to adopt it and it was seconded by Secretary Scruggs. The minutes were unanimously approved at 10:14 a.m.

**Approval of Annual Report**

The Council decided to table this item for the next Council meeting to give Council members a chance to thoroughly review the report.

**Updates and Action Items (Correctional Education Coordinators)**

Ruschelle Reuben, Director of Correctional Education (CE) at MD Labor introduced the Correctional Education Coordinators, Dr. Erica DuBose, Dr. Tamara Barron, Ms. Katharine Lander, and Mr. Patrick Hruz, to share updates on the action items from the last CEC meeting.

Katharine Lander, the Special Education Coordinator, provided updates on the SPED program, including how students are identified for services, enrollment factors, and funding details that were requested at the last CEC meeting.

Identification of SPED Students:

1. DPSCS Case Managers interview incarcerated individuals and notify the CE Principal of potential SPED needs.
2. CE Principals and SPED teachers conduct intake interviews, involving requests to the MIST database for IEPs, obtaining prior school records, and contacting parents/guardians.
3. Students may self-identify or disclose their SPED needs.
4. **It was noted that Ms. Lander will investigate the accuracy of the under 21 population at JCI.**

Enrollment Updates:

1. Immediate enrollment for students with an IEP or 504 Plan.
2. Facility transfers for SPED services are possible for students at institutions not offering these services.
3. ABE enrollment data as of November 1, 2023, showed 1,153 students, with 162 under 21, and 64 of those having an IEP.
4. **It was noted to look further into under 21 IIs on the general education waitlist and to confirm the accuracy of the number of under 21 IIs on segregation/ pre-trial.**

Funding:

1. FY23 SPED Grants totaled $230,000, primarily for salaries, resources, and professional development, which is a fourfold increase from previous years.
2. Ms. Lander said yes in response to Secretary Scruggs asking if more funding is needed. The role of Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in providing SPED funding was further considered, with some counties receiving up to $19,000 per student compared to $3600 per student in CE.
3. Discussion revealed that SPED funding for CE and other state programs are exempt from the standard formula. **It was noted for MSDE to review the statute to identify next steps at the next meeting.**

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Academic Coordinator, Patrick Hruz, provided updates on the Academic program. Mr. Hruz stated that he reached out to each of the principals at the institutions and asked for data on their students. He presented that data to the Council.

* The Wait List for General Education
  + 971 Incarcerated Individuals are on Waitlists (system wide)
  + 512 individuals are on the waitlists at institutions with no seats available (at capacity).
  + 323 individuals on the wait lists with schools near capacity or at capacity in many classes/levels. class capacity size varies based on the institution, the type of class and DPSCS/Fire codes.
  + 416\* Incarcerated Individuals on the Wait Lists are “mandatory”, meaning they have not completed their required 240 hours of education.

**It was noted for Labor to explore what it would take to hire instructors for weekend classes and how it could be implemented as a pilot following a suggestion from Secretary Scruggs and Assistant Secretary Brooks**

Mr. Hruz outlined the prioritization for class placement, with special education students having immediate access, followed by under-21 mandatory, over-21 mandatory, and non-mandatory students. He also highlighted other challenges such as a lack of substitute teachers and seats needing to be held for 60 days for students on segregation. **It was noted for CE to look at the budget for the possibility of a “roaming” instructor to fill teacher vacancies.**

**It was noted for Secretary Scruggs to connect the DPSCS director of Case Management with CE to set up regular meetings to help identify transfers for students on waitlists for low-capacity institutions.**

Hruz shared academic program growth from FY23 to FY24, showing significant improvements in completion rates across various academic levels and an increase in GED attainment.

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen proposed analyzing the data on academic achievements to evaluate the impact on earnings post-release and recidivism rates, aiming to bolster the case for additional resources. **It was noted that this proposal is set to be discussed with Maryland Longitudinal Data System staff.**

Lastly, Assistant Secretary Brooks emphasized the need for better education and motivation among case managers regarding the benefits of earning diplomas or certifications during incarceration and **it was noted that Assistant Secretary Brooks be added to future meetings with CE staff and DPSCS case managers.**

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Dr. Tamara Barron provided updates on the Labor Occupational Training Program at the most recent CEC meeting, focusing on action items from the last meeting. The program is voluntary, offering benefits such as learning new skills, earning free Industry Recognized Credentials (IRCs), and the possibility of receiving diminution credits and a student rate for participation. Eligibility requires a H.S. Diploma/GED, being 12-36 months from release, a strong interest in the program, and being infraction-free for 6 months. **There was a suggestion for DPSCS to clarify which infractions specifically disqualify a student from participating.**

Performance updates show significant progress with 95 completions and 331 IRCs in Q1, and 158 completions and 544 IRCs in Q2, aiming for annual goals of 650 completions and 915 IRCs. The last time these goals were met was in 2018, with subsequent years affected by various challenges including a declining prison population, competing programs, shifted program requirements, early releases under the JRA, and pandemic disruptions. **It was noted that Labor will look into creating a video to promote occupational programs at Secretary Scruggs’ suggestion.**

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Transition Coordinator, Dr. Erica DuBose, provided updates on the Transition program. Between July 1 and November 30, 2023, there was a 56% decrease in student certificate completions compared to the previous year, attributed to staffing issues. Efforts to address this include focusing on staffing and conducting reentry workshops at MCI-J and OSTC for individuals preparing for release.

Looking ahead, strategies to acquire transition staff involve collaboration with Workforce Development, advertising positions through various channels including the Maryland Workforce Exchange (MWE), DPSCS Job Fairs, and working with the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED).

To address staff shortages and promote entrepreneurship, options include playing Enoch Pratt Entrepreneurship Academy videos in common areas, encouraging group work among individuals, and collaborating with Innovation Works for entrepreneurship opportunities. Additionally, content related to entrepreneurship can be uploaded to DPSCS tablets, and CE Librarians can facilitate small group workshops. **It was noted that this would be worked on to be presented at the next meeting.**

Dr. DuBose also announced a tentative Employment Fair for Returning Citizens on February 14, 2024, in collaboration with MOED and the Baltimore Museum of Industry. Suggestions and involvement from vendors or employers are welcome. Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen and Secretary Scruggs suggested involving other state and city agencies and organizing a job fair behind the fence to connect individuals nearing release with employment opportunities.

**Review of Sub-Committees Focus (Deputy Director Stacey Hoffman)**

Stacey Hoffman, Deputy Director of Correctional Education (CE) at MD Labor, reviewed the focus of each of the two subcommittees that were identified in the last CEC meeting.

Focus #1: Data-Driven Tracking System

* Engineered to take a deeper, more extensive look at Correctional Education student outcomes (i.e., earned High School Diploma, Occupational certificate, etc.) earned during an IIs incarceration and make recommendations to enhance tracking student success.
* To facilitate the creation of a data infrastructure with the Maryland Longitudinal Data System to effectively track Incarcerated Individuals (IIs) who participated in Correctional Education (academic, occupational, and transitional) during incarceration to understand employment outcomes upon return to society.
* To develop a map and/or dashboard of an IIs incarceration and track services provided, including employment skills, to ensure success when returning to society.
* To collect data on wrap-around services offered to returning citizens; how accessible are they; at what rate are they being used; are they successful in regard to recidivism.

Focus #2: Successful Employment for Returning Citizens

* To analyze Labor Market information and vet with employers to ensure CE is responsive to industry needs and preparing IIs with the skills and credentials needed.
* To explore how work release could be incorporated into career pathways for IIs, building on occupational skills earned while incarcerated.
* To explore how to strengthen Registered Apprenticeship opportunities for IIs.
* To raise awareness with employers on the benefits and resources available to hire returning citizens.
* To make recommendations on how to develop and implement an “Individualized Employment Plan” for IIs
* To create a program to fill the gap between skilled-returning citizens and quality employment.

**Looking Ahead: Formation of Sub-Committees and Schedule 2024 CEC Meetings (Deputy Director Stacey Hoffman)**

Stacey Hoffman, Deputy Director of Correctional Education (CE) at MD Labor, informed the Council about the subcommittees and how they will be structured and directed Council members to join one of the two subcommittees. Ms. Hoffman also engaged the Council members in a discussion to decide on meeting dates for the upcoming year.

Deputy Director Hoffman invited Council members to sign up for one of the two committees. The result are as follows:

* Data Driven Tracking System

o Chair- Ruschelle Reuben

o Co-Chair - Danielle Cox

o Monica Thomas

o John Feaster III

o Danielle Cox

o Stacey Hoffman

o Dr. Tamara Barron

* Successful Employment for Returning Citizen

o Chair- Renard E. Brooks

o Co-Chair- Jack Weber

o John Feaster III

o Katharine Lander

o Cliff Nolan

o Patrick Hruz

Ms. Hoffman discussed the next steps for the Council's subcommittees now that chairs and co-chairs have been assigned. She plans to send out a list of CEC meeting attendees and additional resources within 24 hours to help form the subcommittees. She encourages the chairs and co-chairs to invite others who may contribute to the subcommittees' goals. Each subcommittee should appoint someone to coordinate meetings and take minutes, with the requirement to meet at least once a month. The Chairs are responsible for sending meeting minutes to Ms. Hoffman two weeks before the next CEC meeting to facilitate progress tracking.

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Ms. Hoffman invited the Council to discuss and decide on CEC Meeting dates for 2024.

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen suggested scheduling the meetings for March, June, September, and December. The Council was in agreement.

The Deputy Secretary also suggested that the meeting occur on the last Monday of the month (excluding December so that the Annual Report can receive Council approval prior to the due date of December 1, 2024).

It was decided that the schedule for 2024 is as follows:

Monday, March 25, 2024, from 10-12pm

Monday, June 24, 2024, from 10-12pm

Monday, September 30, 2024, from 10-12pm

Monday, December 2, 2024, from 10-12pm

**Concluding Remarks (Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen & Secretary Scruggs)**

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen and Secretary Scruggs both thanked everyone for their attendance and participation.

Deputy Secretary Perkins-Cohen requested a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Director Reuben motioned to adjourn the meeting, Secretary Scruggs seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

The Council will have a special meeting on Wednesday, December 19, 2023, to approve the Annual Report.

The next regular meeting of the CEC will tentatively be on Monday, March 25, 2024.