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STAKEHOLDERS, ADVOCATES SEND LETTER TO LEGISLATORS DEMANDING
RESTORATION OF TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FUNDING FOR INCARCERATED
STUDENTS

ALBANY, N.Y. - A broad collective of direct service providers, educators, faith-based institutions
and social justice organizations have joined their voices in a letter to demand passage of S790
(Montgomery)/A3975 (Aubry) which repeals the ban on Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)
funding for incarcerated students in New York State (NYS). The letter, organized by the Turn On
The TAP NY campaign, is signed by over 38 groups and is directed to the Chairwomen of the
Higher Education Committees in both the NYS Senate and Assembly - Senator Toby Ann
Stavisky (D-16) and Assemblywoman Deborach Glick (D-66) - asking that they bring the bill to
their committees for a vote.

“This is about educational equity for all,” says Vivian Nixon, Executive Director of College &
Community Fellowship (CCF) - the organization leading the Turn On The TAP NY campaign.
“Our group of stakeholders work on the ground at every point of contact with people involved in
the criminal legal system and can speak directly to the transformative power of higher education
for both people on the inside and those returning home. We can no longer sit idly by and wait for
the Legislature to pass this common sense legislation.”

In 1995, Governor Pataki signed a bill to strip TAP funding for incarcerated people. This
followed the passage of the notorious 1994 Crime Bill that eliminated Pell Grants for people in
prison. For decades, both TAP and Pell operated successfully in NYS prisons, and after funding
was removed, programs in the state immediately decreased from 70 to 4. Since then, some
college-in-prison programming has become available but it is inequitably distributed across the
state.
The cost-benefits are undeniable. Because TAP is an entitlement program, providing it to people in prison would not take one dollar away from non-incarcerated students. Given the reduced recidivism rate for NYS college-in-prison graduates, the $15 million upfront investment eclipses the $69,000 it costs annually to imprison just one person. Coupled with increased employability and tax revenue upon release, the return on investment for taxpayers is high.

On Tuesday, February 4, 2020, CCF Community Organizer, Ivelisse Gilestra, on behalf of the Turn On The TAP NY campaign, provided both written and oral testimony before the Joint Budget Hearing on Higher Education in Albany. Her testimony called for TAP restoration as a way to uplift marginalized communities that are over-represented in the prison system.

For more information about the campaign, please visit TurnOnTheTAPNY.org. Additional comments from partner organizations are available upon request.

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*Turn on the Tap NY is a statewide campaign of community groups and college-in-prison providers working together to repeal the ban on TAP grants for incarcerated students.*

*College & Community Fellowship (CCF) enables women with criminal convictions to earn their college degrees so that they, their families, and their communities can thrive. We advocate for equity and opportunity for the communities we serve.*