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ADVOCATES HOLD VIRTUAL DAY OF ACTION TO DEMAND NYS RESTORE TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FUNDING TO PEOPLE IN PRISON

ALBANY, N.Y. - Today, the #TurnonTheTapNY campaign held a virtual advocacy day via Zoom to call on the New York State (NYS) legislature to restore Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) funding for people behind bars. The event kicked off with a rally that featured remarks from elected officials, college-in-prison providers, faith leaders and directly impacted advocates.

Today’s event builds on a national conversation to increase access to higher education for people in prison following the December 2020 passage of a bill to restore Pell Grants for incarcerated students. New York implemented a similar ban on TAP eligibility for incarcerated people in 1995, following the federal Pell Grant ban in 1994. As a result, the number of college-in-prison programs in New York fell from over 70 to 4.

Providing college opportunities in prison has been found to deliver strong employment outcomes, develop employer-demanded skills, make prisons safer, and strengthen pathways to successful reentry. These programs also hold the unique potential to improve students’ lives, help narrow racial and economic equity gaps in postsecondary attainment and workforce participation, strengthen local economies and communities, and disrupt cycles of incarceration in overcriminalized communities that are disproportionately Black and Brown.

Reinstating TAP is a means to extend education opportunities and create equitable access for all people. The cost to restore TAP is a fraction of what it would ultimately save the state to uplift communities disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration. It is critical to note that no student has ever lost a TAP dollar as a result of an incarcerated student receiving TAP.

Following the rally, more than 50 advocates met with legislators to stress the importance of restoring TAP to people in NYS prisons as a means to achieve educational equity, racial justice and a stronger democracy.
A link to the rally featuring speaker remarks can be found [here](#). Additional background information is available in the #TurnOnTheTAPNY [fact sheet](#) and [fiscal impact](#) one-pagers located at [turnonthetapny.org](http://turnonthetapny.org).

The following quotes can be attributed to #TurnOnTheTAPNY Day speakers and advocates:

“Restoring TAP funding for incarcerated students is not only key to their personal rehabilitation, but helps them return to society as valuable, tax paying, contributing members. College-in-prison programs provide opportunities that change lives, families and entire communities.” - **Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, Chair of the State Senate Higher Education Committee**

“Providing college opportunities by restoring Tuition Access Program (TAP) awards for people who are incarcerated is critical for their future and for the betterment of our society. It will help disrupt cycles of incarceration that continue to target Black and Brown working-class communities like those I represent. Until 1995, incarcerated persons at state correctional facilities were eligible to receive TAP awards to pursue higher education at our world-class SUNY and CUNY systems. I’m proud to be sponsoring bill S4464 to repeal the ban that has since prevented people who are incarcerated from receiving these opportunities. Education is the key to uplift all people—these awards should be made available once again to anyone who’s incarcerated who wants to pursue their education.” - **Senator Robert Jackson**

“Increasing access to higher education is a means to bridge the opportunity gaps facing our state. With TAP restoration, New York State can build a more equitable future for marginalized people and communities who have been historically locked out and away from resources. Access to education for people in prison not only has the power to bring about this positive change, but also to look racial and economic injustices squarely in the eye and say, ‘enough is enough.’” - **Vivian Nixon, Executive Director of College & Community Fellowship.**

"Higher education in prison has multi-generational benefits: not only do people return to their communities better equipped to be productive citizens, additionally, the children of incarcerated parents enrolled in college programs more likely aspire to go to college as well." - **Lisette Bamenga, MS Ed, Academic Coordinator at Hudson Link**

"College-in-prison is the most effective, simplest and most affordable expansion of college opportunity in the entire landscape of higher education. New York State is ready to be a leader in this field and it is past time for the legislature to reverse the terrible decision it made with Governor Pataki in 1995. Lifting the ban on TAP grants for incarcerated people in New York is how we invest in people and education over prisons and punishment.” - **Max Kenner, Executive Director of Bard Prison Initiative.**
Higher education is a tool which helps all of us build a thriving state. It is a way of ensuring a future of promise and hope for all New Yorkers. It is also a means of combating mass incarceration in New York State, breaking cycles of poverty in NY communities, reducing rates of recidivism, and increasing cost-savings for state and federal governments. We must “Turn on the TAP” for all New York residents so that justice and equality can overflow into all New York communities. - Rabbi Hilly Haber, Director of Social Justice Organizing and Education at Central Synagogue

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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.