

SENATE No. 2675

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

—
**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court
(2023-2024)**
—

SENATE, April 1, 2024.

The committee on Higher Education, to whom was referred the petitions (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 822) of Lydia Edwards, Sal N. DiDomenico and Russell E. Holmes for legislation to instruct the board of higher education to engage house of corrections and state prisons, report the accompanying bill (Senate, No. 2675).

For the committee,
Joanne M. Comerford

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An Act instructing the Department of Higher Education to engage houses of correction & state prisons.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 15A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
2 section 15G the following subsection:-

3 Section 15H. (a) As used in this section, the following words shall have the following
4 meanings:

5 “Credit status”, currently incarcerated persons as well as most recently released persons
6 who, during the term of incarceration, completed and received certification of requirements for
7 an award of a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) with Credit and have been determined to be
8 eligible for acceptance into freshman level, for-credit study at a public institution of higher
9 education in Massachusetts.

10 “Incarcerated person”, a committed offender or such other person as is placed in custody
11 in a correctional facility in accordance with law.

12 “Recently released”, release of a previously incarcerated person from a county jail, house
13 of correction, or state prison to a non-custodial status that has occurred before the most recent
14 specific outreach of admissions or financial aid staff under subsection (b).

15 (b) The department of higher education shall oversee and supervise regular outreach to
16 each county Jail, House of Correction, and State Prison by admissions or financial aid staff of
17 public institutions of higher education.

18 The outreach shall ensure timely identification, at least twice per calendar year, by
19 region, of individuals who have obtained Credit Status. County Sheriffs and the Commissioner
20 of Correction shall ensure reciprocal cooperation in this outreach by compiling twice a year a
21 record of current incarcerated persons and most recently released persons who meet the
22 requirements for acceptance into a public institution of higher education in Massachusetts.

23 (c) If a recently released person has met the requirements for credit status but has been
24 released, the Sheriff and the Commissioner of Correction shall provide to the admissions or
25 financial aid staff representative of a public institution of higher education the last known
26 information concerning the anticipated place of residence and, if available, contact information
27 for the most recently released person.

28 The admissions or financial aid staff representative of the public institution of higher
29 education shall, upon engagement of the qualified incarcerated person or recently released
30 person, provide specific counsel and offer expedient assistance to facilitate the current
31 incarcerated person’s or recently released person’s enrollment into freshman level for credit
32 study in the next available semester, at the public institution of higher education. In the case of
33 current qualified incarcerated person, this offer of assistance and expedited enrollment shall

34 occur within 30 days of the incarcerated person's scheduled release from the House of
35 Correction or the State Prison. This facilitated and expedited assistance shall include the
36 provision of financial aid, including need-based scholarships, to cover all costs not covered by
37 other financial aid programs of tuition, fees, and necessary supplies during the initial semester
38 following release and shall be available to the student for each subsequent semester of study
39 through completion of requirements for the award of a Certificate or Diploma.

40 (d) The department of higher education, in consultation with the department of
41 correction, county sheriffs, and organizations concerned about the education of incarcerated
42 persons, shall promulgate regulations and guidelines for the implementation of this section.

43 (e) The department of higher education shall file an annual report to the house and senate
44 ways and means committees, the joint committee on the judiciary, the joint committee on public
45 safety and Security, and the joint committee on higher education concerning the annual results of
46 this outreach and engagement initiative.