



VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: LONG-TERM SENTENCES AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

Education behind the walls matters to society. Higher education improves the prison environment, empowers students, provides hope, and equips incarcerated people for life beyond the walls.

In Illinois, incarcerated people with long-term sentences are placed on waiting lists for educational opportunities in the order of their release date while the people with shorter sentences get priority. In addition, higher education is virtually nonexistent in the state's maximum security prisons.

Our voices from the inside shows the undeniable importance of higher education programming as a path to humanity, healing and rehabilitation for incarcerated people.



"Higher education represented accomplishing my first real goal in my entire life at the age of 32.

Currently, the law allows for the IDOC's education department to prioritize prisoners with shorter sentences over prisoners that have longer sentences. What this does is basically eliminate 40 to 50% of the total prison population from participating in any college programs or vocational training."

Michael Bradley



"I needed higher education to help save my life from the past mistakes of my youth. Once I entered the Northwestern Prison Education Program, they inspired me to dream of a better future, they gave me support with tutors, professors, wellness team and supplies.

Higher education is so important to me because it restored my strength to live and thrive once released."

James Lenoir





“There are no higher education programs offered to prisoners like myself housed at Lawrence Correctional Center under Administrative Detention status. I know it is easy to not include us when programs are offered to prisoners in the general population, but as Criminal Justice Reform is being implemented in Illinois, people making the decisions need to also think about the prison population that’s been incarcerated for decades and not just think about those entering the system.”

Juan Ocon



“Higher education is important because it gives you knowledge and better opportunities. It gives you a sense of what you can do and what you want to do. It gives you confidence and high self-esteem.”

Joyce McGee



“Higher education is the only way to combat poverty because it opens doors, and not just through education, but also through networking and developing leadership as well as interactive skills and the sharing of ideas.”

Flynard Miller

Voices from the Inside

“I have been incarcerated for 29 years, and I have acquired a GED and a few college courses, but I have been denied higher learning due to the policy that only short-timers can achieve higher learning.”

D.A., Dixon Correctional Center

“The two prisons where I was transferred do not allow their maximum prison population to receive any higher education. I’m being housed in Administrative Detention and they do not us to receive any higher education.”

J.V., Lawrence Correctional Center

“I’m serving a life sentence in Illinois...I have never been allowed to attend college-level classes. Pontiac Correctional Center does not offer any education services, let alone any college classes.”

J.K., Pontiac Correctional Center

“Time should not be a factor in determining who gets to get an education as well! Help people be more than what they were when they came in.”

Cindy Shephard, Northwestern Prison Education Program

Working to bring opportunities and hope to people who are incarcerated.
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