Twitter Thread by Bard Prison Initiative

Bard Prison Initiative
@BPIBard

The news today from Washington signals the biggest victory in the field of #CollegeInPrison in decades. It's a long time coming. This undoes the #94crimebill's ban on #Pell Grants for incarcerated students. #PellRestoration #PELLYES
A thread.



Prior to the #94CrimeBill, college was common, even normal, in state and federal prisons across the country. The #Pell ban eviscerated college nearly overnight.
#PellRestoration
https://t.co/TVBCEwRyiz

Since then, a small but growing number of privately funded programs helped keep the field alive. @BPIBard has been proud to be one of them, but we want to shout out our friends & fellow travelers at @MtTamCollege @HudsonLink & women in Bedford Hills who got so much of this going.

After years of advocacy, the critical moment was in 2015 when advocates convinced the Obama administration created Second Chance Pell, formally restoring college-in-prison to the CJR agenda. No one did more to make that happen than our allies @Vivian_Nixon_WW & @glennEmartin.

Just to say, there was one person in the federal government who carried this torch the whole way. That was our friend John Linton in the Dept of Ed, who we lost last year to pancreatic cancer. We love and miss him.

This is all such a long time coming.
In 2003, Daniel Karpowitz & @maxkenner authored a report on “The Case for Reinstating Pell Grant Eligibility” -requested by & presented to the leadership of the fed Department of Education.

At the time, they were preparing for a reauthorization of the HEA. Even then, they knew this was the right thing to do. Check out the report, it still hits. https://t.co/TVBCEwRyiz

. @BPIBard was deeply involved in the early pushes for Pell reinstatement that later involved the heroic efforts of Dallas Pell, the late Senator’s daughter, and so many more.

In 2020, it’s hard to imagine just how visceral public opposition was to this work throughout the ‘90s and the aughts. Many elected officials would comfortably laugh you out of the room if you brought up the Pell ban or providing any meaningful opportunity to incarcerated people.

Even then, there *was* a small bipartisan collection of legislators willing to consider how to right the wrong. No one actually believed the ban was a “policy” in any one’s interest. In closing the deal, no legislator deserves more credit than @BrianShatz.

But, in the end, it was formerly incarcerated advocates who made today possible. It will transform this field and prisons along with it.

#PellRestoration

It took another 17 years and tremendous coalition-building with too many allies to name to get to the victory in hand today: Nearly half a million people in prison are estimated college eligible and now able to access to #Pell Grants. #PellRestoration

@ccf_ny @FICGN @UnlockHigherEd @DrugPolicyOrg @prisonfellowshp @verainstitute @IHEPTweets @EdTrust @thefortunesoc @Prof_Andrisse @mr_bl0unt @akhan1437 @LynnNovick @DavidLeegarlock @KenBurns @SenBrianSchatz @DyjuanTatro @gchochos1 @trelaineito
@Vivian_Nixon_WW @StephanieBazell +

Now that the #Pell ban is lifted, the question of how to reach all those students with meaningful college opportunities looms. What will this CIP field become with the return of public funding?
It can go really right or really wrong.
Here are some things we know for certain:

1 #Pell Grants help but it’s not enough. When Pell support for CIP was at its strongest pre'94, it was combined w state aid. For CIP to be sustainable, and meaningful states must follow the fed lead and rescind bans on eligibility for ppl in prison. In NYS, we must #TurnOnTheTAP

2. Universities need to take seriously the responsibility of democratizing access to meaningful & ambitious college opportunities. What this should look like:
Students held to same standards, expectations, & rigor as on main campus. Same curriculum same degrees.
#PellRestoration

2b. In-person courses that create & sustain community across student cohorts and between students and their college.
#PellRestoration

3. #CollegeInPrison should reflect the best of American higher education. This happens despite being in prison. What we don’t need is “correctional education” - we want genuine, transformative, independent *college*. That’s what we have fought for and that fight’s not over.
#Pell

3b See also: https://t.co/4AiRY1MxAc #PellRestoration

4 State policymakers must resist the temptation to create centralized forms of mass-produced higher ed for prison. Avoid state-level monopolies & homogenization which gives us correctional education instead of college in prison.

4b The landscape of college inside prison should look like the best of the landscape outside of prison. #PellRestoration

5. We don't need more “systems” and “pipelines” for marginalized people and instead break down racist barriers and encourage networks of opportunity and access for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. #PellRestoration

6. Jailers on the ground must give colleges the space they need to run college operations. CIP comes at no cost to the prisons, but requires space and access to succeed. As prison populations continue to fall, more space must be made for college.
#PellRestoration

7. In-person learning should always take priority over distance models.
#PellRestoration

8. We’ve come too far for the field of CIP to become a backwater of predatory, cynical profiteering. Fed & state policymakers, leaders in higher ed, and DOCS have to work together to keep out bad actors and prioritize intensity, seriousness, and success.
#PellRestoration