

FACT SHEET



HB1041 Correctional Education Reform

Patron: Delegate Betsy Carr

Problem: Despite recent #1 rankings for Education and Business (2024), Virginia has failed to adopt a broad strategy for postsecondary education in prison, which is proven to advance state goals in workforce expansion, educational attainment, and public safety. Instead, Virginia leaves \$105 million on the table every year in federal, college student aid. Specifically, Pell grants, for which 67% of incarcerated Virginians are academically- and income-qualified to utilize for self-improvement and career-readiness purposes.

Despite aiming for recognition as the “Top State for Talent,” Virginia is failing to adequately scale Pell-fundable, postsecondary partnerships in VADOC with Virginia public colleges and universities, leaving thousands of Virginians to exit state prisons annually with less advanced education and fewer credentials to show for it than returning citizens in neighboring states like Maryland, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Virginia’s 23 community colleges, facing revenue and enrollment cliffs, stand ready while 15,000 potential enrollees a semester, with Pell dollars in their figurative pockets, go unserved in prisons across the Commonwealth. Currently, only 580 eligible, incarcerated Virginians (4%) in state sponsored care are matriculated in college programs, despite research indicating recidivism is halved by participation in degree programs.

Approximately 12,000 individuals annually enter Virginia’s labor force from incarceration in state prisons—a number comparable to the graduating class of George Mason University. By 2030, 62% of jobs will require postsecondary education, yet educational pathways in Virginia’s prisons remain limited, even after the restoration of federal Pell Grant eligibility in 2023.

Solution: This bill modernizes Virginia’s prison education system by aligning literacy instruction with state standards, institutes a task force on correctional education, with a higher education advisory group, engages VDOC to participate in multi-agency data sharing that allows evaluation of educational impacts, and requires study of teacher salaries. The bill strengthens workforce readiness, improves public safety, and moves Virginia toward fully leveraging restored Pell grants for college behind bars.

Context: In 2024, the **Virginia Consensus for Higher Education in Prison (VCHEP)** was established by the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy to facilitate multi-sector, multi-agency collaboration to expand postsecondary education pathways in VADOC. In 2025, key partners—including VADOC, **Virginia Works**, **VCCS**, the **State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)**, and nonprofit **Resilience Education**—joined the Virginia Consensus, reflecting growing alignment across corrections, higher education, and workforce systems. In Fall 2025, these named agencies and nonprofits initiated a voluntary, collaborative strategic planning process for higher education in Virginia as members of the Virginia Consensus.

This bill builds on this foundation by providing a statutory framework to address interagency, public-private collaboration to plan for and implement high-value postsecondary partnerships statewide, align prison education with workforce needs, and ensure continuity from incarceration through reentry.

Policy Details: This bill:

- Requires prison literacy instruction to align with the Virginia Literacy Act
- Establishes a multi-agency Prison Education Task Force with a Higher Education Advisory Group
- Engages VADOC to join in multi-agency data-sharing that makes assessment of long-term education effects on post-incarceration outcomes possible
- Requires study of VDOC teacher salaries to compare with regional standards

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