



April 28, 2022

Dan Fuller, Deputy Secretary for Education
Office of Governor Kathy Hochul
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Deputy Secretary Fuller:

As you know, New York State banned incarcerated people from accessing its Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) in 1995. And **Part F** of the New York State 2023 Enacted Budget repealed the TAP ban and restored TAP funding to incarcerated New Yorkers, effective immediately. However, the process by which students can apply for TAP is currently insurmountable for Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) students because incarcerated people in NYS do not have access to the internet nor the online Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Currently, there are two mechanisms by which students can apply for TAP: 1) The easiest is to apply via the FAFSA website. New York State residents attending NYS schools can link directly to the TAP application from the FAFSA submission confirmation page. 2) If the student exited the FAFSA process before completing the TAP application, but filled in a New York State address and a New York State college, the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) will automatically receive the information in about three days. HESC then sends an email, if an email address is available, or postcard with directions to complete the TAP application online as well as how the student can request a hard copy of the TAP application.

The Bard Prison Initiative currently has 90 Pell eligible students who would likely also qualify for academic year 2022-2023 TAP funding.¹ With the academic year 2022-2023 deadline for students to apply for TAP set at June 20, 2022, BPI recommends that HESC urgently implement an application process for incarcerated students.

Recommendations:

- **It is recommended that HESC immediately provide a hard copy application, similar to the paper FAFSA, that college-in-prison programs can download and print and distribute to students.** A hard copy TAP application already exists, but students must request it online themselves, which is impossible for incarcerated students to do.

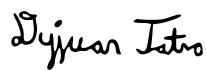
¹ These students are Pell eligible via the Second Chance Pell Experiment that the Obama administration initiated in 2016, and which the Trump and Biden administrations later extended and expanded.

- That HESC should establish a process for manually inputting hard copy applications from incarcerated students into its systems if this capacity does not already exist.
- That HESC utilize a data retrieval system to determine TAP eligibility from one application—the FAFSA. Via data retrieval, HESC could extract necessary data from the FAFSA once it is processed so that incarcerated students do not have to fill out a TAP application; or create a way for TAP applications to be prefilled based on FAFSA information already submitted.²
- That HESC provide information related to TAP restoration as quickly as possible to financial aid offices and college-in-prison programs ahead of the June 30 application deadline.

Our recommendations leverage existing systems to facilitate an application process for incarcerated students because they should be treated in a like manner as any other student in New York to the greatest possible extent. We find that it is in the best interest of BPI students that such processes be as normalizing as possible to avoid stigmatization and in anticipation of students utilizing TAP via familiar processes as they pursue higher education back in their communities.

The restoration of TAP funding extends equitable access to higher education to incarcerated New Yorkers. It will increase public safety, save taxpayer dollars, and create extraordinary inroads to college in communities we most often fail to engage in higher education. It is how the state can invest in people and education over prisons and punishment. We thank Governor Hochul for lifting the 26 year ban and are willing to work with our partners in government to get this funding once again flowing for all college-in-prison programs ahead of the June 30, 2022 TAP application deadline.

Sincerely,



Dyjuan Tatro
Senior Government Affairs Officer

² This recommendation should be readily applicable to any Second Chance Pell site in NYS, and generally applicable after Pell Grants are fully restored for incarcerated students in June of 2023.