



# Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

*Shared Voices for Liberal Religious Values in Maryland*

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## **Testimony in Support of HB 812 – Correctional Services - Diminution Credits - Education**

**To: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**From: Karen Clark, Chair, Criminal Justice Task Force, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland**

**Date: February 25, 2020**

I am Karen Clark, speaking on behalf of the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry. Our faith calls us to support legislation that aligns with our spiritual values. HB 812 connects with our first principle – to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all people. The bill aims to better prepare our returning citizens for a successful transition back into their community. When our returning citizens are better prepared to be successful, we all benefit.

There is solid evidence-based research that returning citizens who have participated in academic educational programs or who have worked to develop technical skills, have a significantly better chance of not recidivating (43% less) and a greater chance of securing a job than those who do not engage in such programs (Rand Corp. 2015; Case for Correctional Ed. in US prisons). The Abell foundation's evaluation Maryland's Correctional system in 2017 suggested making four major improvements. HB 812 is one of these suggestions. Its goal is to motivate people to participate in more educational opportunities and to reward them when reaching significant goals. For example, if a person were to earn a GED certificate or complete a vocational training program or another educational benchmark, a block of diminution credits would be awarded in recognition of achieving and working hard to accomplish the goal. These time credits could be much as 90 days off of the original sentence. The commissioner sets the amount of credit for various goals.

The large block of diminution credits sets a goal and a reward of achievement for those behind the walls to make the hard work worthwhile while forming good study habits and improving self-esteem. It is hoped that this will help motivate others to try this path and to build a more positive climate while inside. Maryland used to have a robust correctional education program and this is a right step to help rebuild it and have our returning citizens reentering their communities better prepared to become productive and engaged citizens.

The Unitarian Universalists ask for your supporting vote on HB 812 to help make this a reality.