

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER
EDUCATION

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B E F O R E: Eric Dinowitz, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Gale A. Brewer
Oswald Feliz

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Karol Mason
President
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
City University of New York

Dr. Gerald Maitre
Deputy Director of Programs
Institute for Justice and Opportunity

Darryl Epps
Director of Outreach and Onboarding
Institute for Justice and Opportunity

Tommasina Faratro
Special Projects Manager
Institute for Justice and Opportunity

Maddy deLone
Interim Director
Institute for Justice and Opportunity

Jarell Daniels
Founder and Program Director
Justice Ambassadors Youth Council
Center for Justice at Columbia University

Geraldine Downey
Professor
Columbia University

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Welcome to today's New York City Council hearing on higher education. Please silence all cell phones, and please do not approach the dais. If you wish to submit testimony, you may do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair we're ready to begin.

[GAVEL]

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Good morning. I'm Eric Dinowitz, Chair of the Committee on Higher Education, and welcome to our oversight hearing on serving justice-involved college students in New York City. This committee prioritizes making higher education accessible to all students. Today we are focused on students who have been directly or indirectly affected by the criminal justice system.

Studies have shown time and again, that education is directly linked to decreased crime rates. In fact, individuals who enroll in post secondary correctional education programs are 48% less likely to be re-incarcerated than those who do not. That statistic alone makes it clear that higher education can contribute substantially to life-changing opportunity, while encouraging students not to let mistakes or obstacles define their futures.

As many of you know, I'm a proud CUNY alum and I consider it an honor to have attended a university that focuses on inclusive academic success. I believe CUNY already has key programming in place to serve the population we are here to talk about today. And I look forward to discussing with CUNY administrators how they can build upon and improve their valuable initiatives. CUNY's programs include John Jay's Prison-To-College Pipeline, BMCC's Project Impact, and Lehman's Reentry at Lehman.

We're interested in learning more about how these multifaceted programs operate, how they are publicized, and the impact they've made on students. We are particularly interested in the demographic makeup of enrolled students including their gender, racial and ethnic background, income level, and disability status, because we know that incarceration disproportionately impacts low income students of color and people with disabilities.

This leads me to my next point: Guaranteeing the affordability of these programs for students is non-negotiable. I was delighted to hear that Pell and TAP grants were recently reinstated for incarcerated students after a 29-year ban. This is a step in the

right direction, a step that this New York City Council supported, and this committee is eager to learn about how this recent change has affected CUNY's funding for these programs.

One last word: We are pleased to have with us today representatives from an innovative program, the The Justice Ambassadors Youth Council, which is sponsored by Columbia University's Center for Justice, JAYC was founded by Jarrell Daniels whose life changed after participating in an education program while he was in fact, incarcerated at a Queen's facility. Apart from providing overall guidance for JAYC, he has personally run the weekly sessions for each cohort of formerly incarcerated or otherwise justice-affected youth and their mentors since 2019. Many of the mentors are drawn from city and state government agencies, including the City Council. He is assisted by a handful of Columbia Graduate students and by Professor Geraldine Downey, one of the founders of the center, and a longtime and distinguished researcher in this field, and herself a teacher of incarcerated individuals.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize someone very important to this Committee and very

someone very important to the CUNY system. The Committee and I would like to thank John Katowski. That's the CUNY senior statesman, and all-around great guy, for his long and dedicated support to this committee. He has always provided us with the best possible information in the most timely manner. He's tapped excellent witnesses for our hearings, partly because he seems to know everyone at CUNY, and they all like him, which I totally get. He's a straight shooter, and he will be missed. Happy retirement John.

I would like to now remind everyone who wishes to testify in person today that you must fill out a witness slip, which is located on the desk of the Sergeant at Arms near the entrance of this room. Please fill out this slip even if you have registered in advance that you will be testifying in person today. To allow as many people to testify, public testimony will be limited to three minutes per person, whether you're testifying in person or on Zoom.

My colleagues are also going to limit their questions and comments to five minutes. Please note

2 that witnesses who are here in person will testify
3 before those who are on Zoom.

4 Now in accordance with the rules of the council,
5 I would will administer the affirmation to witnesses
6 from CUNY.

7 Please raise your right hand.

8 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth,
9 and nothing but the truth in your testimony before
10 this committee and to respond honestly to council
11 members' questions?

12 ALL: I do.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. And as a
14 reminder to all our witnesses, please state your name
15 prior to your testimony for the record, and you may
16 begin your testimony.

17 Please.

18 PRESIDENT MASON: Good morning. I'm Karol Mason,
19 President of John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
20 representing the City University of New York. Good
21 morning Chair Dinowitz and members of the Committee
22 on Higher Education. Thank you for this opportunity
23 to address you today. As I said, I am Karol Mason,
24 and I have the honor of serving as the president of
25 John Jay College of Criminal Justice, one of seven

senior colleges in the 25-institution City of University of New York system.

As a Hispanic-serving and minority-serving institution, John Jay College is focused on justice in all its dimensions. I'm delighted to talk with you today about the many ways that John Jay and other colleges in the CUNY system support justice-involved students, including those in and returning from prison and jail. We are proud to partner with our CUNY colleagues, alternatives-to-incarceration providers, and reentry organizations across the city to bring the power of higher education to justice-involved New Yorkers.

The Institute for Justice and Opportunity is a research and action center that began its work at John Jay in 2005. I'd like to introduce the institute's staff briefly, as you will hear from each of them about their work in the course of this hearing.

Dr. Gerald Maitre to my left is the Deputy Director of Programs of the Institute and is responsible for overseeing the quality and impact of various courses and services. Darryl Epps, to his left, is currently the Director of Outreach and

Onboarding and formerly a student participating in the College Initiative Program. Tommasina Faratro is the Special Projects Manager at the Institute, who among her other duties supports the CUNY Justice Learning Collaborative. And to her left is Maddy deLone, our Interim Director of the Institute for Justice and Opportunity.

I will begin by providing a brief overview of the important services and the impact of the work of the Institute at John Jay for students across CUNY campuses. Many of the city-based services and programs were developed and supported by funding from the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice, and combined with the institute's dedication and work have transformed lives. A significant number of New Yorkers have a conviction record. In a study conducted by John Jay College's Data Collaborative for Justice, New York City has nearly 750,000 people with conviction records, 80% of whom are black or Latinx, and many of whom have served time in prison and jail. There is no doubt that the cascading effect limiting economic and educational opportunities is impacted by the justice involvement.

Formerly incarcerated people earn 52% less than their peers. More than half hold only a high school diploma or GED. And a quarter hold no credential at all. And while we don't know how many students enrolled at CUNY are justice-involved, since CUNY has long had a policy of not requiring disclosure of criminal involvement, we do know that they endure the perpetual punishment of their conviction record as they seek education, employment and housing opportunities.

Ensuring access to college in and after prison is a crucial step to helping people transform their lives, improve their futures for themselves, their families and their communities. The Institute's wraparound services including referrals for housing, tech assessments, and classes, know-your-rights training, and mentoring, as well as our combination of academic and career readiness services lead to greater inclusion and success for people with justice involvement in higher education, and their social and economic mobility and stability. Ultimately, these students are better prepared to engage productively in their communities as a result of the institute's work.

The Institute's core programs include the prison-to-college pipeline, which is operated at Otisville State Correctional Facility and provides college readiness classes, admissions testing, credit bearing classes, and academic reentry planning. Students are eligible for the program if they have a high school diploma or equivalency and are within five years of release. Once enrolled, prison-to-college pipeline, students who maintain passing grades and meet other admissions requirements can have a seat in a CUNY college upon their release. Nearly 300 students have enrolled in prison-to-college pipeline at Otisville since 2011. Many of these students returned to New York City and enroll in John Jay or other CUNY colleges. I've had the privilege of meeting with our students, engaging with our students at Otisville, and they are all star students in inspiring.

The College Initiative is another program at the institute, and this is for system involves students who want to attend and succeed at colleges across CUNY and in other New-York-state-based colleges. They provide academic counseling, peer mentoring, and community engagement. More than 1000 previously incarcerated or court-involved students have pursued

higher education through the College Initiative, and you'll meet one of them shortly. Nearly 400 have earned post secondary degrees across all the campuses, and roughly 20% of those graduates have earned multiple degrees. There are approximately 300 students involved in the program each year, most of them applying to or enrolled in CUNY colleges.

And then we have the Career and Workforce Pathways. The institute hosts one semester certificate programs, the navigators certificate in Human Services and Community Justice, offered in partnership with John Jay faculty. This program prepares people with lived experience in the legal system for careers in the human services field, and provides an on ramp for higher education. The institute also provides tech skills and training. Tech skills, assessments, and training are provided for students who lack the basic technology skills necessary for higher education and employment.

And finally, I want to touch on our CUNY Justice Learning Collaborative, which you'll hear more from as well from Tommasina. The CUNY Justice Learning Collaborative is led by the Institute and convenes partners across the 25-campus university system who

are committed to creating more equitable and accessible Q&A for students who have been impacted by the criminal legal system.

We are proud of our success of our students and having-- that they've achieved through these programs, and through the combination of various funding streams we have touched the lives of thousands of students and their families, and we thank you for the continued support for these vital programs, and my team and I look forward to respond to any questions you have, and we invite you to our graduation for the College Initiative on June 22, and the graduation for our navigator certificate program on June 29.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What time?

PRESIDENT MASON: Um, I'm going to have to get back to you, because we'll send you a personal invitation.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

PRESIDENT MASON: I know it's-- I'm pretty sure it's in the evening. [BACKGROUND VOICES] 6:00.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

PRESIDENT MASON: Thank you. I'll be there.

DR. MAITRE: Gerald Maitre. Good morning, Chairman Dinowitz, and members of the Committee of Higher Education. Once again, I am Gerald Maitre, the Deputy Director of Programs at John Jay College Institute for Justice and opportunity.

On behalf of our students and staff of the institute, I thank you for the opportunity to brief you about our work creating pathways to higher education and workforce for many individuals impacted by the criminal legal system, who are seeking a better life for themselves and their families.

We know that our students need to connect education with work readiness and employment. Just as CUNY has been a driver for students to reach the middle class. The Institute is a crucial driver for economic mobility for students impacted by the legal system. By increasing access to higher education, we are training our students for civic engagement, and leadership roles at work and in their communities.

I am from Brooklyn, born and raised in Brownsville, where I grew up in NYCHA apartment buildings. I was faced with many of the same situation and challenges that landed the Institute students in jail in prison. The only difference is

that I realized I had to fight for an opportunity to go to school. I understood that in my community, there were no resources or support systems for people who looked like me to be successful.

My older brother served 20 years in and out of jail and prison systems. I knew that was not what I wanted for my life. I was so convinced that higher education would shape my life for the better that I couldn't start with just one graduate degree. I have a master's in social work from Hunter College. And I also have a doctoral degree also.

The transformational power of education, family support, and my faith is why you see me here today. I have a passion to help those who are justice impacted like my brother, because I want them to have the chance to go to college and to access those resources to be successful.

I'd like it tell you about the Institute's special sauce, how we do our work of opening doors to college for people in prison, and people coming home from prison and jail. First, the Institute is uniquely positioned within both the criminal legal system and CUNY. We are a pipeline from the legal system to degree and non-degree programs. Our staff

work with a network of reentry services and ATR providers serving individuals inside and released from city jails and people on probation. We also conduct outreach at many New York state prisons, with a special focus at Otisville and Queensboro and the Edgecombe transitional facility. We let people who are incarcerated know they are not forgotten, that the chance to get an education is here for them when they return from prison and jail.

We are committed to the transformative power of education. Every day we see our students learning and growing as they move towards their vision for themselves. We have outstanding CUNY faculty teaching in our college and the prison programs, and in our community based navigator certificate program. The CUNY faculty are being are bringing intellectual inquiry and full experience of the academic environment to our students. We have a holistic, student-centered approach. We provide academic advising, enrollment, and financial aid application assistance, specifically tailored to address the kinds of barriers that students impacted by the legal system often face, and peer mentoring that gives students immediate support and a sense of community.

We recognize the impact of trauma on our students and help help them build the self-care, self-advocacy, and communication skills they need to succeed in college and beyond.

Let me tell you a little bit about our students. Three quarters I'm male in a vast majority, 85%, are black, Hispanic, indigenous and other people of color. About 30% of students in New York City live in the Bronx, and 20% in upper Manhattan, East Central and West Harlem in Washington Heights, more than a quarter live in Brooklyn, at about 16% in Queens.

We are making a real difference in the lives of our students. In the last four years, we enrolled 849 students in our college initiative program, and celebrated 134 graduates who've earned their degrees. We provide tech skills, assessments, and training to 301 students. And for our students facing digital literacy divide, tech skills development is essential for them to embark on education and thrive in the workforce.

We've also celebrated 112 students of our intensive, semester-long navigate certificate training for people with lived experience in the

criminal legal system, who are seeking jobs and promotions in New York City Human Services workforce.

A survey of graduates from the first two quarters found that two thirds of respondents had increased their salary after completing the course. The navigate certificate is also an on-ramp to college, and alumni who enrolled in the human service degree programs at John Jay, BMCC, and Bronx Community College, are awarded six undergraduate credits.

Everything that we do, we've learned about how to help people impacted by the legal system to gain access to higher education, and training in the workforce. All that expertise we share with the wider community of providers working on reentry, youth justice, and criminal justice policy.

To our fellowships for John Jay students, we are training the next generation of practitioners and policy leaders. Through our reports and publications, we are sharing vital information about their rights in the workplace, how to navigate background checks for employment, and how to obtain professional and occupational licensing.

Our work also encompasses CUNY wide training and capacity building so that students impacted by the

legal system will be welcomed and treated with equity on all CUNY campuses.

Now I'd like to introduce to my left, our Director of Outreach and Onboarding Darryl Epps, who will brief you about his work of bringing students into our institute and his experience as an alumnus of our college services. Thank you.

MR. EPPS: Good morning, Chair Dinowitz and the Committee of higher education. My name is Darrell Epps, and I am the Director of Outreach and Onboarding at the John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity. In this role, I'm responsible for student recruitment for all of the institute's courses and services, and for ensuring that new students are fully supported during the initial enrollment process. I'm also a former student of the College Initiative Program at the institute.

As both a staff member and a former student of the institute, I am uniquely positioned to share the perspective as someone who experiences every aspect of this truly special organization. I'm excited to share my story of transformation and change which is in large part due to the services, courses, and

professional opportunities that the Institute has given me. And I'm honored to assist the generation of students following me.

I would like to begin by sharing my journey of going from incarceration to the person that is speaking before you today. I was released in 2017 after 17 years in New York state prison. While incarcerated, I was a student in Cornell's prison education program, which includes courses taught through Cuyahoga Community College, Hobart, and William Smith colleges, and Cornell University. I earned close to 100 credits-- earned close to 100 credits from 2012 to 2017, and was paroled prior to earning my degree.

Upon release, I completed a college preparatory course at Columbia University's Justice and Education Scholar Program. Then, in order to pursue my college degree, I joined the college initiative at the John Jay College Institute for Justice and opportunity.

The institute was a crucial factor in my successful reintegration into society. The institute used a student-centered approach starting with the holistic onboarding process to assess academic goals and non-academic needs such as employment and

therapy. The onboarding process also considered my concerns from my family. The Institute helped me develop a holistic academic plan, which empowered me to pursue my dream of earning a degree in social work.

Most importantly, that same year, the Institute also provided my 17-year-old son, a high school senior, with aid exploring college options.

After he saw me go to college, here's what my son, Little D, said about his academic journey:

"Honestly, I never really saw myself as college material. I did not like school, so I couldn't see myself getting to that level of education. But seeing my dad's success in college, despite the hardships he had gone through, had altered my perception of my abilities. I felt that if he was able to succeed as well as he did with the limited resources he had, then I could definitely reach that level of success. Seeing his success showed me that despite whatever hardships are obstacles and may be in my way, hard work and dedication will always prevail."

The support from the institute's strengthened our familial bond and emphasized the transformative power

of higher education. The Institute's ongoing support not only reduced the chance I would recidivate, but also ensured that my son would have the opportunity to pursue his college dream, attain meaningful employment, and maybe one day like he said, at eight years old, get his mommy a house. My experience with the Institute is not unique, but it's a microcosm of the invaluable services they provide for many people in our communities.

In 2022, Little D and I both graduated from CUNY's College of Staten Island. My son earned an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences, and I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology. And this was during COVID. And all I could think about is when at eight years old, looking into those bright, hopeful eyes and him telling me, he wanted to go to college, get a good job, and get his mom a house. And here we are, in our house, sitting at a table outside of prison celebrating our graduation.

Currently, my son is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Biochemistry. He's still at CSI. And I am a-- and I'm a graduate student at Hunter College's Silberman School of Social Work working towards my MSW.

June 2023, marks my one-year anniversary with the Institute as the Director of Outreach and Onboarding. It has been an honor to participate in providing people with the same services I received from the institute, which transformed my life. My story is not unique. Every day, the Institute and its dedicated staff are on the front lines of delivering critical support to the individuals who need it most. Whether it's academic counseling, career development, or just an empathetic ear and an open heart, the institute is providing holistic support to the communities that for far too long haven't received their fair share.

I cannot-- I cannot imagine what would happen to these communities if the institute could not deliver its services. And as my story shows, it's not just the participants that will be impacted, but also our families.

In closing, I want to say we are proud to be a CUNY family. And I thank the Committee for the opportunity to share my story and my experience, and for your continued support. Thank you.

MS. FARATRO: Tommasina Faratro. Good morning, Chair Dinowitz and members of the Committee on Higher

Education. I want to echo the gratitude expressed by President Mason and my colleagues, and thank you for the opportunity to address you today, and for the privilege to share with you the exciting work happening across the university to support students impacted by the criminal legal system.

I am Tommasina Faratro, the Special Projects Manager at the John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity. The core of my role is to cultivate relationships across CUNY in an effort to raise awareness about the experiences of CUNY college students impacted by the criminal legal system, and serve as a resource and thought partner to our colleagues who are eager to better support this population of students at their campuses. I also leverage those relationships to both enrich the services we provide at the Institute and to eliminate barriers to educational professional opportunities these students face in CUNY and elsewhere. This work is primarily accomplished through the CUNY justice Learning Collaborative that I will describe in my testimony.

I want to begin by stating that CUNY has a strong history of supporting students impacted by the

criminal legal system, and has long recognized that students with conviction records are an important part of its community. As part of a research project conducted by the Institute in 2018, I had the opportunity to interview 85 CUNY colleagues to understand the breadth of programs that exist across the university to support students impacted by the criminal legal system, and to hear their aspirations for further engaging this population of college students.

Through these conversations, I learned about prison and jail-based programs that have since sunset following the early 1990s legislation that eliminated Pell and TAP eligibility for people who were incarcerated, the creation of committees like the University Faculty Senate Committee on Higher Education in Prison, and the independent and often unknown efforts of faculty and staff who are recognized as campus champions for supporting system impacted students.

Three things became clear through this work: There are many colleagues across CUNY that share our commitment to supporting students with conviction records in realizing their educational professional

aspirations; their efforts deserve recognition; and our colleagues are eager to do more.

Our report titled "Mapping the City University of New York, the University's Commitment to Supporting System Impacted Students" captures the range of known programs, including those offered by the Institute described in Gerald's testimony operating within CUNY to support students impacted by the criminal legal system. These include initiatives that-- initiatives that intentionally partner with college and prison providers across the city and state, that conduct-- conduct outreach to incarcerated people via correctional facilities-- via correctional resource fairs, certificate programs, pre-college programs, campus based support programs and committees, and college and prison opportunities.

For example, the University Faculty Senate Committee on Higher Education in Prison coordinates faculty from across CUNY to attend resource fairs at local correctional facilities to share information about CUNY. Bronx Community College's Future Now program and the borough of Manhattan Community College's Project Impact program provide high school equivalency programming, mentorship and pathways to

their institutions for system impacted students. The CUNY Graduate Center partners with the Bard Prison initiative to provide a pathway to the CUNY BA program for Bard Prison Initiative alumni who earned college credits and credentials while incarcerated.

Since the release of the Institute's report in April 2020, many of these programs continue to exist, some have since sunset, and several new initiatives have emerged. For example, Lehman College created Reentry at Lehman to provide key information and resources to support Lehman students with conviction records. Hostos Community College revived its campus-based committee, Justice at Hostos, and Bronx Community College developed Justice at BCC, which recently secured funding to develop the Kalief Browder Social Justice Center for justice-involved Bronx Community College students.

There is so much incredible work happening across the university, but there is little awareness about the initiatives that are detailed in the report and those that continue to emerge. The Institute is working to increase CUNY's knowledge of these efforts.

To raise awareness and better coordinate information, the institute launched the CUNY justice Learning Collaborative in October 2020. The Collaborative is a cross-university community of CUNY faculty, staff, administrators, and students who share a commitment to creating a more welcoming university that is inclusive of and responsive to the experiences of CUNY students impacted by the criminal legal system. We launched our first meeting and invited the 85 individuals interviewed in the report. Now our list of contains more than 270 people that are invited to these meetings.

The institute convenes the collaborative virtually on a bimonthly basis and averages upward of 75 attendees per meeting. We use this space to spotlight and raise awareness of existing programs bring in guest speakers to present on research regarding college students with conviction records, and legislative changes in the field of the delivery of higher education in prison, and solicit their input on various projects.

For example, our May 2023 Meeting featured a presentation from the Vera Institute of Justice on the Pell reinstatement and how existing second chance

Pell, and non-Second-Chance-Pell institutions can become approved prison education programs. It is also a hub for resource sharing and learning and as a space where relationships can lead to intercampus partnerships. To my knowledge, this is the only space in CUNY where all the known efforts that support students with conviction records come together to learn about one another's work and share best practices and challenges.

Additionally, to try to respond to the interest, the Institute collaborated with CUNY's Office of Communications and Marketing to create the CUNY Supports For Students With Conviction Records webpage so that students, their families, and our colleagues can easily access information and resources to serve them in their educational journeys. A small working group of CUNY Justice Learning Collaborative members develop the contents of the webpage, which is then shared with a larger group for review. The webpage launched in October 2021, and thus far has received more than 2000 pageviews from new unique viewers. The institute is responsible for managing and updating the contents of the web page, and I invite you to review and circulate this.

CUNY has always been and will continue to be a beacon of opportunity for people impacted by the criminal legal system. Each corner of the university plays an important role in helping this population of students fully realize their value to our society. With the reinstatement of Pell and TAP eligibility to incarcerated people, more and more individuals will likely turn to higher education to change the trajectory of their lives. And for the 750,000 Plus New Yorkers with conviction records, they will no doubt turn to CUNY, the engine of social mobility.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the important and often unrecognized work happening across CUNY to support students with conviction records. Thank you.

MS. DELONE: I'm Maddy deLone, the Interim Executive Director of the Institute. I do not have testimony. I'm simply here if you have questions that require my knowledge.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Wow. Thank you. Well, thank you, everyone, for your testimony. I want to comment on all of them. And Mr. Epss, I do want to thank you for your heartfelt testimony. My-- My kids are eight years old. And I just-- I just hope that I

can inspire them half as much as you have in your life. So thank you. And thank you all for your-- for your work.

I have a few questions. The first question-- I mean, I-- I always find myself asking similar questions at these hearings, and CUNY has all sorts of wonderful and impactful programs. You touched a little on-- on how people know about these programs. You said you work with alternatives-to-incarceration providers. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Do you have a list of every provider in New York City? And does each one of them-- are they aware? And do you work with all of the to make sure that the-- where people are coming from have access to the resources that you provide?

DR. MAITRE: Short answer: Yes. We work with The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, MOCJ, ATI, and we are really close. And Darrell, he sits at the top of that, who does the connection with his team, with the support services, and the onboarding, and we've worked with many of the organization that's in the city that supports people coming home. So we do that very closely.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And it's-- And it's standard that if they-- if it's within five years of-- Is it the same sort of criteria that you have for-- at Otisville, where you're have to be within a certain number of years of graduating high school? Or is it everyone moving out of incarceration is informed of and has access to these programs?

DR. MAITRE: Everyone.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Everyone.

DR. MAITRE: Yeah, everyone.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And so, so going back to people applying for college, so students-- so students or prospective students leaving the prison system, it sounds like every single one of them knows about the-- your programs at CUNY. But if I'm a student who did not have alternative-to-incarceration program, or I didn't take advantage of it then, or it was a few years back, and I decided to go to college, what is the outreach like then? You don't ask people about their criminal history. So how do you get that information? How do you know, to do the directed outreach?

MR. EPPS: So when a student expresses interest in the Institute, we conduct an onboarding process,

which assesses for-- even though we don't run a criminal background check, there's certain questions we ask that really underscore or can tell whether or not this-- the individual has been incarcerated or justice impacted in some way before, and so we're able to assist them moving forward.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I mean before-- I guess I'm asking, before they get to the institute.

MR. EPPS: Right.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Because I think a lot-- again, a lot of the programs, you don't know what you don't know. If people don't know about the programs, they-- they can't take that step to get to the institute. So does the Institute have any ability to do any work to find the students that need that support, or could benefit from that support?

PRESIDENT MASON: So I think that one of the things that that is a hallmark of CUNY and the Institute in particular is the relationships we have with organizations, for example, Osborne and others, across the city in the state doing this work. And so there's a lot of collaboration and information sharing with people who are on the ground doing work with the communities of the formerly incarcerated.

Also, the website that Tommasina mentioned is another vehicle that was created again so that people can access the information and know it.

We welcome suggestions about how to broaden their reach, but we are trying to use all of our networks in order to spread the word about what's happening here at CUNY.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Right. And I guess-- We don't ask about criminal background checks for very obvious reasons. But that puts you at-- it feels like a sort of disadvantage, because your purposes aren't nefarious. Your purposes are to find the students who need that the type of support that you provide. So it sounds like you're finding other ways to-- to bring the students in.

Is there-- Now when it comes to in the correctional facilities themselves? You said you work with alternatives to incarceration. Can you go over again, what-- what sorts of initiatives go on in the prisons themselves? Are there any sort of-- any sort of advertisement or outreach done within the prison system that is-- that you-- that CUNY does themselves?

DR. MAITRE: Yes. So we do-- through our publication, we do share that to all the prisons. And we also work closely with other providers to go into Otisville. We do have a program in Otisville, so we work closely with that facility. In Queensboro, we do have staff members that goes there on a bi-monthly basis to do outreach. So the way we've done it is actually we put the boots on the ground, and we go out and do that work. So-- And we also try to disseminate all information to all the President through our publication, and through the CUNY work that Tom has taken lead on-- that Tommasina has taken a lead on, we do share all our resources. And we do sit as the central hub for people to come home. And if-- if people are having any issues, or whatever, on CUNY campuses, we also support whatever we may need to provide for those students.

MS. FARATRO: The other thing I'll add to that is the University Faculty Senate Committee on Higher Education in Prison does a lot of similar to us. There's a lot of work to coordinate faculty and staff, and including our own programs and services is there at various like correctional facility resource fairs, for people that are getting ready to come

home. So in addition-- in addition to talking about CUNY in general, they're also advertising our programs and connecting students to Darrell through that work.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Great. I'd like to point out we've been joined by Councilmember Brewer. The great Councilmember Brewer.

I want to touch on Otisville. Because Otisville was mentioned as the specific prison that-- where the education is actually done, where people are actually receiving credits and taking courses. And I-- my question is-- well, that's a facility that's about, I guess, two hours away from here. Are there any other facilities that you work at closer to home, geared more towards perhaps New York City residents? Or are there any plans to expand that, especially with TAP and Pell now being accessible to incarcerated individuals?

MS. FARATRO: So-- I mean, the commute is the-- is a challenge for most for-- for CUNY to deliver college and prison programming. To my knowledge, there are no other CUNY institutions that are operating in correctional facilities. And I think that there is something to be said about how-- like

the proximity of facilities to CUNY as well and what our role is. I don't know of any initiatives to expand that work. But I do-- I do think that the role that CUNY plays is in connecting them to the university when they come home, not necessarily to expand for correctional facilities across the state. And I think part of the challenge with doing that in prison and jail-- jail-based programs is that the population is very dynamic, and it's constantly changing. So it's difficult to deliver a semesters worth of programming, or 12 credits of programming in a jail. And I think that we're best positioned to at least connect students to our to the institute when they come home.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yes. No, understanding the challenges, I guess my-- my question is why Otisville exclusively? And-- and I guess also the population there, are they mostly New York City students, are they students from upstate? Are they from somewhere else? I mean, is this kind of targeting the very people CUNY is designed-- I think mostly for New York City. Is this initiative really targeting our New York City students and providing

1 them those opportunities they need to come back home
2 and succeed.

3 MS. FARATRO: We can probably get you some more
4 information about why it started at Otisville. As I
5 understand it, it started at Otisville in 2011. It
6 was originally slated to be in one of the really
7 downstate facilities, which was then closed when a
8 number of prisons were closed in 2009 to 2012. So it
9 was the closest prison, and to-- to run a program out
10 of the CUNY campus, which is further than that.

11 There are other local-- there are a few other local
12 prisons that are closer, but they are served by other
13 institutions. And so it has not been the practice
14 and the department in general to serve-- to have
15 multiple providers in any one facility. And yes,
16 most of-- many, many of the people at Otisville come
17 back to New York City and therefore can go to CUNY or
18 other New-York-City-based colleges.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And so is it your
20 understanding that every prison in New York City has
21 some sort of college program where there are credits--
22 -
23 -

24 MS. FARATRO: In New York State or in New York
25 City--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: In New York City.

MS. FARATRO: Every prison?

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Jails. I misspoke.

Jails.

MS. FARATRO: The jails do not have college programs.

PRESIDENT MASON: Because-- because the population is constantly changing, going in and out. So we think our best opportunities there are to make sure that they have the awareness of what programs and resources are available when they come home.

And I wanted to say for Otisville, a number of our graduates (and when I say our graduates, I mean across CUNY) come from that Otisville program.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Wonderful. I'm going to turn over to Councilmember Brewer who has some questions.

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you to John Jay, on all levels. As we know, it is in my district, in case you didn't know, Mr. Chair.

My question is: are you getting enough support from state correction so that those who do want to get-- continue their education? Does correction make you aware of them? You know, is there-- is there a

seamless transition from--? My guess is No. So then the question is how do we make it better, if that's an issue?

PRESIDENT MASON: In general, the-- at Otisville, we work very closely with--

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: That's only one though.

PRESIDENT MASON: Right. In other-- In other facilities where there are providers doing the discharge planning for that end phase of incarceration time, we are connected to those providers in the facility. So they hear about the education possibilities at the institute through sessions that are generally run by folks like Osborn, Fortune, I believe, but I'm not certain. So you're saying that there's no problem, that it's totally seamless? No matter what facility, institution, prison, you're coming from upstate, and if you want to continue education, and you are coming to New York City, you know about that individual?

PRESIDENT MASON: Well, upstate, that's a different issue.

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I'm talking about upstate. I'm talking about all of the correction. Not everybody-- I mean, Bard is there, Cornell's there.

I mean, I think I know most of the programs. So--
But I'm just wondering, you know, people haven't
finished, and they want to continue, do you know
about them so that CUNY can work with them?

PRESIDENT MASON: So a lot of the work, the
mapping work that Tommasina did, and-- and we've been
trying to do is to figure out how to better
coordinate. I would not say it's seamless, I would
say it's a work in progress, that people are trying
to figure out how to do, and building those
collaborative trusting relationships between those
other colleges providing in other areas and making
that happen. And I think that's, again, the-- the
work that Tommasina is trying to lead for us.

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Okay. And is it such-- Is
it a funding issue? Is it a legislative issue? Is
it just a noodge issue? Because what you're doing is
super important.

PRESIDENT MASON: I'm going to turn it to
Tommasina.

MS. FARATRO: I mean, I think part of the
challenge is that every facility operates in its own
little fiefdom. And there is a lot-- there's a lot
of changes that are constantly happening when

individuals are incarcerated, whether they are being transitioned to different facilities.

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I had 35 foster kids. Many of them we're at your facilities. I'm very familiar with the state facilities. I'm very familiar with them. Go ahead.

MS. FARATRO: I mean, the short answer is, "See all the above." I think there are a lot of different challenges that make the coordination of information, and the coordination of getting students access to the services they need is a challenge. Some of it is infrastructure. Some of it is communication. Some of it is constant turnover in staff that I think are beyond our control, but we're doing our best to connect them to, and connect with the providers that are able to provide students with that information.

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: But wouldn't it be helpful for the state legislature to state to the relevant college programs that if one is coming to New York City, they should be in touch with you? Wouldn't that be helpful?

MS. FARATRO: Absolutely.

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: So we could do a resolution in support, and then get somebody in

Albany to do that. Maybe a Dinowitz. Thank you very much.

DR. MAITRE: So I want to add to what Tommasina was-- was saying. We do work closely with SUNY, with the providers in those other facilities. So if they're-- if they do have someone in their program and they are coming to the city area, they do-- do a warm handoff to us. So we do work closely with-- with SUNY in doing that work, and vice versa.

COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Councilmember Brewer. What-- Can you describe the admissions process to select individuals to participate in the programs? At Otisville?

PRESIDENT MASON: At Otisville.

DR. MAITRE: So the admission process is that we do do a general recruitment of whoever's in the facility that are interested. Then we do a pretty much orientation. And if they are able, or want to do the program, we then admit them through our admission process in Otisville. But it's a paper process. We do do that. Our staff fill it out for them. And we do that footwork in the community. And

then there'll be John Jay students taking courses in Otisville.

We-- and with that, this advising that we got to make sure because, people are coming in with a lot of credits. Right now we are on the verge of trying to make it where students can-- can leave with a degree.

So-- but if a student's coming in with 100-plus credits, then we'll have a different conversation. Because our course-- courses are very limited to support those students. So with the students that are willing and able to do that work, that's pretty much the process, as any student in the community, but just more so as paper form, and staff is really working closely with students to do the admission process.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I want to make sure I understood what you said. Students are coming in with 100 credits from let's say, Otisville--

DR. MAITRE: From other from other facilities into Otisville. Because--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay

DR. MAITRE: --individuals transfer from different facilities while serving time, and sometimes they might come into the facility of

Otisville with credits already from other college programs at other facilities.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

DR. MAITRE: So that-- that happens, sometimes.

So-- So I just want to just like that. But with those students is a different process to work with them. But just the simple form of the work is just them coming in, they are interested, we do the admissions, advising, and we get them into the course for that semester.

PRESIDENT MASON: So one of the things I wanted to add that we are working closely with the borough of Manhattan Community College, again, with the expansion and permanent access to Pell for students who are incarcerated, what we're finding is that students want to be able to get their degrees while they're there, and not just accumulate credits. And so that's the-- the issue that Gerald was alluding to is that many people take college credits and they've transferred from other facilities where they may have been in a Bard program or somebody else's, but they're not working toward a degree. And so we're working with the borough of Manhattan community college to figure out how do we make sure that that

they can accumulate the degrees toward a BMCC degree, and then have a pathway to a four-year degree at John Jay after that, modeled after our CUNY Justice Academy work.

So what we're trying to do is make sure that they're not just accumulating credits, but they're moving towards degrees.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It sounds like (and correct me if I'm wrong)-- It sounds like the same problem. We've heard over and over again about different community colleges and the four-year colleges within the CUNY system not having matching coursework. Is this the same? Is this a similar issue?

PRESIDENT MASON: I think it's analogous-- analogous to it, but because they're coming from different prison programs outside of the CUNY system, and then we're trying to figure out what's the pathway to a CUNY degree for those that have accumulated credits, and making sure we design our program at Otisville so it's a program designed to get them a degree, and we are also looking at removing that five year release within five year

requirements. So again, we can begin working with students and putting them on a pathway to a degree.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I saw Tommasina nodding her head. Is...?

PRESIDENT MASON: She's making sure I'm not giving inaccurate information. Since I-- Since I gave that oath.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah. Don't worry, no one's hauling you off to jail for misspeaking.

PRESIDENT MASON: I think what you're hearing, and I hope you're hearing is-- is that the passion for us for this work, and they have been good advocates in making sure I'm educated about what's happening there, so that I can be a good advocate. And we've been spending the last months advocating in the state legislature for additional funding. So I-- So I am-- They keep me well informed.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And what does-- I mean, Councilmember Brewer was alluding to this. She goes, "Well, what do you need?" And what is-- what does the funding look like for these programs? And what is-- what do more dollars provide for our students?

MS. DELONE: Right now we're really trying to fund the base programs that they're sort of full

capacity, and we are-- we are about \$400,000 short for next year of getting that funding in order to run the programs throughout the year. So we are seeking-- we're looking for ways to fund that-- that-- Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What happens if-- what's the-- what's the budget of the entire program?

MS. DELONE: It's about \$4.6 million at this point.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What happens if you don't get the \$4-- if you don't fill that gap, or if CUNY doesn't move money around? Or the state, or the city, or whoever doesn't provide that funding?

MS. DELONE: Then-- Karol?

PRESIDENT MASON: Yeah. I was going to say that we don't operate at full capacity. And many people do extra work. Because it means that we don't hire some positions that we would want to hire. And this wonderful team here does more work because of their passion for this work.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Does the expanding TAP and Pell grants to people who are incarcerated does that impact funding for CUNY at all?

MS. DELONE: So we are still trying to figure those pieces out and what the economics are and where

the money really lands, because it's new. And so we haven't access it the way-- We haven't fully accessed it and understand how it's how it works financially yet. So we are hopeful that that will help with some of the financial cost of running the program. But it's not-- it's not there yet.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Well, I just-- You know, outside of the-- the importance of the work, incarcerated students having access to TAP probably means you would get more students and then get more help with some of the budget gaps.

MS. DELONE: So again, remember that only-- that TAP and Pell apply to our students who are at Otisville. We do much more work than that. A lot of our work is again, reaching out to students, connecting them to the resources, and helping them get ready to go to college. So those things are not covered by TAP and Pell. It's only the actual education classes themselves that would be covered by TAP and Pell.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Is \$4.6 million the Institute or is \$4.6 million all of your Prison Initiative Programs.

MS. DELONE: It's-- It's synonymous. The Institute is all of our programs.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm sorry. I'm referring to the services you provide on campus as opposed to at Otisville.

MS. DELONE: That \$4.6 is everything.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But the \$4.6 includes what you do at Otisville. What you do for our students on campus, it's everything.

MS. DELONE: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. But that's \$400,000 short?

MS. DELONE: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Great. And so-- You've referenced some-- I think you referenced some papers in some of your testimony that the short-term and long-term measures of success for these programs. Were are-- Those are available with these papers?

DR. MAITRE: Yes, this is in the publications and any reports that you can find. Well, we can-- I don't know if we can share it, but we can definitely-

-

MS. DELONE: We can follow up with some information and send you the links and copies of the reports.

Now, though, something that also has been brought up at a number of hearings is that, again, incredible work CUNY does. And there's a lot of data to support that work. A lot of it's not available on the CUNY website, where sometimes for some of your initiatives, it's just little blurbs about these programs.

And I would encourage you to-- to share a little more freely some of that information that we shouldn't have to get through Committee, you know, Committee staff working on.

And so those-- those measures of successes, those will be shared with me. What's the split between funding for the programs, for these different programs? How much is just direct state funding, or through TAP, Pell Grants, things like that?

MS. DELONE: So I will say the-- the \$4.7 is-- or \$4.6 is the amount for the Institute staff and the pieces that are not TAP and Pell funded. So the TAP and Pell funding for the students who are enrolled in courses, that does not cover the Institute's costs.

They're slightly-- They're slightly separate. That's a different number. And I don't actually know that budget of how much TAP and Pell-- or TAP-- Pell traditionally, and maybe now TAP can go to-- goes to John Jay to pay for the educational services.

The other-- The other services, so we spend about half a million or \$600,000 on the Otisville support. And then the additional funds are split between largely the college initiative and career development work, which includes the onboarding function. And then there's a piece, a small piece, that's dedicated to staffing the Justice Collaborative.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Great. Now one of the things CUNY does. Well, we talked about ASAP a lot in this committee. They share it with the world. It's great. Does CUNY-- Do you look at sharing this model with other municipalities? Or are there other models that have been done elsewhere, either within New York City or other municipalities, that are models that you look to emulate for their success?

PRESIDENT MASON: So I think, again, that's part of the data mapping project that happened a couple of years ago that Tommasina referenced. And I do think that there is a-- we are hopeful that we can

strengthen the collaborative we have with other providers, college providers, and I will say that-- that the fact that John King is the new chancellor at SUNY, and he was the Secretary of Education when the Second Chance Pell pilot was created. I think there are a lot of opportunities for collaboration between CUNY and SUNY, because he believes in this work as well.

So I think that there are always opportunities to continue to strengthen these relationships and learn more from each other. And that's something that Tommasina is leading that work.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Wonderful. So if CUNY sought to expand these programs, what sorts of resources would be would be needed in order to do that?

MS. DELONE: So right now, we're really working on trying to fund this core set of programs. But I think, you know, we could think about-- I mean, we have a list of desires that come from the Institute and I--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Tell me about them.

MS. DELONE: Yeah. One would be to have more academic counselors who do help students enroll, who

help students with all the pre-enrollment process,
help students file the financial aid applications,
which of course, could leverage additional resources
for CUNY.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Are-- Are all of your
academic counselors, I guess, trained and aware of
this-- of the institute in this particular
programming you do?

MS. DELONE: These are people that work at our
Institute. We also do some training through the
collaborative and other-- we get invited to forums.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Meaning like outside the
collaborative?

MS. DELONE: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You know, and the council
had a budget response to-- to the executive budget.
And what we said in our executive-- in our response
to the executive budget was "more funding for
advisors," general advisors for our CUNY students.
Are all of the advisors trained and aware of these
programs? Because when you said more academic
counselors, you were talking about for the institute.

MS. DELONE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But do our academic advisors otherwise know about the work that you're doing and know to connect students with your institute?

MS. FARATRO: So I think that's an aspiration of ours is to be more embedded in the CUNY community, to either have our work represented in those spaces, or to have our academic counselors represented in those spaces. I think because, of course, we're housed at John Jay, but our academic counselor support students that are attending-- supporting students that are attending all of CUNY's campuses. One of the things that we did in this last year is I gave a presentation to the CUNY academic career-- The Career Counselors Association, about just the use of background checks, and I would like us to get more involved in different academic advisor conferences, different-- different at like CUNY, little CUNY Councils and things like that.

I think part of the challenge is that we need to embed ourselves in the culture-- in the culture of the university. And that's just the challenge, because we're at John Jay, but it is an aspiration of ours. And I think we're using the learning

collaborative as a-- as a way to move through the university and get connected to those different councils and conferences and spaces.

PRSIDENT MASON: And may I just add that we strongly support adding academic advisors across CUNY, because I think a stronger CUNY helps all of us and helps this program as well.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: We agree in the Council. We surely agree. Yeah. And I guess it speaks back to that challenge of-- of not just all of the counselors and all of the advisors being aware of your program, but alluding to what you had spoken about earlier. And I don't want I don't want to say it wrong or reference it wrong. But you mentioned there are certain things you look for. You don't ask if someone's formally incarcerated. But what are-- What are some of the key indicators that you said you look for to-- to move forward on that?

MR. EPPS: So in part of the assessment, or through the onboarding process, as we're discussing their experience, certain references to a particular facility or particular interaction or engagement with law enforcement will come up. And those are some of the key indicators that those of us who are either

trained or justice-impacted as myself or be able to determine whether or not a person has been incarcerated in jail. And we work from there.

PRESIDENT MASON: If I understand your question, it's-- it's how are we also supporting those who do not self-identify and make themselves known to us.

And I think that-- that is a challenge. We-- We want people to have the freedom to self disclose if they choose to and know that these resources are here and this support is here. So I think again, the more we raise the profile, and that's why it's great that Tommasina has worked with CUNY marketing and communications to create the website so that people know we're there, and can choose whether-- and I think that the answer for those who choose not to disclose is a healthy CUNY.

And so the healthier CUNY is in supporting its students and having the advising that they need whether they've had justice involvement or not. Again, help support them. And so I think that that that is the beauty of CUNY is that we provide this wonderful support whether you've been incarcerated or had justice involvement or not. And yes, I see your

smile, that I'm sticking with the party line.

Because I really it.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Well, I--

PRESIDENT MASON: I really believe it.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It's-- You know, it's something that been brought up-- been brought up time and again in this Committee. We've spoken about veteran students, students with disabilities. And I think the challenge is, in a lot of cases, people don't, for various reasons, which I won't judge, they don't want to look back, they don't want to look back, they don't know why that question is being asked. So whether it's in the case of students' disabilities, veteran students, or formerly incarcerated students, you know, it's how do you-- how do you convey that the purpose of this question is to provide you with more resources and more support, not just to get a data point, or to put you in a bucket, or to put you in a category, or in the worst cases discriminate against you.

PRESIDENT MASON: So, you know, having just hosted our Safe And Just Community Summit, where we had a panel discussing this, I think that while ideally, we would like to be able to have access to

people so that we can support them, I think it's better for us to build something strong that they see and self-select into, rather than having to answer that question.

And I think that if we continue to do the wonderful work that we're doing here, across CUNY in supporting our students who are formerly incarcerated and their success, and touting that, more and more people will come to CUNY who have who need this support.

But I do think that it is that it has been misused more often than being a supportive tool. So I think there would be such a cultural shift. And that we'd spend-- I think the better energy is spent in raising the profile of this wonderful work and creating something that they're wanting-- they're going to want to come into.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, and I certainly hear you on that. I'm not suggesting, you know, checking for criminal background checks on applications.

But it is-- It does go back to the question of, you know, how you are raising the profile. So today, I-- of course, I heard working with the alternatives to incarceration. And that's something for every

program at CUNY, that we ask about raising the profile, a lot of the work you do is important and-- and impactful.

So if you could just go over-- and the one last thing we-- I wasn't sure about is the-- is the, sort of, some of the data. I'm really supposed to start with the data. I'm closing out with the data, is if you could just go over how many individuals are enrolled per campus, the demographic diversity?

And also when you mention Otisville, how-- what percent of those students are from I think it gave me a wrong number, but how many of-- what percent of those students are from New York City and what percent come back and finish a degree at CUNY?

DR. MAITRE: So I can go with the numbers that I provided earlier. But for CUNY, we, for the last four years, we had about 850 students in our college initiative program, and about 134 graduated with a degree.

So that speaks to CUNY. The percentage of how many students are coming from Otisville to CUNY, we'll have to get back to you with that number. I don't have a hard number as of today. But-- But we

can definitely circle that back around when we get that information.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Sorry. I'm writing that down.

All right. I want to thank this panel for coming and thank you for sharing about all the important work you're doing for our for our justice-involved youth. And we will in one moment call the next panel. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT MASON: Thank you.

64:50

For our first panel, I'd like to call Jarell Daniels and Geraldine Downey. And before you begin I'd like to note we've been joined by Councilmember Oswald Feliz. Welcome.

Jorell, you may begin.

Good morning Councilmember Dinowitz, and good morning Committee on Higher Education. Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to share some remarks on the work that we do at the Center for Justice at Columbia University. My name is Jarell Daniels. I stand before you as the Founder and Program Director of the Justice Ambassadors Youth Council at Columbia University's Center for Justice. The Justice

Ambassadors is a leadership platform for disadvantaged youth, many of whom are "involved or legal system impacted" and come from disadvantaged neighborhoods across New York City with high rates of poverty, incarceration, unemployment, and a lack of college graduates.

I'm also a Truman Scholar at the University and an aspiring psychologist, just for the record.

But I'm also someone who spent the most critical years in my adolescent development in adult prisons, 6 years to be exact from age 18 to 24 years old. And at a time when many young people are preparing for graduating high school and going on to college, I was preparing to enter state prison.

The same age range in New York City is referred to as being out of work and out of school, approximately one in eight New Yorkers who are not facing their true potential because they're uneducated, excuse me, not uneducated but not educated formally. My time incarcerated forced me to grapple with the reality of my actions. And no matter how many times I prayed for forgiveness, nothing can repair the harm that are caused. But to be transparent, it wasn't the harshness of our legal

system, or my time in prison that got me where I am today. It was the transformative power of an access to higher education while serving my time in prison.

Being an incarcerated college student opened up a world of possibilities about who I could become after regaining my second chance of freedom. The best part is that I don't stand alone, as people who've benefited from college and prison programming and pathways to top universities throughout the state. Higher education providers like Bard College, John Jay College, Hudson Link, St. John's, Columbia University, and many others that have made college accessible and have collectively contributed to the successful reintegration of thousands of formerly incarcerated people back into mainstream society.

So I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the fact that my story is not unique or uncommon. In fact cycles of generational poverty, broken families, community violence, and incarceration that plagued neighborhoods like mine for decades. What prevented me and countless others from fallen back into the vicious cycle was our pursuit of a college degree. Many of us who serve time in prison understood that graduated from college was much more than just

obtaining a degree. It was about job security, employment, and it turns stable housing. It was about providing for our families and paying it forward for the generations to come. But most importantly, earning a college degree is about showing the world that we are much more than our worst mistakes. A college degree gives us the respect and credibility that we deserve, and puts us on an equal playing field with the rest of society.

And ladies and gentlemen, I want to be clear. When I say that earning a college degree has proven to be the biggest predictor against recidivism post release. It is the only thing that has guaranteed the success and well being of many people like me.

So my question to you all today is: Why aren't there more college pipeline programs for vulnerable youth? Why isn't the college prep college programs or prep classes and every disadvantaged neighborhood, or every adolescent or adult facility in the state?

At the hearing from my peers and colleagues who testified earlier, we all know that there's an abundance of higher education programs and services for currently and formerly incarcerated people.

What we have yet to see is the widespread investment in college readiness programs and pathways for young people at risk of being incarcerated. For me, I believe that prevention and early intervention through higher education opportunities will be the best way to decrease our city's incarceration rate, particularly for young people who are at the forefront of police contact and high rates of arrest.

Why aren't we using college as a tool for social reform and community development? College is the same pathway that got most of us, excuse me, all of us in this room to where we are today? So again, I ask, why isn't the focus in New York City and using education to reach the people most likely to be impacted by gun violence, poverty, incarceration, and recidivism?

In closing I want you all to know that in the end, it'll be our commitment to workforce readiness through higher education that will determine the fabric of our city going forward. Stories like mine demonstrate that the importance of higher education for people before, during, and after incarceration.

The steps towards changeing New York City for the better begin with increasing higher education access and supporting students to finish law. I thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Jarell. Geraldine? Or Professor Downing?

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: Hi. I'm Geraldine Downey. I've been teaching in prisons and jails and at Columbia University for about 35 years. The Center for Justice that Jarell mentioned began when I met Kathy Boudin and Cheryl Wilkins when I was teaching in Bedford Hills, and there were students there, and they had brought back college after the Pell Grants had been removed and ended higher education in prison.

When they came home from prison. They along with me started the Center for Justice, with the commitment to supporting the leadership of people who've been incarcerated, or who come from communities where there's high rates of incarceration.

And sort of fast forward to where we are now: At Columbia we teach in provide credit bearing courses in six prisons and jails, including Rikers Island, including MDC Brooklyn, and in partnership with

Hudson Bank for higher education in prison in Sing Sing and Taconic facilities.

And so we provide educational opportunities to about 200 students a year. And we really see-- we don't-- unlike some of the other colleges, we don't provide a degree, but our courses and the credits that they provide go towards degrees.

I met Jarell at Queensboro Correctional Facility, when he was coming to the end of his sentence in an innovative program that brought Manhattan prosecutors in to take courses with men who are coming to the end of their sentence at Queensboro. When they came home, all of them-- the prosecutors, as well as the students, had a graduation, sometimes at John Jay, and sometimes at Columbia, in which they presented policy proposals. So a lot of the focus of our work at Columbia in leadership development for people who are incarcerated is to support them in becoming people who develop policy and-- and really engage with their-- with leadership of the city in developing the policies that affect their communities.

So when Jarell came home, he had this question which he didn't talk about, but was, "Why am I

meeting people in a position to make change at the end of my sentence, rather than at the beginning of it?" And so what came out of that was the Justice Ambassador's Youth Council, which he developed at Columbia, and invited all of the leadership of the city to take part in it.

And out of this, I'm also out of the work with, that we do inside at Sing Sing. You know, the-- the one question that everybody had is why are we not doing more to support young people in the communities where, at least in New York City, half of the people incarcerated come home to about seven communities in the city (Brownsville, East New York, Bed Stuy, the South Bronx, Harlem, South Jamaica, Queens). And so a lot of our work now, in addition, it to working in the prisons, is taking the idea that we want to support young people through that transition from 18 to 24, into college and out of the path to-- to prison. And so it's-- that is something that-- that I believe, as a developmental psychologist, needs to be a major focus, a real kind of investment that we see, the parents whose children come to Columbia put into their preparation for college, being put into the communities where young people are much more

likely to end up in prison than they are to end up in-- in colleges and with degrees, and become successful adults.

So I think that-- that what I would, in finishing say, is that the work that CUNY is doing, we work with them a lot to connect our young people into college and our people who are incarcerated, it really deserves to be supported.

I also want to say that technology is a huge barrier. And that investment in programs like one that we have at Columbia called Justice Through Code, which, which provides opportunities to protect careers for people who have been justice impacted, needs to get the investment of people like you.

And finally, the people that I work with at Sing Sing, the students there, many of them are on hugely long sentences, and that as a result of the investment in incarceration in the 90s, and the 2000s, they've turned their lives around. And I would hope that the City Council would give them an opportunity to have their-- their talents be used in New York City rather than in incarceration. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you both. I-- I will highlight that at Columbia, they do provide educational opportunities to people within New York City in the criminal justice system. Which was a different answer than what CUNY gave. So I want to highlight that.

So one of the questions I'm interested in is-- Well, first of all, I'll just say thank you both for your testimony. I think you both spoke about, you know, preventative measures, so people don't, you know, become justice-involved in the first place. And certainly on this council, there were a number of initiatives taken. Even on this committee, we had a hearing on K-16 initiatives, right? What are we doing for-- How are CUNY and the DOE working together on programs that help them as-- before they get into college. So certainly a shared value of this council and this committee.

So one of the things I think when I think, when I think of Colombia you go by-- and it's a beautiful campus. They have incredible facilities that are used. That's one of the things I think about at Colombia.

And so how-- Describe some of the challenges in how the same educational opportunities are provided to students in a-- in a prison setting where you don't have access to the same facilities.

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: We don't have access to the same facilities, but we do have access to the same faculty. So Columbia has been very, very responsive in-- we get some funding from the Mellon Foundation, but the-- Columbia has provided the opportunity for faculty to use part of their teaching load to teach in-- in the prisons. We work-- We don't have access to the same level of technology, but Columbia is very much focused on the core curriculum, which is reading books and discussing them, and-- and so it's not as much a stretch as it is-- if you're thinking about high-tech courses.

But what we are trying to do now is bring in coding into some of the facilities that we work in, teaching coding and teaching data analytics. And that's taking all our ingenuity because we don't have access to the internet inside.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Right. We talked about-- I mean, you spoke, about turning the lives of incarcerated individuals around. How often does that

happen? I mean, is it 100% success stories? Have there been any-- any things you would change based on outcomes of student trajectories?

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: So what I would say is that, that Hudson Link with whom we work, they have done a lot of followups of their students, and students who graduate with a college degree about-- there is almost negligible recidivism rates, so they have about maybe 97% of people who come home, not only stay home, but they become leaders in the communities. You know, people like Darryl Epps, who worked with us at Columbia, although he wasn't a student there, but are inside, but we have other students who, obviously, like Jarell, and the student who-- who started, Justice Through Code came to us from actually a federal facility. And he graduated, like Jarell did, from the school of General Studies, because we have a pathway to the school of General Studies for students who come home from prison. And the school of General Studies is a non-- a school for non-traditional students who have had some interruption in their education. And it's-- so it is-- and we have some funding to provide the students with a pathway to graduation through the school of

General Studies. [TO MR. DANIELS:] Did you want to add...?

MR. DANIELS: I want to add to that. So just to really flesh it out more. So Columbia is unique as an Ivy League institution in its pathways for folks who have had system contacts, that have pathways to the university. One of those is the initiative that we have at the Center for Justice in partnership with the Heyman Center called Justice In Education Scholars. And that program allows faculty from the University to teach credit-bearing courses in local jails and prisons. And those same students who are incarcerated receive an active university ID and then it can come home and take free credit-bearing courses at the university, one course free of charge per semester, and if they maintain a B-plus or higher, they can continue to take as many credit courses at the University with matriculated students.

However, the additional pathway is after going through a number of JIE courses, they can apply to be a full-time student with the School of General Studies, which is only one of four undergraduate programs at Columbia University designed for students who have had a gap, who have been out of school for a

year or more, and are going back to finish their bachelor's degree.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And what would you say is Justice Ambassador's biggest success story?

MR. DANIELS: I would say--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: is it you?

MR. DANIELS: No. Definitely not me. I would say it's two. I would say one, we actually got people to denounce their gang affiliations, move away from a gang lifestyle and into more healthy and productive ways of living. And I think the biggest success that we've had is actually leveraging the program to get people into schools, to jobs, but also having their court cases end in non-incarceral dispositions. I think that's the most powerful element where we can leverage the Columbia name and brand and partners to get people into programs and services that meet the court's needs. And to have the court agree that this person would do better off working with you all on the outside as opposed to being detained or incarcerated.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [TO PROFESSOR DOWNEY:] Do you agree? Are those your areas as well?

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: No, I do agree. But I would also say that another very important part of the education that we provide, is we-- we provide courses, credit-bearing courses on Rikers Island, and not that many, with great difficulty. But what-- what we have found is that-- that is something that inspires students when they come home from-- from Rikers to continue in college.

But it also gives them a pathway to think about continuing college, if they are unfortunate enough to go upstate. So that's another program that we're very, very proud of.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And what are some of the-- are there any roadblocks to your partnership in working at Rikers for the students? Any-- What's preventing that from being more successful?

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: So Rikers, I don't need to tell anybody here, is a very unstable situation for everybody.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: We've heard.

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: Yes, you've heard.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: We 've heard the rumors.

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: And so to do programming there is-- it's very, very uncertain. So in that one, one

day, you may go out, and you can't get in to teach the class. The next day, you may be able to teach the class. So it doesn't allow for the students to have the kind of continuity in education or in programming that's needed to make a real difference. The students who actually do finish the courses are extraordinary in terms of their patience, their perseverance, and their resilience. But a lot more could be done in Rikers, with serious education programs that build on the DOA education that's provided to get people through their GEDS like Jarell.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And if there's one thing that you can do to improve your program, one thing you would change?

MR. DANIELS: I can-- I'll take the first shot at that. I would say just building off of Professor Downey's point, I think that if there was a strong partnership with Rikers Island, specifically with RNDC that services the young adult population, the 18 to 21 year olds, if there was a way for us to establish a formal partnership with RNDC, and the Department of Education who has, you know, faculty from DOE going in and teaching courses and helping

people achieve their high school diploma. If we have a partnership with them to provide the college readiness and preparation piece, and also integrate our college courses with the DOE in some kind of way, because the students-- we just attended a graduation ceremony yesterday, but they're still going to be incarcerated. So they've graduated, they've earned their high school diploma. But what next? They are still pending trial. And some may be facing incarceration. So if we could offer college prep course for those who may be released or those who may-- are interested in following up when they are upstate.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you anything else you want to share before we go on to the next panel?

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: So I wanted to come back to the Justice Ambassadors Program, which brought us here, and-- and say that that is something that-- that has benefited in the ways that Jarell has talked about, many of the young people from the most disadvantaged areas of the city. And about 100% of them have continued their education, the majority of them have moved up in employment, and they've been civically engaged. For us, getting some kind of city

support, funding for that would allow us to continue the program, but also get young people into internships comparable to the ones that Columbia is now set up for them to get into. So we're looking for money like everybody else.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you Jarell. Thank you Professor for your testimony today.

PROFESSOR DOWNEY: Thank you.

MR. DANIELS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: For our next panel on Zoom. I would like to recognize Pamela Jean Stenberg.

Pamela Are you on Zoom?

Okay, is there any one else on Zoom who we may have inadvertently missed who wanted to testify, use the raise hand function.

I want to thank CUNY. I want to thank Jarell and Professor Downey for their testimony today about programs and support for justice-involved youth. This hearing is now closed.

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



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