

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/a-piece-of-the-puzzle-state-financial-aid-for-incarcerated-students>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

Postsecondary education in prison puts people on a path toward a brighter future by disrupting the cycle of poverty and incarceration. But it has not been offered at scale due to the numerous barriers including the 1994 ban on Pell Grants to people in prison that prevent students and postsecondary institutions from accessing state and federal funding programs. And so, while the majority of people in prison are interested in pursuing postsecondary education, only a fraction are able to enroll.

Nearly all states, however, have aid programs targeting students with financial need a description that fits most incarcerated students. By surveying state financial aid laws, regulations, and practices, this report highlights the barriers to financial aid for incarcerated students, reviews available funding sources, suggests ways to incorporate state financial aid into a suite of funding, and provides a state-by-state listing of need- and merit-based aid programs.

Incarcerated students who are unable to access federal Pell Grants may still have a variety of financial aid sources available to them on the state level, although numerous barriers to aid also exist.

More than one-third of states have no barriers to state financial aid for incarcerated students.

Seeking multiple, sometimes unconventional, sources of financial aid will allow more incarcerated people to attain postsecondary education.

The cost of educating people in prison is more than offset by the savings in lowered recidivism rates for those who participate.

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