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## **NEW RESEARCH FINDS THAT CALIFORNIA MUST DO MORE TO SUPPORT FORMERLY AND CURRENTLY INCARCERATED STUDENTS SEEKING TO EARN A COLLEGE DEGREE**

*Report highlights opportunities for the state and college campuses to increase college access and success for currently and formerly incarcerated students.*

**Los Angeles** – Today, the Campaign for College Opportunity released “[The Possibility Report: From Prison to College Degrees in California](#),” a research publication that provides demographics on California’s incarcerated and paroled populations, highlights the unique barriers currently and formerly incarcerated students face on their path toward a degree and provides recommendations for college campuses and the state to increase college opportunity for these students.

Currently, of the 650,000 Californians who are incarcerated, on parole, or on probation, fewer than 20,000 (less than three percent) are enrolled in some form of higher education. Increasing college success among these individuals would benefit the students and the state, as, one study estimated that if 50% of college-eligible incarcerated Californians participated in a postsecondary prison education program, the state could potentially save \$66.6 million per year. However, currently and formerly incarcerated students face a unique set of barriers to obtaining their degrees.

Through a series of focus groups with formerly incarcerated individuals who are attending or have attended a public college or university in California, the Campaign for College Opportunity learned that inconsistent services, messages, and policies work against the success of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. The focus groups revealed:

1. The parole and probation systems in California do not prioritize higher education and often prevent formerly incarcerated Californians from achieving their educational goals.
2. Requirements to access housing leave formerly incarcerated Californians with unstable living situations, creating an environment inconducive to going to or staying in college.
3. Formerly incarcerated students straddle two employment problems: Finding work and balancing the need to work with attending school.
4. Targeted student support services are key to college retention but are inconsistent across campuses and, in some instances, the responsibility to create relevant support services falls on formerly incarcerated students themselves.

5. Campus advisors lack the specific knowledge and understanding to properly advise students with criminal records on career opportunities.

“My parole officer encouraged work over education even saying, ‘school is a nice little hobby— is that clear?’ There was no emphasis or focus on education, but education saved my life,” said a California State University student from one of the focus groups.

Recommendations in ***The Possibility Report*** address these challenges and encourage immediate action from college campuses, the state and the federal government to increase college opportunity for these students. Recommendations include ensuring better transitional services from incarceration to college enrollment, continuing investments in on-campus support services, implementing hiring policies that prohibit the use of a conviction against qualified applicants on campuses and restoring Pell Grant funding for incarcerated students.

In addition to the economic benefits of educating incarcerated and paroled Californians, the state has a moral obligation.

“For far too long, California has overinvested in prisons to solve our social issues but has provided minimal resources or funding to colleges and universities to provide an alternative to incarceration,” said Danny Murillo, principal author of ***The Possibility Report*** and former Campaign for College Opportunity program analyst. “I am in awe and inspired by the real opportunity we have as a state to create change for generations of Californians caught in an unjust criminal ‘justice’ system.”

"A commitment to a strong California economy and to racial justice requires that we end a school-to-prison pipeline that pushes too many Black and Latinx Californians into prison instead of into college. Ensuring a path to a college degree for current and formerly incarcerated people will benefit these individuals personally and the state as a whole," said Michele Siqueiros, president of the Campaign for College Opportunity.

Read the full report [here](#).

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*The Campaign for College Opportunity is a California non-profit bipartisan policy and research organization focused on a single mission: to ensure all Californians have an equal opportunity to attend and succeed in college in order to build a vibrant workforce, economy and democracy. For more information, visit [www.CollegeCampaign.org](http://www.CollegeCampaign.org)/[Facebook.com/CollegeCampaign](https://www.facebook.com/CollegeCampaign) or follow @CollegeOpp on Twitter and Instagram.*