



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
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ACTION ALERT

DATE: February 28, 2008
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, Washington Bureau

NAACP Supports the Literacy, Education and Rehabilitation Act

HOUSE BILL WOULD PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR PRISONERS TO IMPROVE LITERACY AND TRAINING TO HELP WITH RE-ENTRY

THE ISSUE:

There are currently more than 2 million men and women in America's federal and state prisons today. Of those, recent studies show that more than 50% are either functionally illiterate or have marginal reading, writing and math skills. Furthermore, it is estimated that 95% of unskilled jobs in this country require a high school diploma or some work experience. But 40% of released prisoners lack a high school diploma or GED -- more than twice the rate of the general population over 18. In prisons today, only about 1/3 of inmates receive vocational training or work experience designed to improve their ability to obtain legitimate employment once released. Even fewer ex-offenders receive job counseling and placement services after release.

The Federal prison population has increased more than 7-fold over the past 20 years. In 1984, the population was about 25,000 prisoners. In 2004, there are more than 175,000 prisoners, and the population is growing. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), the primary reasons for this tremendous growth has been longer sentences resulting from the 1984 Sentencing Reform Act and mandatory minimum sentences. The Sentencing Reform Act established determinate sentencing, abolished parole, and dramatically reduced good time credits.

The increase in the number of African Americans and other racial and ethnic minority Americans in prison today is startling, and is having a devastating impact on many of our communities. Two-thirds of the people in prison are now racial and ethnic minorities. For African American males in their twenties, one in every eight is in prison or jail on any given day. 32% of African American males will enter state or Federal prison sometime during their lifetime.

Congressman Robert "Bobby" Scott (VA) has introduced H.R. 4283, the *Literacy, Education and Rehabilitation Act* (LERA). The purpose of LERA is to reduce recidivism and the victimization and the fiscal and social costs associated with such recidivism. Studies have shown that inmate participation in education, vocational and job training, prison work skills development, drug abuse, mental health and other treatment programs, all reduce recidivism, significantly. Unfortunately, the elimination of incentives such as parole, good time credits and funding for college courses, means that fewer inmates participate in and excel in literacy, education, treatment and other development programs. LERA provides incentives and recognitions for achievement by giving prison directors the discretion to grant up to 60 sentence credit days per year to an inmate for successful participation in literacy, education, work training, treatment and other development programs. LERA will not only prevent crime victimizations, but also save taxpayers money.

[More...](#)

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact your Representative and both your Senators **and URGE THEM TO CO-SPONSOR H.R. 4283, THE LITERACY, EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION ACT.** To contact your Senators and Representative, you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your Senators and your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Senators'/Congressman's offices. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

✓ **Write a Letter**

To write letters to your Senators, send them to:

The Honorable (name of Senator)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:

The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Senators' or Representative's offices (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for their fax numbers (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your Senators, simply go to www.senate.gov, and click on "Contacting the Senate"; you can look your Senators up either alphabetically or by state. To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on "Write Your Representative." This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

Unfortunately, not all Members of Congress have e-mail addresses.

REMEMBER TO CONTACT BOTH YOUR SENATORS!!!!

THE MESSAGE

- ◆ There are currently more than 2 million men and women in America's federal and state prisons today. Of those, recent studies show that more than 50% are either functionally illiterate or have marginal reading, writing and math skills. Furthermore, it is estimated that 95% of unskilled jobs in this country require a high school diploma or some work experience. But 40% of released prisoners lack a high school diploma or GED -- more than twice the rate of the general population over 18.
- ◆ These men and women should have incentives to use their time in prison to improve their education and vocational training as preparation for reentry.
- ◆ Such educational preparedness will dramatically reduce recidivism and make it easier for ex-offenders, once they reenter society, to become productive and contributing members of our communities.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!
If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

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To become an NAACP member or to sign up for e-mail legislative and press updates, visit www.naacp.org

Sample Letter

(date)

The Honorable _____
United States Senate / House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510 / 20515

RE: SUPPORT FOR H.R. 4283, THE *LITERACY, EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION ACT*

Dear Senator / Representative _____;

As your constituent, I urge you to co-sponsor and support H.R. 4283, the *Literacy, Education and Rehabilitation Act* (LERA), introduced by Congressman Bobby Scott (VA). This bill is intended to reduce recidivism by providing literacy and vocational education training to prisoners while they are incarcerated so they can leave prison and reenter society as productive members.

There are currently more than 2 million men and women in America's federal and state prisons today. Of those, recent studies show that more than 50% are either functionally illiterate or have marginal reading, writing and math skills. Furthermore, it is estimated that 95% of unskilled jobs in this country require a high school diploma or some work experience. But 40% of released prisoners lack a high school diploma or GED -- more than twice the rate of the general population over 18.

By providing these men and women with some of the tools they will need to succeed in society and avoid re-incarceration, we are not only doing the right thing morally; we are saving the American taxpayers significant money. It currently costs more than \$22,000 annually to keep an individual in prison today. With recidivism rates at about 70%, it is clear that something must be done. LERA is a good start to helping these people help themselves, and thus I urge you again to do all you can to help ex-offenders, help our communities, and help the American taxpayer. Please contact me soon to let me know what you intend to do help reduce the rampant recidivism and let me know what I can do to help.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)

*Remember to contact your
Representative and BOTH
your Senators.*