

Comments Submitted 1/27/2023

The Office of the Corrections Ombuds urges the Department of Corrections to halt its policy revision process until the integrity of its stakeholdering efforts can be demonstrated to incarcerated individuals, the public, and this office.

DIRECTIVE:

I.B.

The OCO encourages the department to provide a greater degree of transparency into the process for approving credit and non-credit program proposals. The policy should identify, for instance, the criteria considered in the approval process, how an approval or denial will be reached; and whether process exists for requesting reconsideration of a denial.

VII.D.

The OCO is seriously concerned that the changes proposed in this new subsection will significantly impact educational programming throughout the department. Requiring an “instructor, sponsor, or facilitator in the room/area throughout the scheduled callout” will have a devastating impact on the many peer-led educational opportunities that exist within the DOC.

Peer-led educational opportunities enrich student participants’ academic lives as well as their social and emotional wellness. Peer-led education also provides incarcerated instructors with tremendous opportunities for growth as leaders and mentors in their communities.

With this change, programs such as the Sustainability in Prisons Project Gardening and Composting classes, currently led by incarcerated peer instructors, would be terminated. T.E.A.C.H., led by Black Prisoners’ Caucus peer instructors, would also be terminated. These programs and others like them have provided life-changing experiences for many incarcerated individuals. They have also served to fill the void of volunteers left by the pandemic over the course of the past three years.

The consequences of this change will be devastating and lasting, and the harm done will take years to repair. The OCO urges the department to reconsider this proposal.

Student Financial Responsibility – Attachment 1

The OCO notes the increase in per-credit fees outlined in Attachment 1. The OCO urges the DOC to increase compensation provided to incarcerated workers accordingly.