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HUDSON COUNTY EXECUTIVE & COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT TO VISIT WITH INCARCERATED STUDENTS ENROLLED IN NEW, FIRST-IN-NJ "ACADEMIC WORKFORCE PATHWAY PROGRAM ON DEC. 14<sup>TH</sup>

*Leaders will visit students enrolled in community college degree classes now being offered inside the Hudson County Corrections & Rehabilitation Center.*

*Jersey City, NJ*—Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise and members of the Board of Commissioners will join Hudson County Community College President Chris Reber in a visit with incarcerated students now working towards their Community College degrees within the walls of the Hudson County Corrections and Rehabilitation Center (30-35 Hackensack Avenue, Kearny, NJ 07032). The visit will take place on Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am.

The visit will highlight the new, *Academic Workforce Pathway Program*, launched this September, which will provide community college classes to as many as 55 individuals now serving time in the Corrections & Rehabilitation Center during the 2021-2022 academic year.

The program allows qualified inmates to earn their Associate's Degree or certification in a wide range of employment-focused concentrations of study. This makes the Corrections & Rehabilitation Center the first county jail in New Jersey (and perhaps in the nation) to offer degree programs to those in custody. Approximately half of the individuals enrolled in the *Academic Workforce Pathway Program* are participating in this degree track.

The *Academic Workforce Pathway Program* also provides a Workforce Skills Development Training track that will offer community college classes in such areas as basic computer skills, essential business software, supply chain management, and English as a Second Language (ESL).

All students in the program, degree and non-degree, will be further assisted with a life-skills training program that Hudson County Community College provides in partnership with the respected Jersey City non-profit, Women Rising.

The total cost for the first year, two-semester program is \$150,000, with funding provided through The Hudson County Reentry Grant.

The rationale for this groundbreaking partnership between the College and the County is simple: access to post-secondary education focused on usable skills dramatically decreases barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals trying to reintegrate into the community and support themselves and their families.

In a fact sheet presented by the Vera Institute of Justice in January 2019, entitled, “Investing in Economic Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Post Secondary Education in Prison, Expanding Access to Post-Secondary Education in Prison,” research showed that post-secondary education focused on employable skills can help incarcerated individuals successfully return to the community.

The courses and degree programs offered by the *Academic Workforce Pathway Program* reflect local employment market trends carefully studied by Hudson County Community College and County workforce development professionals who seek job placement opportunities for their students and clients every day in Hudson County.

The partnership is also in line with HCCC’s mission to serve its diverse communities with inclusive educational programs and services that promote student success, upward social and economic mobility, and resources for growth, and expands the progressive approach to incarceration employed by the Hudson County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The Corrections & Rehabilitation Center already offers the only certified in-patient drug treatment available to county jail inmates in New Jersey, as well as substantial community reintegration programming that includes post-incarceration housing assistance, health care (Medicaid enrollment), and employment placement services for those in its custody.

The partnership also reflects the DeGise Administration’s continued focus on providing a web of supportive services to help individuals most in need get the tools required to stabilize their lives and support themselves and their families.

That is reflected in the Administration's recent creation of a unique "Department of Housing & Community Reintegration" focused on building connections to the treatment, work skills, housing, and employment assistance that help more individuals stay off welfare and out of prison, and that over time save taxpayer dollars by reducing system dependency and recidivism. The Department's Division of Reintegration oversees the *Academic Workforce Pathway Program*.

"We've long heard that it costs as much to warehouse a person in jail as it does to send them to college," said County Executive DeGise. "It seems a lot smarter to actually provide people who want to turn their lives around with the post-secondary classes they need to do that while in jail. I am grateful for President Reber's vision and commitment and for the remarkable efforts of his faculty and staff to make this program possible. And I wish to thank all of the leadership and staff of the agencies working with the College, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and Department of Housing and Community Reintegration to truly make this a "pathway" to employment for the incarcerated individuals enrolled."

"Offering programs that promote upward social and economic mobility is at the very core of Hudson County Community College's mission," said President Reber. "Attaining a degree or certificate – and the employment possibilities it provides – is profoundly empowering for students and their families. The transformative power of programs like this is best realized through partnerships, and we are proud to partner with County Executive DeGise, the County Commissioners, Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Department of Housing and Community Reintegration, and Women Rising in making this essential and innovative program a reality."

"The scourge of mass incarceration has to be addressed in a range of ways and this is surely one we needed to pursue," said County Commissioner Jerry Walker, who sponsored the resolution that officially created and approved funding for the *Academic Workforce Pathway Program*. "When you give a person skills, you give them a chance to remake their lives. I believe we are doing that here."

"The tragedy is that so many people who get caught up in the criminal justice system are trapped in a cycle that they cannot break caused by poverty due to a lack of education," said Commissioner Anthony L. Romano, a former police captain who seconded the resolution creating the program. "I witnessed that

frustrating reality on duty for many years. I'm glad now to support a program that can actually help people stay out of jail and build a real future."

"We have the resources to change lives, strengthen our community and in the process save taxpayer dollars over time," said Freeholder Bill O'Dea, who long championed this kind of partnership. "We simply needed the leadership and the cooperation required to bring those resources to bear. I'm thankful to the County Executive and President Reber, my colleagues on the Board, and our dedicated county staff for providing both. Lives will change as a result of this approach and we will all be the better for it in Hudson County."

Entities involved in the Academic Workforce Pathway Program's interagency partnership include: Hudson County Community College, The Hudson County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, The Hudson County Department of Housing and Community Reintegration, The Hudson County/Jersey City Workforce Development Board, the Hudson County Economic Development Corporation, and Women Rising.

Tuesday's visit will be conducted at the end of two classes held in the HCC&RC's law library. The elected leaders will briefly address and then interact with the students in the degree-track programs (Intro to Computer Science, English/Speech) being taught during that time and their professors.

Members of the media are invited to arrive at 11:00 am at the Corrections & Rehabilitation Center. They will be escorted to the "Meet and Greet" from there, which will begin promptly at 11:15 am.

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