

## **NYT- Cuomo Proposes Higher-Education Initiative in New York Prisons**

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ALBANY — It was nearly two years ago that Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo floated a plan for the state to pay for college courses for inmates. But it sank in the face of withering opposition from critics who mocked Mr. Cuomo's initiative as "Attica University" and Republican members of the state's congressional delegation who argued that New York should put "kids before cons."

On Sunday, however, Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, reintroduced the plan through a new and seemingly less vulnerable financing mechanism, using about \$7.5 million in criminal forfeiture funds from the Manhattan district attorney, Cyrus R. Vance Jr., whose coffers are filled with hundreds of millions of dollars in bank settlements.

An additional \$7.5 million will come from private matching funds, according to the governor's office, which hopes to offer what it calls an "integrated curriculum" to about 1,000 inmates statewide over the next five years.

The governor formally announced the college plan on Sunday morning in Harlem, in a speech before the congregation of the Mount Neboh Baptist Church.

"Prisons were not supposed to be a warehouse," Mr. Cuomo said. "It was not supposed to be, 'We're going to take you and put you in a warehouse for 10 years and lock you up, and then take you out in 10 years and return you to society and think maybe you're going to be the better for it.'"

"It was supposed to be about rehabilitation," he added. "It was supposed to be an opportunity to help people. We lost that somewhere along the way."

In an interview, Mr. Vance acknowledged that such programs have always faced an uphill battle in the State Legislature, usually running into obstacles in the Republican-controlled Senate, because some conservative lawmakers consider it unfair to underwrite education for prisoners when scholarships for law-abiding people are scarce.

But Mr. Vance said that expanding college programs for inmates made sense from a crime-fighting standpoint because studies had shown that inmates who earned a college degree were less likely to return to prison.

"If we don't provide an exit strategy for ex-offenders, they are just going to be re-offenders," Mr. Vance said. "It's just really common sense."

The college initiative is part of a broader agenda touching on criminal justice reform and social issues that the governor outlined on Sunday, including seeking an additional

\$100 million for so-called community schools, which aim to address challenges for students beyond the classroom, an approach tried in New York City and other urban areas. He also wants \$55 million for jobs programs for at-risk youths, a category that includes those who have committed crimes.

The governor also announced an agreement with the state Office of Court Administration to stop making some juvenile criminal records available for purchase from private data and background check companies. That change, expected to take effect this month, comes in conjunction with a recent executive action by the governor to pardon as many as 10,000 people who were convicted of nonviolent crimes as 16- and 17-year-olds but have since avoided criminal activity.

Some state prisons already offer a handful of college courses, but Mr. Vance said the new initiative would expand those programs by about a third. It would also improve them so that credits could be more easily transferred to colleges outside prison walls, a problem that has bedeviled the existing system.

The proposal would offer colleges and other educational institutions up to \$5,000 per student to provide a full-time course load of 30 college credits, according to the district attorney's office. Only inmates who have a high school degree and are within two to five years of completing their sentences would be eligible. Those serving life sentences would be disqualified.

Mr. Vance said studies had shown that educated inmates were less likely to commit crimes when they left prison, an outcome even law-and-order-minded prosecutors could embrace.

"This is a crime reduction strategy, and it happens to be around the issue of education," he said.

That sentiment was echoed by Alphonso B. David, the governor's chief counsel, who said the plan — which would take effect this fall — would balance the need for public safety with the prison system's stated goal of rehabilitation.

"We've seen that educational programming is extremely effective in preventing recidivism," he said. "When people make a mistake, we should provide a path to redemption. And that's what we're doing."

## **Buffalo News: Education for inmates is promoted by governor**

By Tom Precious :

ALBANY – Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, the overseer of the state’s massive budget, is turning to sources outside of Albany’s bank account to begin a state-run college education program for inmates in some of New York’s prisons.

Cuomo also vowed to close more state prisons, although he offered no specifics.

“It’s wrong to put people in cages and waste young lives,” he said in Manhattan on Sunday.

After his idea to add more college opportunities in a handful of prisons flopped two years ago at the State Capitol, Cuomo on Sunday said he will use a legal settlement controlled by the Manhattan district attorney and private dollars to offer public college courses in some state prisons.

“Prisons are not supposed to be a warehouse. ... It was supposed to be about rehabilitation,” Cuomo said in announcing another try at a college education program for inmates.

In his speech Sunday, Cuomo also appeared to soften his rhetoric substantially from last year on what causes public schools to be considered “failing” as learning centers for their students.

A year ago, Cuomo released a report showing that 109,000 children across the state go to school in 178 persistently failing schools – marked by high dropout rates, low test scores and other factors. At the time, he was pushing a plan to allow for outside takeover of failing schools and making it harder for teachers to get tenure.

On Sunday, he criticized “the bureaucracy” that resists change in the education system, but he talked of “community” school-type settings as the solution. “We want to take those failing schools and say, ‘Look, the problem isn’t just education,’ ” he said.

Cuomo said that if people think that the problems in such failing schools are teachers and the education system, “then you’re missing the point, because the kids in those schools need a lot more than a teacher and normal education.”

The Cuomo budget plan to be released Wednesday will call for \$100 million to expand an array of services offered at failing schools. A precise breakdown by school was not available Sunday, but he suggested that it will offer more money for nutrition, mentoring, after-school programs, counseling and other efforts at the failing schools. “Don’t call it a school. Call it a community school,” he said.

A Cuomo spokesman noted that community schools were added “as an eventual product of the process” involving failing schools. “This is consistent with that,” the spokesman said.

Supported by studies showing that inmates who obtain college or other education degrees have lower recidivism rates than those who get out of prison with no higher education, Cuomo said the prison education effort, run through the State University of New York and the City University of New York, will give some inmates a college education “so they come out stronger than they went in.”

The governor promoted his plan at a Harlem church Sunday morning. When he proposed a similar plan two years ago, he did so during an appearance at an Albany church that was hosting a service for lawmakers gathered for the annual Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus weekend.

The only difference this time was the absence Sunday of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who was prominently featured at the 2014 Albany event standing alongside Cuomo; the two men have since been engaged in a nonstop feud.

The state retreated heavily a generation ago from college prison programs, though there are educational offerings at a number of facilities funded with private dollars.

It was then-President Bill Clinton who signed into law a measure cutting off Pell Grants for inmates to pay for college courses, and then-Gov. George E. Pataki in the mid-1990s followed by cutting state-funded teachers in prisons and barring inmates from participating in a state college aid program.

Cuomo’s much-touted plan in 2014 died in the face of opposition in the Republican-led Senate.

The chief argument against it was that the state should not spend money on prison inmates when those on the outside are increasingly unable to afford college tuition or are graduating with crushing debt loads.

The Cuomo plan this year comes as SUNY is pressing to get renewed a law passed five years ago allowing the public college system to raise tuition each year without separate approval from the State Legislature.

In-state undergraduate tuition has gone up by about 30 percent during that period, and now SUNY wants Cuomo and lawmakers to provide the approval to continue what it considers a “rational” tuition policy.

Cuomo believes that his plan will sail this year because he is floating the use of a different funding mechanism than using money from the state’s general fund.

He now wants to tap a forfeiture fund controlled by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr., as well as private groups, for a program to cost \$15 million.

“We have colleagues in Albany who are not ready to do that and don’t want to pay for those programs. ... I’ll just find another way to get there,” the governor said at the Harlem church Sunday morning regarding his education plan for inmates.

The prison initiative is, however, modest compared with the college programs the state once offered inmates.

Currently, 1,000 inmates are now enrolled in some type of college-level program, and the Cuomo administration said the additional \$7.5 million funding from the Manhattan district attorney’s fund will enable up to another 500 more to be enrolled each year.

The state’s prison system has about 50,000 inmates.

The prison college funding plan pushed Sunday comes after a week of Cuomo rolling out – mostly through coordinated media leaks followed by personal appearances by Cuomo – snippets of his proposed budget or the 2016-17 fiscal year that will be formally unveiled to lawmakers Wednesday at the Capitol.

In the last week, Cuomo has been heavily focusing on a major spending push for capital projects.

The governor has proposed everything from new roads and rail projects for Long Island, renovation of Penn Station in Manhattan and expansion of a convention center in Manhattan to another year of having taxpayers bail out the Thruway Authority to help block toll increases over the next several years.

## Capital NY: Cuomo revives plan for prisoner education

By Josefa Velasquez:

ALBANY — On a frigid Sunday morning, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced to a crowd of primarily black and Latino parishioners a new statewide initiative to provide college classes in state prisons.

That was 2014.

The politically polarizing plan quickly fizzled amid opposition from Republicans, who dubbed it "Attica University."

But Cuomo revived the idea at the Mount Neboh Baptist Church in Harlem this morning, telling churchgoers that he would continue to push for a prison education plan as a preventative measure to ending the disproportionately high levels of incarceration among black men.

"How do you stop the cycle? You actually have the right priorities," Cuomo said from the dais. "You actually really invest in the prevention rather than paying for the problem once it manifests itself, because it's too late."

During his initial proposal in 2014, Cuomo said the college programs for 10 state prisons would be publicly funded, with an estimated cost of \$1 million a year, drawing the ire of Republicans who argued that the funds could be better spent on education for children.

"You can tell me no, I'm accustomed to it," Cuomo said this morning. "I'm just going to find another way to get there."

This time, the program would be paid for with \$7.5 million in criminal forfeiture funds controlled by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., combined with another \$7.5 million in private donations, the New York Times reported. It's unclear how much the revived college for inmates program will cost or how many prisons will administer college courses.

"We have estimates and there are numerous studies that have estimates," Cuomo told reporters after his remarks. "It depends on how many people you run through the model, obviously. But the additional cost is incremental on the prevention side."

The college program, Cuomo said, would be administered through the State University of New York and City University of New York systems.

The Democratic governor unveiled a seven-pronged agenda, consisting largely of policy proposals already in effect as well as some new measures he plans to push.

Reforming failing public schools in poor neighborhoods is the first preventative step to future incarceration, Cuomo said. He's proposing to invest \$100 million to transform failing schools and "other high needs schools" into community schools, Cuomo announced in a press release.

He will also push for an additional \$50 million increase in funding for an apprenticeship program targeted toward training young people.

"Get people a job. Get people a job. Get people a job. Get people a job," Cuomo said. "Give them the pride, the respect, the dignity of earning their own bread. Give that to them."

Cuomo said that the state should also look at alternatives to incarceration and should not think of prisons as a "warehouse" for individuals.

"When they're in prison, teach them a skill. Give them an education," he said.

Cuomo told reporters that he also plans to unveil a bail reform proposal on Wednesday.

"I don't want to comment on the specifics yet, but we're going to have a bail reform proposal in the State of the State because I think we can make the bail system better," said Cuomo. "I think it actually makes it harder for people who should be out on bail to be out on bail and it actually releases some people who shouldn't be."

Mayor Bill de Blasio called for changes to state bail and diversion programs in November, after the suspect in the shooting of a police officer was found to have been in a jail diversion program.

The governor has also proposed raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years old and investing more funding in re-entry programs.

In December of 2014, following a Staten Island grand jury's decision to not indict a police officer in the choking death of Eric Garner, Cuomo promised a "soup-to-nuts" review of the criminal justice system.

In the months following, Cuomo signed an executive order appointing Attorney General Eric Schneiderman as a special prosecutor to oversee cases of police-involved civilian deaths.

In the last several months, Cuomo has continued to push criminal justice reforms, announcing that he would overhaul solitary confinement in the state, as well as conditionally pardoning individuals who committed a non-violent felony or misdemeanor at the age of 16 or 17 and have not subsequently broken any laws.

Last month, Cuomo signed an executive order removing teenagers from adult prisons in the state.

“At the end of the day success is cheaper than failure. Success is cheaper than failure,” Cuomo said. “We are talking about relatively small investments early on to keep us from spending large amounts once the problem is manifested.”

## **TU: Gov. Cuomo's college for cons plan gets a boost**

By Matthew Hamilton:

Gov. Andrew Cuomo again is proposing a college for prisoners plan. But unlike two years ago, he won't be asking the Legislature to use state money to fund it.

Cuomo announced that Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance is putting up \$7.5 million in settlement funds to help fund higher education for roughly 1,000 inmates in the state prison system. That proposal is part of a seven-point plan with a theme of racial equality and criminal justice and was announced by the governor at a Harlem church Sunday morning. Unlike most other parts of the seven-point plan, the higher education piece can be done outside of the state budget process.

The "Right Priorities" initiative was part of a series of announcements Cuomo is making ahead of Wednesday's State of the State and executive budget address.

"I'll tell you what they're going to say when we argue this in Albany: 'Oh, there he goes again. More money, more money, more money,'" the governor told the congregation before listing off parts of the plan — including the creation of new community schools, increased funding for re-entry programs for former offenders, and the introduction of the new prison education programs — and admitting that they will cost more money. "But at the end of the day, success is cheaper than failure. ... We are talking about relatively small investments early on to keep us from spending large amounts once the problem is manifested."

Cuomo's Sunday remarks focused on issues he has been supporting in recent years, including the need to reduce recidivism.

The college for inmates proposal was aimed at just that when the governor pitched it for 10 state prisons in 2014. But he ran into a buzz saw of opposition, particularly from the state Senate, and the proposal didn't win approval in the budget deal that April.

For 2016, the plan is re-calculated to use the \$7.5 million from Vance and matching private funds.

The governor's office said 1,000 inmates over five years would be eligible for the college-level instruction. CUNY's Institute for State and Local Governance would oversee the grant process for the colleges interested in providing their services. SUNY and CUNY would develop the standards and would set up a transition process so those who are released from prison can continue their education, Cuomo's office said.

Classes would begin in the fall.

The broader seven-point plan includes pieces that Cuomo already has acted on, such as his move to offer conditional pardons to former youth offenders who haven't committed another crime in the past 10 years.

The governor also continued to support legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 years old. Cuomo took executive action last month to move toward getting minors out of adult prison and placing them in their own facilities.

In a reprise of rhetoric he has been using since last year, Cuomo singled out "failing schools" in his proposal as well. He spoke to the need for community schools and pitched \$100 million to transform underperforming schools.

"The way you define the problem is the solution you seek," Cuomo said. "If you say the problem in that failing school is the teachers and the education system, you're missing the point. Because the kids who go to that school need a lot more than a teacher and a normal education. They need a lot more than a kid who's coming out of a rich school and in a rich community."

"It's not just a school," he continued. "If you think of it as just a school and all you're providing is education, you're going to fail. You needed nutrition, you needed mentoring, you needed after-school, you needed counseling, you needed to put those services in that school in the beginning, understanding that you're in a poor community with challenges."

Cuomo's office also released details on a plan to combat poverty upstate through \$500,000 in planning and implementation grants and access to a \$20 million grant pool to match private sector and foundation funding in 10 upstate cities. The eligible municipalities include Albany and Troy.