



# LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

May 30, 2003

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*Executive Director*

The Honorable Cindy Montañez  
Member, California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 5144  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SUPPORT OF ASSEMBLY BILL 1219**

Dear Assemblymember Montañez:

The Little Hoover Commission supports AB 1219, the measure you have authored regarding prison inmate education. The Commission supports this measure based on its January 1994 report, *Putting Violence Behind Bars: Redefining the Role of California's Prisons*.

In its examination of California's prison system, the Commission found that the Department of Corrections' inmate education program is neglected, unfocused and poorly structured. While the goal of the Prisoner Literacy Act is to strive for ninth grade literacy for all prisoners, statistics demonstrate that the program is not providing a mechanism for meeting the goal. The program has great unrealized potential but the lack of organizational structure and neglect by the Department's top management makes it ineffective as a tool for reducing recidivism.

Research validates the cost effectiveness of educating inmates. Studies in Illinois, Florida, Alabama and New York found that adult inmates in academic education had lower criminal involvement, less recidivism, higher employment and more likelihood of continuing their education once they were released. In the area of vocational education, the range of studies revealed that vocational inmates caused fewer problems in prison and behaved better once they were out.

The Commission recommended that the Department of Corrections restructure its education program, either by creating a correctional school district with the assistance of the Governor and the Legislature, or by creating a superintendent of correctional education who is recognized in the correctional education field. A district model has worked successfully in other states, such as Virginia and Texas, and the strength of statutory authorization would protect education from diversions of funds to other priorities. The Commission further recommended that whether a district is formed or a superintendent's position established, that entity should be the key decision-maker on inmate education and should set short- and long-term goals involving literacy, testing and education priorities for all prison education programs.

AB 1219 addresses the Commission's recommendations by creating an educational board within the Department of Corrections and providing for the appointment of a director of correctional education to ensure correctional education programs meet performance standards and provide ninth-grade literacy skills and marketable vocational skills. For these reasons, the Little Hoover Commission is taking an active support position on this measure.

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As the bill moves through the committee process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you feel my presence and testimony at a hearing would be helpful, please let our office know, and I will make every attempt to be available.

If you have any questions or if I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

James P. Mayer  
Executive Director

c: All Commissioners