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April 7, 2009

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The Honorable Loni Hancock
Member, California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 3092
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 738
THE PRISON EDUCATION REFORM ACT**

Dear Senator Hancock:

The Little Hoover Commission supports Senate Bill 738, the measure you have authored to provide transitional educational services for prison inmates. The Commission supports this measure based on studies it has completed on California's corrections, sentencing and parole systems.

In its 1994 examination, *Putting Violence Behind Bars: Redefining the Role of California's Prisons*, the Commission found that the management structure within the former Department of Corrections, since reorganized as the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), discourages, rather than encourages, its education program. 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 achieving that goal.

Research validates the cost effectiveness of educating inmates. One of the most comprehensive studies ever conducted on the impact of correctional education on recidivism found that inmates who participated in education programs had a 29 percent reduction in re-incarceration rates and also earned higher wages than those who did not participate in education programs. The three-state study found that annually, for every dollar spent on education, more than two dollars are saved on food and cell space alone.

In its 2003 examination of California's parole system, *Back to the Community: Safe & Sound Parole Policies*, the Commission found little had changed since its previous review. CDCR routinely and openly diverted resources intended for education programs to fund other operations. The system failed to use the time inmates are incarcerated to prepare them for their eventual release. The Commission's study found that two out of three parolees return to prison.

The Commission recommended the state create the means to improve the performance of the correctional system by changing laws, budgets and programs to increase success among parolees.

In its 2007 examination, *Solving California's Corrections Crisis: Time is Running Out*, the Commission found that as a result of the prison overcrowding crisis, programs which can improve public safety by reducing recidivism took a back seat to custody-driven population management strategies. Despite the emphasis Governor Schwarzenegger placed on rehabilitation in his 2005 reorganization plan in which he renamed the department as the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, little has been done to support the "R" in CDCR. The Commission recommended the state expand programs, particularly educational programs, that research shows reduce recidivism.

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SB 738 addresses the Commission's recommendations by providing the potential and opportunity for more inmates to advance their education and become better prepared to reunite with their community upon release from prison. For these reasons, the Commission supports this measure.

As the bill moves through the legislative process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you have any questions, or if I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Stuart Drown
Executive Director

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