

**ALBANY OFFICE:**  
306 Legislative Office Bldg.  
Albany, NY 12247  
Phone: (518) 455-2041

**DISTRICT OFFICE:**  
5030 Broadway, Rm. 701  
New York, NY 10034  
Phone: (212) 544-0173

EMAIL: JACKSON@NYSENATE.GOV  
WEBSITE: JACKSON.NYSENATE.GOV



THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK

**ROBERT JACKSON**  
SENATOR, 31<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT

**CHAIRPERSON**

Cities

**COMMITTEE MEMBER:**

Civil Service and Pensions  
Education  
Higher Education  
Housing, Construction and  
Community Development  
Labor  
New York City Education

**MEMBER**

New York State Black, Puerto Rican,  
Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus

January 27, 2021

Anthony Annucci, Acting Commissioner  
Jeff McKoy, Deputy Commissioner for Programs  
Department of Corrections and Community Supervision  
1220 Washington Avenue, Building 2  
Albany, NY 12226-2050

Dear Commissioner Annucci and Deputy Commissioner McKoy:

We write to express grave concern over the decision by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (“DOCCS”) to contract Ashland University to provide distance learning at correctional facilities in New York State.

New York State is home to some of the finest educational institutions in the world such as Columbia University, New York University, Cornell University, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Vassar College, and the University of Rochester. Many of these institutions provide educational opportunities at correctional institutions at their own expense. Educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals help reduce rates of recidivism, allow them to forge lasting alumni relationships with their educational institutions that teach at correctional facilities, and afford them local re-entry support to match their needs.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York, it was understandable to limit in-person education opportunities to prevent the spread of the virus. However, we are distressed to learn that DOCCS did not contract with New York educational institutions to provide distance learning. Rather, DOCCS contracted with Ashland University, an Ohio-based institution, to provide distance learning at correctional institutions. Ashland University has partnered with JPay to provide distance learning through tablets. JPay is a subsidiary of Securus Technologies that operates pay phones and tablets in correctional facilities, which has been involved in numerous scandals charging incarcerated individuals exorbitant fees for their usage.

Even more concerning is Ashland’s inability to provide quality educational services. Ashland was \$70 million in debt, given a junk credit rating by Moody’s, and cited by the Higher Learning Commission, the regional accreditor, for transcript manipulation. Ashland’s prospects only turned around when the federal Department of Education contracted with Ashland to provide distance

learning at correctional facilities. Ashland now enrolls as many students on its campus as it does in correctional facilities. Additionally, unlike other educational institutions that offered in-person education prior to the pandemic, Ashland only offers distance learning opportunities. The only opportunity for interaction between incarcerated students and their professors is through a messaging platform that the tablet must be plugged into and the tablet often breaks down. Moreover, Ashland only has one digital librarian for these students across the country and only has one staffer that manages these students' career prospects and re-entry into society.

We implore DOCCS to contract with New York educational institutions to provide distance learning opportunities at correctional facilities. The New York Consortium for Higher Education in Prison ("NYCHEP") is a collection of outstanding higher educational institutions in New York. The members of NYCHEP are rooted in New York communities and have greater incentives to see their incarcerated students succeed. To those institutions, their students are not just some persons at the end of a tablet, they are future returning community members.

In Unity,



Robert Jackson  
Senator, 31st District



Liz Krueger  
Senator, 28th District



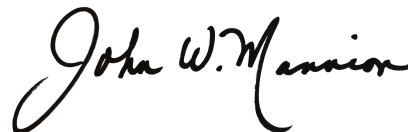
Brad Hoylman  
Senator, 27th District



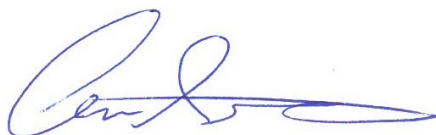
Jamaal T. Bailey  
Senator, 36th District



Leroy Comrie  
Senator, 14th District



John W. Mannion  
Senator, 50th District



Andrew Gounardes  
Senator, 22nd District



Jessica Ramos  
Senator, 13th District



George M. Borrello  
Senator, 57th District



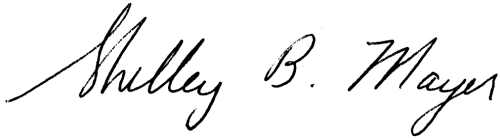
Samra Brouk  
Senator, 55th District



Gustavo Rivera  
Senator, 33rd District



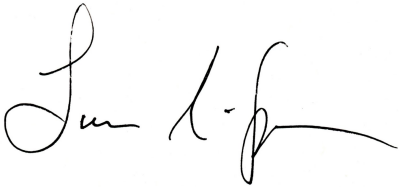
Jabari Brisport  
Senator, 25th District



Shelley B. Mayer  
Senator, 37th District



Alessandra Biaggi  
Senator, 34th District



Luis Sepúlveda  
Senator, 32nd District