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HELEN E. HANKS
COMMISSIONER

DIRECTOR

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RE: Future of Higher Education Behind Bars

Commissioner Hanks joins the unified group of New England Department of Corrections Commissioners who are all members of the newly formed New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education Behind Bars. The New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) and The Educational Justice Institute (TEJI) at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) announced the launch of the Commission earlier this week ([Announcing the New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education Behind Bars — The Educational Justice Institute at MIT](#)).

The Ascendum Foundation funded a \$250,000 grant which prompted the formation of the New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education Behind Bars. The Commission brings together 60 individuals throughout New England who represent key stakeholders including postsecondary and corrections leaders, current and previously incarcerated individuals, employers, legislators, and governors. Joining Commissioner Hanks in their respective department of corrections are:

- Commissioner Angel Quiros, Connecticut
- Commissioner Randall Liberty, Maine
- Commissioner Carol Mici, Massachusetts
- Commissioner Patricia Coyne-Fague, Rhode Island
- Commissioner Nicholas Deml, Vermont

The Commission will collaborate with partners and experts to convene multi-state conversations engaging key prison education providers and stakeholders to:

- Consider testimony and presentations from subject-matter experts, scholars, stakeholders, and policy innovators.
- Analyze data related to the completion of prison education programs and how postsecondary education impacts the economic and overall success of incarcerated individuals, their states, and communities.
- Explore collaborative, multi-state models for increasing the effectiveness of prison education programs (in-person and online) through policy reform and alignment, including protocols for the transfer of credits after release from incarceration, better integrated credential pathways, and the assessment of skills and competencies leading to the award of academic credit.

“I am excited to be working with this group of professionals who work diligently to advance the field of corrections” said Commissioner Hanks. “Reducing recidivism is a mission of the Department and providing incarcerated people with more educational opportunities improves self-esteem, increases job skills and improves community transitions. I am looking forward to the insight and recommendations that will be derived from this Commission.”

The next New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education Behind Bars meeting is scheduled for October 14 at MIT.