



Graduate and Professional Student Senate
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**Graduate and Professional Student Senate
 GPSS Resolution 2021-22K
 Resolution to End Prison Labor Contracts and Reform Hiring Practices**

First Reading by GPSS:	Sept. 23rd, 2021
Second Reading by GPSS:	date
First Reading by Commission	date
Staff Senate Review:	date
Faculty Senate Review:	date
Undergraduate Student Senate Review:	date
Approved by Commission	date
First Reading by University Council:	date
Approved by University Council:	date
Approval by University President:	date
Approved by Board of Visitors:	date
Effective:	upon approval

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech, like many state universities, partners with prisons and jails to produce cheap goods for its consumption; and

WHEREAS, state law requires that Virginia Tech purchase furniture from Virginia Correctional Enterprises (VCE) with VCE having right of first-refusal; and

WHEREAS, VCE, like all companies utilizing incarcerated people’s labor, produces furniture by exploiting the labor of incarcerated people who are paid between \$0.55 and \$0.80 per hour (see Appendix 1); and

WHEREAS, VCE is emblematic of larger abuses of incarcerated people and there are many private corporations who partner with and profit from prisons and jails; and

WHEREAS, these partnerships exploit incarcerated people and profiting from incarceration is itself unethical; and

WHEREAS, such exploitation is not in line with Virginia Tech’s values, notably the university’s commitment to Excellence and Integrity; and

WHEREAS, in an April 2021 open letter (see Appendix 2), University President Tim Sands wrote, “Our investment in the legacy of George Floyd must endure through our daily

commitment to unravel the deep history and systems of racism in our society, including the role of educational institutions”; and

WHEREAS, Black people in Virginia are disproportionately incarcerated (53% of prison population and 20% of state population as of 2017; see Appendix 2 and GPSS Resolution 2021-2022D1 for further resources and documentation) making this a key diversity, equity, and inclusion issue; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Virginia Tech Office of Government and Community Relations lobby the Commonwealth for an exemption from the requirement of purchasing goods from Virginia Correctional Enterprises, thereby ending all contracts between Virginia Tech and VCE, and all other entities who utilize incarcerated labor to produce goods; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in the meantime, Virginia Tech divest from any and all entities utilizing incarcerated labor as completely as state law allows and seek ethical purchasing alternatives, adjusting our procurement policies accordingly. The new purchasing guidelines should not replace goods produced by incarcerated people and by carceral corporations with those made in countries with lax labor laws, known sweatshop practices, or otherwise unethical production practices. The spirit of the resolution stands as trying to reduce our unethical consumptive practices as a university and community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that formerly incarcerated individuals be given fair hiring consideration as university faculty and staff as an insufficient form of reparations. We should “ban the box” (<https://bantheboxcampaign.org/>) as a first step towards more ethical hiring practices and commit to not ask about felony convictions and other measures captured by the ban the box campaign.

Appendix 1: Resources On Exploitation of Prison Labor

A resource for prison wages can be found here:

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2017/04/10/wages/>

However, this is a problem across the country and is in many ways a direct inheritance from convict leasing programs as discussed in many of the resources from GPSS 2021-2022D1.

We have also seen the low wages for incarcerated workers highlighted in public service sectors such as in firefighters (here <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/07/california-inmate-firefighters/619567/>) and in staffing for political candidates on both sides of the aisle (here <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/at-least-seven-states-have-prison-inmates-working-in-governor-s-mansions-and-capitol-buildings/>)

Also, horrifying exploitation of incarcerated people's bodies under the guise of using their labor: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/09/04/arkansas-bloodsuckers-the-clintons-prisoners-and-the-blood-trade/> and <https://archive.org/details/acresofskinhuman00alle>

Appendix 2: Resources On Local and National Prison Disparities

The president's message concerning our policing crisis can be found here: <https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2021/04/president-message-042121.html>

Statistics on our local carceral trends can be found here: <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-virginia.pdf>

And statistics on our national carceral trends can be found here: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/>