

# Ridley-Thomas Introduces Ex-Felon Education Bill

(Sacramento) — On Friday, Assemblyman Mark Ridley-Thomas (D-Los Angeles) introduced a measure that makes it easier for participants in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches (LAM) ex-felon education program to attain a general education diploma (GED). AB 1901, sponsored by LAM, modifies the measure of success of the organization's ex-felon education program to consider an improvement of three educational grade levels in three years a success.

"This measure increases the likelihood that more ex-felons participating in the education program will actually see the fruition of their efforts and receive their GED," said Assemblyman Ridley-Thomas. "As currently structured, the program does not afford sufficient time to these working hard to becoming law abiding and productive citizens within the allowed time frame. It is very discouraging to those who have invested time in the program only to have their efforts be

deemed a failure because they were unable to complete their GED in three years, and as a result most drop their educational pursuits. It is common knowledge that the more education a person has, the more they contribute to society and the less likely they are to recidivate."

Specifically, AB 1901 would change the measure of success for the Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches ex-felon education program by considering an improvement of three grade levels over three years a success. The current criteria for success require participants to achieve GED's within three years. The Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches operate the ex-felon education program, which is a state sponsored pilot program. According to LAM, almost 90% of all persons arrested in California do not have a high school diploma and on average, read on an eighth grade level. A condition of parole/probation requires ex-offenders to find and retain meaning-

ful employment, which is difficult to attain without a high school education. Most ex-offenders return to local communities without any legitimate chance of finding meaningful work. Frequently, the only avenue open to persons without sufficient literacy skills is the illegal economy, which usually results in re-incarceration. In fact, national studies show that 70% of all repeat offenders have one common trait — they can't read.

LAM is a network of 45 African American congregations that span Los Angeles County. The organization was founded in 1994 to address hopelessness and despair in the African American community. Their mission is to build the capacity of clergy, lay and community leaders to revitalize their communities.

The measure will be heard in an Assembly policy committee later this spring. To view the bill language, please visit the California State Assembly's website at [www.assembly.ca.gov](http://www.assembly.ca.gov).