

Prison Policy Initiative

[Home Page](#) > [PPI In the News](#) > Choose prison or school

Choose prison or school

Press-Register (Mobile, Alabama) Editorial
Saturday, May 12, 2007

WITH ABOUT 60 percent of state prisoners functionally illiterate, a new film by Shelley Stewart makes a lot of sense.

Mr. Stewart and John Zimmerman, both of Birmingham, have produced the documentary "INSIDEOUT," which explores the connection between a lack of education and a life of crime. As the interviews with prisoners show, the connection is real.

The film features inmates at Holman Prison near Atmore and Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka, who warn viewers: Stay in school or risk ending up in prison. They are right.

Mr. Stewart previewed the 52-minute, DVD film for Mobile and Baldwin county educators and law enforcement officials recently. The film will be made available to school counselors and students this fall.

When a person is functionally illiterate, he's unable to read or do math well enough to make use of the skills in everyday life. Sociologists have recognized the connection between illiteracy and crime for a number of years.

The Prison Policy Initiative in Michigan points out on its Web site that people who are completely illiterate -- unable to read or do math at all -- are disproportionately represented in the prison population. For example, folks who are completely illiterate make up about 4 percent of the adult population in the United States, but they make up nearly 20 percent of the nation's prison population.

If Mr. Stewart's documentary helps even one young person, it will be a valuable film.

Copyright 2007 Press-Register. All rights reserved.

Prison Policy Initiative, PO Box 127, Northampton Mass. 01061
