

Prison Reform Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

August 20, 2019
9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Governor's Crime Commission

Board Members Attending: Beth Austin, Art Beeler, Mike Killmer, James French, Dorothy Ledford, Stanley Drewery and Stephanie Hollembaek.

Department of Public Safety (DPS) Officials Attending: Secretary Erik Hooks, Jane Gilchrist, Tim Moose, Pam Cashwell, Todd Ishee, Tracy Little, Kenneth Lassiter, Chris Holland, Pam Walker, Jerry Higgins, Margaret Ekam, Erica Romain and Loris Sutton.

Chair Austin called the meeting to order and recognized Chief Deputy Secretary Tim Moose and asked him to share any comments. CDS Moose welcomed everyone and thanked them for all of their hard work.

Chair Austin then recognized Secretary Hooks for remarks. Secretary Hooks welcomed the group and thanked the board members for their continued participation. He stated how much their input was appreciated and he looked forward to their recommendations.

Todd Ishee, the new commissioner of Prisons, was introduced by Chair Austin and asked to offer comments about his background. He stated he comes to North Carolina after 29 ½ years with Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. He started his career as a correctional officer in 1990 and worked his way up in the ranks to role of warden and various agency level positions.

Board members and DPS officials introduced themselves.

A motion was made by Art Beeler and seconded by James French to approve the May 22, 2019 meeting minutes. Minutes were approved as presented.

The Board heard several presentations related to current operations and initiatives. Copies of the presentations can be found on the DPS Prison Reform [website](#).

Human Resources Consultant Barb Kunz provided an overview of an initiative focused on development of career pathways for Prisons custody and program staff. The goal is to establish the Prisons profession as a career of choice, to develop strategies to retain leaders and to prepare Prisons staff for future promotional opportunities. Initiative plan highlights include:

- Interviews with Prisons management team to identify key competencies needed by leadership at all levels
- Meetings with Region Directors and wardens to identify key competencies needed by leadership at all levels and to introduce the initiative

- Drafting and reviewing a project plan with Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice leadership
- Identifying an initial set of leadership competencies based on interviews with agency leadership and focus groups with Prisons employees in various position classifications
- Developing an electronic survey for Prisons custody and programs supervisors
- Reviewing survey results with Prison management team, and developing specific career pathways training and progression based on information gathered.

Stephanie Freeman, director of the Office of Staff Development and Training, provided an update on activities of the Improving Training for New and Veteran Employees workgroup. Objectives covered included:

- Strengthen Basic Correctional Officer Training
- Strengthen In-Service Training
- Enhance Mentoring for New Hires
- Enhance Training for Supervisors
- Strengthen Training for Non-Certified Staff

Mike Killmer asked if the situational awareness training was going to be a mandatory yearly requirement for non-certified staff who have offender contact. Ms. Freeman indicated she encourages it, but in-service requirements are not set by OSDT.

Stanley Drewery asked how much it costs to send a person to basic training. Ms. Freeman stated the cost is approximately \$8,000 on average and potentially up to \$12,000 for an overnight location, and is less for students who commute to basic training classes.

A presentation on Improving the Ability to Communicate Information to Internal and External Stakeholders was given by Margaret Ekam, operations manager for DPS Communications. Initiatives focused on two areas, improving communication internally and improving communication with external stakeholders.

Internal communication initiatives included:

- Establishing virtual town hall meetings with Prisons leadership via WebEx technology
- Setting up a Contact Prisons dedicated email account that enables staff to submit ideas and suggestions
- Developing the Prisons News You Can Use weekly messages from Prisons management to staff
- Initiating a Discover DPS video series that will provide updates on various initiatives
- Installing video message screens at all facilities to promote consistent messaging
- Expanding use of email accounts for staff

External communication initiatives included:

- Adding a second communications officer in DPS Communications to focus on positive aspects of Prisons operations and accomplishments
- Providing media relations training to managers to promote active engagement with media at the local level
- Upgrading software for managing response to public records requests

- Maintaining a Prison Reform website to provide timely updates to interested parties.

Chair Austin mentioned that it had been some time since she had seen the ads for correctional officers on TV. Tracy Little explained that the commercial TV videos were created as part of a correctional officer's appreciation week awareness campaign in Spring 2018. More recent videos were targeted to air over a three-month period in areas of the state close to facilities with the highest correctional officer vacancy rates.

Chair Austin asked why every correctional officer still does not have an email account.

Ms. Little responded that Prisons is currently piloting full correctional officer access in two facilities; however, there are more than 2,000 officers that have email based on their job assignments. Ms. Little stated there has been a lot of work from the IT perspective on licensing and infrastructure to provide each officer an email account. However, the current challenge is providing staff time and access to a computer to check email inside the facility.

Ken Smith, Prisons chief of security, provided information regarding the efforts of the Reducing Contraband in Prison Facilities workgroup. Major objectives included:

- Enhance and Strengthen Correctional Facility Entrance Screening
- Enhance Facility Perimeter Security
- Enhance Mailroom Security
- Utilize Intelligence to Interdict Contraband
- Enhance Cell Phone Interdiction

Chair Austin announced that the Board would be in recess for lunch. Following lunch, the Board held a work session to discuss potential recommendations. Visitors were invited to stay for the work session.

Chair Austin adjourned the meeting at 3:40 pm.