

**Reentry Advisory Council (RAC)**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2020 Meeting Minutes**  
**Via Zoom**  
**Thursday, July 16, 2020**

**Attendees Present:**

Malcolm Myer, Designee for Secretary James Le Blanc, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections  
Alfreda Tillman Bester, Designee for Marketa Garner Walters, Department of Children and Family Services  
Dr. Emily Campbell, Designee for Dr. Monty Sullivan, Louisiana Community and Technical College System  
Rhett Covington, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections  
Judge Jules D. Edwards, III, 15th Judicial District Court  
Stacye Falgout, Designee for Dr. John Morrison, Department of Public Safety and Corrections  
Karissa Page, Designee for Jennifer Katzman, Department of Health  
Rémy Voisin Starns, Louisiana Public Defender Board  
Winona Connor, Louisiana Housing Corporation  
Robert D. Hanser, University of Louisiana at Monroe  
Lindsay Jeffery, Designee for Judge Arthur L. Hunter Jr., Orleans Criminal District Court  
Joseph Prejean, Big Poppas Fitness Gym

**Absent:**

Courtney L. Baker, Louisiana Association of Business and Industry  
Michael 'Mike' Cazes, Louisiana Sheriff's Association  
Bridget Dinvaux, Louisiana District Attorney's Association  
Daniel R. Martiny, LA Senate  
Steve Pylant, LA House of Representatives  
Sheryl Ranatza, Committee on Parole  
Joseph Ardoin, Jr., LA State Building and Construction Trades Council  
Reverend Paul R. Murray, Elayn Hunt Correctional Center  
Chairman Louis Reine, LA-AFL-CIO  
Ava Dejoie, LA Workforce Commission

**Other:**

Leslie Chambers, Governor's Office  
Nicole Miller, Community Coordinator - Calcasieu Parish  
Jessica Strange, Community Coordinator - Orleans Parish  
Kristin Parsons, Community Coordinator – Caddo-Bossier Parish  
Julie Lafleur, Community Coordinator - Lafayette Parish  
Marlana Fireman, Community Coordinator – Jefferson Parish  
Cheron Holland, Community Coordinator – Rapides Parish  
Lynn Stevens, Goodwill of North LA  
Twanda Laurant  
Renard Thomas  
Verna Bradley-Jackson  
Rene' Soule, REAL  
Patricia Williams  
Vanessa Spinazola  
Darlene Jones  
Wendy Matherne  
Ilona Prieto  
Monicka Henry  
LaDrika Carey  
Jr Catchings

## **Dept. of Public Safety & Corrections Staff:**

Corey Acosta, Probation and Parole  
Rochelle Ambeau, DPSC  
Nicole George, DPSC  
Rebecca Ikner, Probation and Parole  
Kelsey Pearce, Office of Offender Reentry  
Hester Serrano, Probation and Parole  
Robert Vehock, Office of Offender Reentry  
Melissa Young, Probation and Parole  
Hannah Walker, DPSC  
Natalie Laborde, DPSC  
Bradley Noland, DPSC  
Stephanie Webb, DPSC  
Carmen Coutee, DPSC

### **Call to Order**

- Chairman Louis Reine was not present for the meeting
- The meeting was called to order by Assistant Secretary Rhett Covington at 9:34 am.

### **Roll Call**

- Roll was called and a quorum was established. 12 of 22 present

### **Approval of the January 2020 Meeting Minutes**

- Assistant Secretary Covington asked for a motion to adopt the January 2020 minutes. A motion to accept the minutes was put forward by Dr. Emily Campbell and seconded by Dr. Robert Hanser. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

### **Welcome and Introductions, Assistant Secretary Rhett Covington**

- Assistant Secretary Covington welcomed everyone.
- Assistant Secretary Covington discussed the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the Department of Corrections' programs.
- Assistant Secretary Covington stated the Department was recently informed that the Louisiana Community and Technical College System will be facing budget cuts and discussions are being held about what that means for the fall prison programs.

### **Justice Reinvestment Implementation Update, Nicole George, DPS&C**

- Ms. George stated CIG programs and in-reach have been shut down due to the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Ms. George stated she has been in discussion with Regional Reentry Center staff concerning in-reach with our CIG grantee partners. The group has two possible solutions and are hopeful they will be in place Aug 1<sup>st</sup>: 1) a paper intake release form and 2) incorporating Video/Phone conference along with the paper intake release form.
- Ms. George updated the group on the Emergency and Transitional Housing (ETH) program, stating currently there are a total of 21 ETH providers across the state. The parish provider breakdown is: East Baton Rouge -9, Iberia -1, Jefferson -1, Orleans -2, Rapides -2, St. Landry -1, Ouachita -3, Caddo -1 and Terrebonne -1.
- Ms. George stated she is hoping to get a MOU signed with the Louisiana Housing Corporation to get formerly incarcerated individuals connected with long term housing upon release. She reported that a meeting is scheduled next week.
- Assistant Secretary Covington asked when the next round of grants would be available? Natalie Laborde, Executive Council, responded mid-August and anticipates the recognized savings to be somewhere around \$5 million. This amount is less than the previous year, but was expected.

### **Subcommittees of RAC, Rhett Covington, Assistant Secretary**

- Assistant Secretary Covington reminded everyone that the RAC accepted oversight of Employer Advisory Council (EAC), New Beginnings, Lumina and Adult Reentry Employment Strategic grant (ARES) as subcommittees in a previous meeting and updates were given for each group.
- Assistant Secretary Covington updated the group on the EAC, stating this group has not met in 2020, but are planning to meet in September. Updates will be given at the RAC October meeting.
- Assistant Secretary Covington explained that “New Beginnings” is a federal grant program for co-occurring substance use disorders stating with the program is housed at EHCC and LCIW but was put on hold in March due to the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Kelsey Pearce updated the group on the ARES grant, stating that this planning grant focuses on internal processes and external barriers around employment post release.
- Ms. Pearce stated during their many meetings over the last year, subcommittees were created on policy, employer engagement and a public information campaign.
- Ms. Pearce stated the group would appreciate RAC representation at the next ARES grant meeting, as well as the local Workforce Development Boards in Jefferson and St. Tammany. The next meeting is scheduled for July 29, 2020 from 1:30 – 3:00.
- Mrs. Allison Bradford updated the group on the Lumina grant, stating the group is currently focusing on becoming Eligible Training Providers through the Louisiana Workforce Commission.
- It should be noted that the COVID 19 pandemic has hindered these groups from meeting and completing their work. These barriers are currently being working through.

### **LA-PRI Implementation Steering Team, Robert Vehock, DPS&C**

- Mr. Vehock gave an update of the IST Subcommittees that consist of Housing, Education, Employment, Legal and Data.
- Mr. Vehock state the subcommittees are looking to improve and expand resources for our releasing population.
- Assistant Secretary Covington asked the RAC members help with getting good membership for the IST subcommittees from their contacts or organizations.

### **RAC Strategic Plan**

- Assistant Secretary Covington stated the RAC Strategic plan is in need of revisions due to some new and completed projects and also wording updates. He stated performance measures are also being looked at and will recommend changes in the fall meeting in October. He advised that the strategic plan could be found on the Boards and Commissions website under the RAC.

### **RAC Membership Expirations**

- Assistant Secretary Covington asked that all expiring RAC members please reach out to your nominating agency to renew your RAC membership or have them submit 3 nominees to the Governor’s Office.
- Assistant Secretary Covington added that the Secretary LeBlanc’s office has prepared letters and mailed them out to each member who has an upcoming expiration to make sure we get a timely renewal in place.

### **Other Business**

- No other business mentioned.

### **Public Comment**

- Jessica Strange with Goodwill of New Orleans asked was the New Beginnings program within state facilities and will it be offered at Plaquemines Parish Prison? Assistant Secretary Covington responded the program is currently offered at EHCC and LCIW. Stating Plaquemines Parish Prison does not get these type of cases because they are transferred to EHCC or LCIW at intake.
- Renard Thomas questioned the Department’s COVID 19 testing on releasing offenders. Stacye Falgout, the Department’s Director of Nursing, shared the process, stating in one case officers drove a COVID positive releasing offender to his residence to keep him off public buses in an effort to reduce the spread.

- Renard Thomas stated if the community doesn't know who's releasing how can we have a handoff? Assistant Secretary Covington responded that part of the handoff in the New Beginnings grant entails working with the regional Human Service Authority (or LGE) in the parishes that the grant allows us to work with. We are not only making sure that organization knows who is returning to their area, but that the treatment plans align pre- and post- release. That handoff is already happening. Assistant Secretary Covington also stated that sharing confidential information greatly complicates giving such information out because release of information forms must be signed by the offenders prior to the Department giving out their personal or medical information.
- Renard Thomas asked what the requirements were related to Coastal Erosion mitigation, because the state is "sitting on millions of dollars" but requirements about how to access those funds are not easily known? Assistant Secretary Covington responded this information will need to come from that group.
- Alfreda Tillman Bester with Department of Children and Family Services asked whether or not the furlough panel been suspended? Deputy Secretary Malcolm Myer responded that due to the COVID 19 pandemic now being in phase 2, the Furlough Release Panel is no longer active. However, should the Governor choose to reconvene this panel, the panel will then review eligible persons on a rolling basis. The panel was formed based on the Governor's executive order and until that changes, the panel has been suspended. We are still processing offenders for regular release dates, and the Parole Board continues to meet for scheduled hearings. Natalie Laborde, Executive Council, shared Offender and Staff COVID numbers and referred everyone to view the latest numbers and resources available of the Department's website, stating the website is updated daily.
- Monicka Henry stated she is hearing the Department is only testing persons who are showing symptoms. Nurse Falgout stated the Department is testing symptomatic offenders and offenders who are high risk.
- Darlene Jones heard offenders are not being given mask and hand sanitizer. Natalie Laborde, Executive Council responded offenders are issued washable masks and that hand sanitizer is available for all offenders. Ms. Laborde asked for a name or facility so it can be looked into.
- Renard Thomas asked if staff is being tested? Ms. Laborde responded that the Department's staff are required to wear mask and the Department is following all CDC testing guidelines.
- Wendy Matherne stated in the Zoom chat that her son had symptoms of fever, nausea and diarrhea, stating his symptoms were treated, but he was not given a Covid test.

### **Adjournment**

- Joseph Prejean entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:26 AM. Alfreda Tillman-Bester adopted the motion and the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting will be held on October 15, 2020 at 9:30 AM the location is TBD.