

**REENTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL &
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MINUTES
Thursday, June 28, 2012**

Advisory Council Members Present

Chris Granger, Senator Guillory Designee
Whalen Gibbs, DPS&C Designee
Sue Austin, DHH Designee
John Walters, ABC Designee
Louis Reine, AFL-CIO
Ricky James, LCA Designee

Others Present

Rita Thomas, Office of Reentry
Gretchen McCarstle, Office of Reentry
Tammy Jetson, Office of Reentry
Dr. Peter Scharf, Tulane University
Mr. David Creesy, Tulane University
Rhett Covington, DPS&C

**Advisory Council Members
Not Present**

Secretary James LeBlanc, DPS&C
Mike Cazes, La Sheriff's Association
James Landry, LABI
Jimmy Sawtell, LCTC
Curt Eysink, LWC
Joseph Audoin, LBCTC Designee
Steve E. Pylant, State Representative
Kim Matherne, DCFC

Item #1: Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:35 a.m. at DPS&C Headquarters in Baton Rouge by DPS&C Designee Whalen Gibbs.

Item #2: Approval of the Minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting of March 7, 2012

Mr. Gibbs asked for the approval of the minutes from the meeting of March 7, 2012. Louis Reine motioned the minutes be approved and the motion was seconded by John Walters and passed with a unanimous vote.

Item 3: Opening Remarks

Whalen Gibbs stated that Secretary LeBlanc had a prior commitment would not be able to attend today's meeting.

Mr. Gibbs further stated that the Department is faced with major hurdles and one of the challenges involves budget cuts and doing more with less. The Department is making preparations to close two prisons currently, Forcht Wade Correctional Center and J. Levy Dabadie Correctional Center. Consolidating and closing of prisons are definitely challenges at this time but despite these challenging times, the Department continues to meet the daily

demands of housing the offender population. We take in hundreds of offenders monthly and release hundreds of offenders back into our community on a monthly basis. As it relates to reentry, we continue to have the Regional Reentry Program available and offer programs in our prisons. The Regional Reentry programs are still ongoing at the Northwest Region (Caddo), Southeast Region (Orleans Parish) and Louisiana Transition for Women in Tallulah (Madison). We recognize the importance of continuing to rehabilitative opportunity for those offenders that are returning to our communities.

Louis Reine discussed the legislative budget process as it related to efforts to keep Dabadie open. He then asked for a report on the challenges of moving offender's to Wade Correctional Center.

Mr. Gibbs responded that the Department faced with some challenges as it relates to offender population moving to Wade Correctional, as well as the other prisons and local jails. The logistics on transfers are being systematically worked out by Operations within the Department.

Mr. Reine asked if DOC had been given any reasoning from the Governor as to why after the struggled to put the money back in the budget for J. Levy Dabadie at the end of the day it was for nothing.

Mr. Gibbs indicated that he didn't know the reason and that Secretary LeBlanc would be in the best position to answer that question. Mr. Gibbs indicated that he would not guess or speculate as to the Governor's decision to veto the funding.

Mr. Reine again asked about challenges with moving all those offenders.

Mr. Gibbs responded by noting that the Department was experienced in working through challenges involving the movement and assignment of offenders. The larger challenge is with the employees at those facilities and finding opportunities for them. As it relates to operations, the big challenge at Forcht Wade Correctional Center is that it was a substance abuse treatment facility. We know that 80% of our population admits that they have some type of substance abuse problem that lead to their criminality, so it would have been devastating to lose that resource as it relates to treatment. Now we have been able to salvage the substance abuse treatment component by having a partnership with the Bossier Parish Sheriff. The Sheriff will provide the space to house the substance abuse treatment program. That challenge has been met as we still have this treatment resource for the multitudes of individuals coming into the correctional setting.

Mr. Reine stated that if we didn't as a system address substance abuse addictions then the workforce training would be all for not.

Mr. Gibbs answered that as it relates to the Forcht Wade Correctional Center and the transfer of the program to Bossier Parish Sheriff's facility, services will not be diminished overall. As for the remaining facilities the programs remain.

Mr. Reine asked is that level adequate for what we really need to be at to address substance abuse within corrections.

Mr. Gibbs responded that in short, no. Forcht Wade Correctional Center was a substance abuse treatment facility. We do have some other substance abuse programs, available at other state facilities and some on the local level as well. Substance abuse treatment has been and will continue to be a challenge even with the FWCC program and transferring it to the Bossier Sheriff's Facility. Keep in mind that corrections does all we can to provide rehabilitative opportunities and often time society expectation is that corrections should fix everything, but the bottom line is Corrections' primary mission is custody, control, security and safety. When you look at a 600 million dollar budget, that's where the majority of it is spent. We have very limited funds for rehabilitative programs, but we try to cobble together what is left in the budget to provide those rehabilitative opportunities for the offender population. Again, keep in mind the primary mission of corrections, providing safe and secure incarceration of offenders and protecting our staff and the public.

Mr. Reine stated that the tools necessary for us to be successful in what we all volunteer to come here and do are not being met. He thinks that as a group, the Council should send some kind of correspondence to document what has been identified as need and request some financial support consideration to accomplish that success. He added that to get the whole workforce training in the work would be fruitless if we don't address the key issue of substance abuse. Whether we get it or we don't, I think we should at least be on record as notifying the administration. Mr. Gibbs noted that he made a good point and that the Council could address this issue with Senator Guillory and have him draft their concerns and/recommendations to the Governor.

Mr. Gibbs acknowledged the new Council designees at the meeting. Mr. Ricky James representing Chaplain Donald Miller of the Louisiana Chaplain's Association, Mr. Chris Granger representing Senator Guillory and John Walters representing Mr. Alvin Vargas of Associated Builders and Contractors.

Item 4: Legislation enacted during 2012 Regular Session of the Legislature

Whalen Gibbs stated that the Council discussed two pieces of legislation at the last meeting that the Council decided to support and they had passed.

HB 521 by Rep. Mareno which expand the Reentry Court Workforce Development Sentencing Program to the 19th and the 22nd JDC.

Mr. Gibbs further stated that what Reentry Court offers non-violent and non-sex offenders an opportunity to be in a workforce development training program at Angola. The training program is mainly taught by offenders who have skilled trades in welding, carpentry or automotives. The Department is using them to actually teach the offender populations sentenced through the Reentry Court. It's been in existence for about two (2) years, have had about twelve (12) graduates only two (2) of which have returned.

Mr. Reine asked for more information about the program at Angola.

Mr. Gibbs stated that where the program is currently being administered at Angola, which is supported by the New Orleans Baptist Theological College (NOBTC) graduates. We have

offenders who have earned a B.S. degree in Theology from NOBTC. They also have received certification in various trades. We are utilizing this population that has certification in various trades to help train those offenders that are coming from Orleans and now East Baton Rouge and St. Tammany Parish. The caveat is that once the person successfully completes that program, they are returned to the sentencing court and traditionally the sentencing court will place them on supervised probation under the Probation and Parole office.

Mr. Reine asked what percentage of incarcerated prisoners is serving a DOC sentence in the Sheriff's facilities.

Mr. Gibbs replied that of the 40,000 incarcerated, approximately 22,000 are serving their sentence at the local level.

Mr. Reine asked for training purposes does the department only have the ability to serve those at a state facility.

Mr. Gibbs indicated that the Reentry Council Program is currently only offered at Angola. He also indicated some local jails provide other programming, including vocational training opportunities; however, we continue to work with them to urge their expansion of program opportunities.

Mr. Reine asked of the 22,000 that are in the jails, were they minor and non violent offenders?

Mr. Gibbs stated they are generally lower risk offenders.

Mr. Reine stated that 22,000 seem to be the pool we would be more successful with.

Mr. Gibbs stated that he was correct. The 22,000 generally have fewer impediments to reentry, so there is a great opportunity there for those offenders if you provide the resources.

Mr. Reine asked if we look through those offenders in the sheriff's facilities to bring into the state facility for reentry or do we take in the ones hardest to deal with?

Mr. Gibbs responded the disciplinary problems and those that have more medical/mental problems are typically transferred into state facilities and that we are starting to also identify candidates for Reentry on the local level and transferring them to state facilities.

Mr. Gibbs indicated not all of them have mental/health or disciplinary problems and that we don't forget about the 22,000 serving time on the local level. One of our major initiatives as mentioned earlier implementing more regional reentry programs within the nine identified regions. We do recognize there is a problem. We have developed the Regional Reentry Programs in Caddo, Tallulah and Orleans. All of that is aimed toward providing more opportunity for reentry for offenders who are serving time on the local level so they would be better prepared. We hope to be able to open all nine regions so we can provide for better reentry opportunities for those individuals serving their sentence on the local level. Funding permitted, we will continue that process. The Department recognizes the need to address the offenders on

the local level to truly improve the overall success of reentry. We are already starting to see better results for those offenders that have been released from the three regional reentry programs that are currently up and running.

Mr. Reine asked when you send a group to Angola for the training program, how many offenders you would send at a time.

Mr. Gibbs responded we have 120 slots at Angola and the offenders trickle in from the court 1, 2, 3, 5 or more at a time.

Mr. Reine asked if those 120 slots are inmates who would have otherwise served time in a state facility.

Mr. Gibbs stated they there are offenders that otherwise would have been sentenced to a hard labor sentence and would have ended up in a local jail or a state prison if it were not for this program and they definitely would have to serve a longer period at hard labor.

HB295 by Rep. W. Bishop – Criminal record effect on trade, occupational, and professional licensing.

Mr. Gibbs stated that he felt that this legislation may have the unintended effects of net widening. Prior to legislation that was passed; the old language allowed felons to work in certain occupations. With the new language the word felon had been struck in favor of “criminal record”. A criminal record could be a misdemeanor conviction so that results in net widening limiting licensure opportunities.

Mr. Reine stated felt the intent would be to allow the license entity the ability to consider a conviction and if it has nothing to do with the license being applied for, then the license could be issued.

Mr. Gibbs stated that it already provided for this. The group will wait to see how this law is implemented and make recommendations if necessary in the future.

Item 5: Reentry Strategic Plan Update (Tulane – Scharf and Creesy)

Dr. Scharf conducted a presentation on Update to LA Reentry Advisory Council Strategic Implementation Plan indicating they need the Councils ideas on how to improve: (Presentation attached)

Rhett Covington commented on the draft of strategic planning which includes three (3) initiatives:

1. To broaden our ability to do front end assessment of offenders with Texas Christian Assessment which are free and they can be retested without loss of validity;

2. To put in the demonstration grant (Cognizant Behavior Intervention) to attack the criminal thinking offenders have. New Orleans Violent Crime initiative is to look at how probation and parole is functioning in the community now;
3. To look into Justice Reinvestment.

Mr. Creesy conducted a presentation on the Reentry Advisory Council Organizational Chart. (Chart attached)

Item 6: Coordination of Reentry Advisory Council with Sentencing Commission (Reentry and Evidence-based Practices Committee)

Mr. Gibbs stated that as it stands now, we have goals that we have identified and are working on and some of those goals are in line with goals the Sentencing Commission is working on as well. Within the Sentence Commission structure, there is the Reentry and Evidence-based Practices Committee and within that committee there are several teams. There is a transitional work programs team, education team and substance abuse treatment team. Mr. Gibbs stated he would like to see us more as a part of the sentencing commission and working with some of the groups and determine where we may need to expand to identify some of the other obstacles we need to work on. Doing so would bring about better collaboration on reentry issues and prevent duplication of effort by Commission and the Council.

Mr. Reine asked Mr. Gibbs to further explain the proposal as to the relationship with the Sentencing Commission.

Mr. Gibbs responded that by meeting with this work group, we would have more interface, coordination and dialog with the Sentencing Commission to allow the merging of ideas between the Commission and Council members. He noted some of the same members that sit on this Council also sit on the Sentencing Commission as well.

The group agreed.

Item 7: Expiring term of Advisory Council Members

Mr. Gibbs reminded the Council that the following member's terms were expiring soon:

1. Mr. Alvin Bargas, ABC – December 18, 2012
2. Sheriff Mike Cazes - December 18, 2012
3. James Landry, LABI - October 18, 2012
4. Louis Reine, AFL-CIO – October 18, 2012
5. Johnny Sabathe, La State Bldg. Const. Trade Council – October 18, 2012

Mr. Gibbs informed the Council that each organization would need to submit a name to the Governor requesting the members continue to serve or submit new names of nominees to serve on the commission. Mr. Reine stated that he would probably recommend Johnny Sabathe be replaced because of his scheduling conflicts and indicated that he has someone who works with The State Building and Construction Trade Council who currently attends Prison Enterprises

meeting and has attended a couple of Advisory Council meetings who was interested in serving on the Council.

Item 8: Transaction of such other business as may properly come before the Council

Chris Granger, the designee for Senator Guillory, stated the Senator was requesting to place an item on the agenda for the next meeting. He further stated Senator Guillory wants to discuss young men who have child support obligations that enter prison and had those obligations building up until they are released. Mr. Granger informed the Council that Senator Guillory was concerned that arrearage in child support payments sometime reach as much as \$20,000 to \$30,000 and he found this discouraged offenders from getting a minimum wage job. Mr. Granger shared that Senator Guillory found the offenders cannot afford the base pay of their child support payments and afford their arrearage at the same time and the offenders are held in contempt of court because of court orders. Senator Guillory would like to propose a discussion regarding legislation that would change the law to place child support on hold while the offenders are in prison or at least reduce the payment to the minimum child support. Mr. Gibbs indicated that some of this may be tied to federal law. He also indicated that there had been some discussion with DCFS previously regarding this issue and the discussion centered around the offender going through a parenting program then perhaps there could be some reduction of the portion they are required to pay the state. After consideration, the Administration indicated that no adjustment could be made relative to arrearages that incurred based on an offender being incarcerated.

Mr. Reine asked what happens to the child support for persons that are in work release. Mr. Gibbs stated that the offenders start paying child support while in work release based on a wage assignment the Department has with the DCFS.

Mr. Gibbs informed the Council Secretary LeBlanc requested we research legislation on occupational driver's license for certain individuals that are convicted of a felony, which would allow them to get a driver's license just to go to and from work. He also stated the Secretary wanted to look at fines and fee waivers or an adjustment in fines and fees for individuals that are incarcerated that have outstanding traffic violations. Many of these offenders are faced with thousands of dollars in fines, court cost and fees upon their release, which must be paid before they can obtain a drivers license. The Secretary suggested researching what other states have done and possibly proposing legislation along those lines. The Secretary also suggested the Council revisit the state employer tax incentive credit by increasing the tax credit for employers who hire ex-offenders. Currently, the tax incentive is \$200 and Senator Guillory proposed legislation a few years ago increasing it to \$2,000 which passed, but was vetoed. Secretary Le Blanc thinks that maybe this is the time to rethink that and put it back on the table to the Legislature. Mr. Reine suggested that maybe Secretary Le Blanc and Senator Guillory could come to an agreement with the Governor on a dollar amount thereby, avoiding another veto by the Governor.

Mr. Gibbs asked if there were any other business.

There were none.

Item 9: Adjournment

At 11:45 a.m. Louis Reine move that the meeting be adjourned which was seconded by John Walters.