

**REENTRY ADVISORY COUNSEL &
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MINUTES
Thursday, March 14, 2013**

Advisory Council Members Present

Senator Guillory, Chairman
Whalen Gibbs, DPS&C Designee
Mike Cazes, La Sheriff's Association
Gena Lewis, DHH Designee
James Landry, LABI (teleconference)
Joseph Audoin, LBCTC Designee
Steve E. Pylant, State Representative

**Advisory Counsel Members
Not Present**

Secretary James LeBlanc, DPS&C
Alvin Bargas, ABC
Donald Miller, La Chaplain Association
Curt Eysink, LWC
Jimmy Sawtell, LCTC
Ricky James, LCA Designee
Suzy Sonnier, Dept of Children & Family
Kim Matherne, LDFS

Others Present

Rita Thomas, Office of ReEntry
Gretchen McCarstle, Office of ReEntry
Tammy Jetson, Office of ReEntry
Mr. David Creesy, Tulane University
Alexandra Priebe, LPHI
Rhett Covington, DPS&C

Item #1: Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:33 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 June 28, 2012

Mr. Louis Reine made a motion to adopt the minutes of the Advisory Counsel Meeting of June 28, 2012 and seconded by Mike Cazes. Motion passed with a unanimous vote.

Item 3: Opening Remarks

Designee Gibbs stated that Chairman Senator Guillory has advised that he is in route and should arrive at the meeting shortly. Mr. Gibbs indicated that since our last meeting Phelps Correctional Center (PCC) has closed. The actual closure of PCC was November 1, 2012. He indicated that the majority of the inmate population at PCC were transferred to Angola and were being housed together in a separate "Camp" at Angola referred to as Camp Phelps Correctional Center.

Louis Reine asked how inmates are released from prison from the standpoint of transportation to where they will be residing.

Assistant Secretary Gibbs stated that when offenders are released, there is either someone there to pick them up (family member, support system, community/faith-based organizations) or offenders who are indigent are provided with a ride to the nearest bus station. The department purchases a bus ticket for them if the residence is in Louisiana. In the reentry planning process we try to identify the offender support systems in an effort to minimize bus station drop-offs.

Regarding Legislation for the upcoming session, Mr. Gibbs indicated there is no major legislation relative to the Reentry Advisory Council. One of the items being supported by the Governor's office is legislation regarding first and second time drug offenders receiving substance abuse treatment. The goal is to provide structured substance abuse treatment along with other rehabilitation programs which improves the likelihood of successful reentry. The target population will be non-violent, non-sex offenders.

Louis Reine asked what the budget projection was and how would it affect Corrections.

Mr. Gibbs stated that he was not really certain at this juncture. The Department anticipates there will be additional cuts that we will have to face. Whatever the cut are we will have to manage and continue to provide custody, security, and safety for staff, offenders, and the public. Mr. Gibbs further stated that he was not certain what the actual dollar amount of any proposed cut is at this time.

As it relates to the Advisory Council, we haven't met for a couple of meetings and we've been having a difficult time getting a quorum.

Senator Guillory stated that the reason he hasn't been attending the meetings was because of health issues. Also, the Senate appointed him as Chairman of the Retirement Committee and last year the Governor chose to do pension reform. So between his illness and other responsibilities, he was not able to devote the time he needed to the Reentry Advisory Council, for which he has a deep devotion. He stated the he will be seen much more and be more active relative to the Council.

Item 4: Expired term of Council Members

Mr. Gibbs reminded the Council that the following member's terms have expired:

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 will send letters out to remind the members to submit names of nominees for these positions.

Item 5: Reentry Strategic Plan Update

Designee Gibbs referred to Mr. David Creesy for his presentation of the Reentry Strategic Plan update. Rhett Covington informed the Council that we received the Second Chance Act Planning Grant. They will be applying for the Demonstration Phase grant once everything is completed and get the Council's approval on the Strategic Planning Phase. He further stated that Mr. Creesy will discuss what has been done, the direction that we are going based upon what other states have done with these councils.

Rhett Covington, David Creesy and Alexandra Priebe discussed the attached Reentry Strategic Plan handout.

Mr. Gibbs provided a brief history of the Reentry Advisory Council to the new members. He welcomed State Representative Steven Pylant who was appointed by the House Speaker, to replace Senator Mack "Bodi" White. Additionally Ms. Gena Lewis, representing Sue Austin from DHH was welcomed.

In 2008, the Council was named Inmate Rehabilitation and Workforce Development Advisory Council. When Secretary Leblanc took office, he and the leadership reviewed what was happening throughout our system and one of the events closely reviewed was our work release program and our vocational trade programs. On many occasions offenders would complete a trade and were years away from release. They would obtain a welding certificate and remained in prison not utilizing the trade acquired. We made adjustments as to when an offender can enter programs resulting in offender being placed in trade programs closer to their work release eligibility date, good-time date, or other earliest release... When they complete the trade, it coincides with their work release participation or release date. In changing our Department regulations to make certain that whenever they obtain the trade, they go to work release and also when they were in work release we want to ensure that work release facilities try and place that person in the trade acquired. A large part of what the original inmate rehabilitation workforce advisory council was designed to do was being augmented through policy. In 2010, the Council was tweaked to make it more of a Reentry Advisory Council addressing certain barriers to offender reentry which brings us to where we are today. One of the requirements that were mentioned in the legislation was that we should create a Reentry Strategic Plan and that's part of what is being discussed here today.

State Representative asked if reentry included the Sheriffs. He had concerns on whether the sheriffs would be able to implement reentry on the current per diem. He indicated it cost a lot more to house an offender in state prisons about \$59.00 per day, while the state pay \$24 to house an offender on the local level.

Mr. Gibbs indicated the department is trying to address reentry on the local level with the regionalization plan and have been to date able to open three regional reentry programs while funding the cost of the program on the regional level. Additionally, more local jails are starting to offer the department's pre-release curriculum. He indicated that the department must continue

to address reentry on the local level as 11,000 of the 15,000 offender released annually are released from local jails.

Rhett Covington, David Creesy and Alexandra Priebe resumed discussion of the Reentry Strategic Plan.

Louis Reine made a motion to adopt the Reentry Strategic Plan and seconded by Sheriff Mike Cazes. Chairman passed the motion. No objections.

Item 6: Sentencing Commission Update (Reentry and Evidence-based Committee)

Rhett Covington stated that the Substance Abuse workgroup of the Reentry Sentencing Commission is working on mapping or listing all of the available substance abuse program that are out there beginning with those that are available in the institutions and local jails. They are also looking at those that will be available in the community. We want to make sure we have the capacity out there so that we can have them available to direct offenders who are in the system either under pretrial or post conviction particularly in light of what the Governor is proposing with substance abuse alternatives.

The Education working group has been looking very closely at something that's going to impact a lot of our offenders. Most of our population, as you well know, does not have a GED or High School Diploma. The GED system is moving to electronic computer based testing which poses a problem for offenders in prison because they don't have a computer to do it and secondly it cost two to three times what it currently cost per test. Our fixed budget that allow us to test "x" number of offenders each year means we are going to be testing 1/3 to 1/2 that number with the same budget. Kim Barnette, our Education Director, heads up that working group and she has been recommending that the state consider an alternative exit test like the high school exit exam. If the offender passes the exam, they will award them with a high school equivalency diploma from the Department of Education through the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Those recommendations we will probably get from her and we will forward them to the Council for further comment and any assistance you can give us. Mr. Covington stated that it will actually help us in the opposite direction if we did that. The current cost is \$55 per test but if we can get it cheaper or free from the State, then we can test as many people as we need to instead of having to limit the number of graduates each year.

Louis Reine asked who they are dealing with on the testing.

Mr. Covington informed him that they were working with the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) right now.

Louis Reine asked if the mandates that go on computer, is that their mandate or the accreditation?

Mr. Covington stated the GED is national.

Louis Reine asked if waivers were issued.

Mr. Covington stated that States could opt-out.

Louis Reine stated that it was his understanding that they gave specific waivers to certain district because of the economic cost for a period of time.

Mr. Covington stated that he wasn't sure. He further stated that he will get with Kim Barnette, Corrections Education Director. The official kick off date where it supposes to be mandated is not until January, 2014.

Louis Reine asked if BESE or the Department of Education can issue equivalency to a GED, is it accepted where a GED is accepted such as enrollment in a community college.

Mr. Gibbs stated that per Corrections Education Director Kim Barnette the equivalency certificate will be accepted the same as a GED.

Louis Reine asked if it would be accepted if you go to a college in another state.

Mr. Gibbs stated that according to what he has been told at this point, the Equivalency, would be accepted the same as a standard GED.

Mr. Covington stated that as you can see, those working groups are working on very important issues for people who are in the prison system now or who would be coming out back into the communities again. The social support workgroup is looking at mentoring curriculum, mentoring best practices. We are allowing mentors into our prisons so we want to make sure that they are correctly oriented and understand the difference in being a volunteer and a mentor. To ensure they know where those lines are so they don't blur the lines and end up victims or enabling the person to reengage in criminal activity. We are also looking at other possible options such as peer support groups for ex-offenders similar to an AA group for example but not focus on substance abuse just focusing on issues surrounding the problems of returning to communities. That's some of the issues that the working groups are looking at right now. We are trying to generate the best practices to recommend and get word out to the communities.

Mr. Gibbs stated that one of the teams that he is working with is workforce development group. Some of the things that they have looked at are the pretrial diversion type Transitional Work Program (TWP) and they found that it is going on in Lafayette right now. They also have another type of program operated by the sheriff. It is pretty similar to what Sheriff Cazes is doing in West Baton Rouge. Rather than coming into a DOC prison, the offender is sentenced to the parish jail. Components of the program includes , paying victim restitution, participating in substance abuse treatment or whatever their conditions are and once they complete those conditions are returned to court and placed under probation supervision. We will be encouraging other sheriffs to look at those models with the possibility of implementing. The group also looked at individuals being transferred to work release. An individual becomes eligible for a TWP whenever they are within six months of their earliest release date or within three years of their earliest release date depending on the nature of the crime committed. We are finding that some of those individuals usually when they are eligible for the TWP three years

from their earliest release date, their average stay in work release is a little over seven months. . We are addressing that in house to make certain that we start to screen those individuals that are eligible at the first available opportunity. Additionally, we want them transferred to a TWP at the first available opportunity so they can maximize the amount of time they are in TWP. We are also looking at expansion to areas that have fewer or no TWP beds. We have very few work release beds in one of the major areas where our population is returning namely, Orleans and Jefferson. Between Orleans and Jefferson, we have about 120 TWP beds. So we are looking for expansion opportunity there and other places as well. We are also seeking opportunities for expansion of TWP for females.

Item 7: Boards and Commissions Website

Designee Gibbs referred to the handout on the Boards and Commission Website. He advised the Council to look at the website. It has a lot of information regarding the Council.

David Creesy stated that there will be a Reentry Awareness Day schedule for March 30, 2013 in Mansura. It is being put on by the Reentry Solutions, motorcycle groups and hot rod groups from across the State. He is asking permission from the Council to set up at table at the event and give out information.

Louis Reine made a motion that the Board authorizes a table at the ReEntry Awareness function on March 30, 2013. Seconded by Sheriff Cazes. Chairman Guillory passed the motion. No objections. Chairman Guillory suggested that Mr. Creesy get the details to the board.

Item 8: Meeting schedule thru calendar year 2013

Mr. Gibbs stated at the previous meeting, members were handed a copy of the meeting scheduled for the calendar year 2013. The next scheduled meetings are June 27, 2013, September 12, 2013, and December 5, 2013. Members can go on the website and the schedule is posted. Mr. Gibbs asked that the members mark their calendars of the upcoming meeting so that the Council may have a quorum.

Louis Reine suggested that we extend an invitation to the members who are working on the Strategic Plan.

Item 9: Transaction of such other business as may properly come before the Council

Chairman Guillory asked if there were any other matters to bring before the Board. There were none.

Chairman Guillory adjourned the meeting at 11:10 a.m.