

Reentry Advisory Council (RAC)
3rd Quarter 2021 Meeting Minutes
Via Zoom
Thursday, August 26, 2021

Attendees Present:

Chairman Louis Reine, LA-AFL-CIO
Camille Conway, Designee for Dr. Monty Sullivan, Louisiana Community and Technical College System
Rhett Covington, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections
Karissa Page, Designee for Jennifer Katzman, Department of Health
Robert D. Hanser, University of Louisiana at Monroe
Lindsey Jeffrey, Designee for Judge Arthur L. Hunter Jr., Orleans Criminal District Court
Joseph Prejean, Big Poppas Fitness Gym
Joseph Ardoin, Jr., LA State Building and Construction Trades Council
Bridget Dinvaut, Louisiana District Attorney's Association
Sheryl Ranatza, Committee on Parole
Winona Connor, Louisiana Housing Corporation
Tavares Walker, Designee for Ava M. Cates, LA Workforce Commission
Alfreda Tillman Bester, Designee for Marketa Garner Walters, Department of Children and Family Services
Dennis Grimes, Louisiana Sheriff's Association
Carl Filler, Designee for Christian Rhodes, LA Association of Business and Industry
James LeBlanc, Department of Public Safety and Corrections, Headquarters
Paul R. Murray, Elayn Hunt Correctional Center
Debbie Villio, Designee for Tony Bacala, LA House of Representatives

Absent:

Rémy Voisin Starns, Louisiana Public Defender Board
Judge Fred Crifasi, 19th Judicial District Court
Randy Lavespere, Department of Public Safety and Corrections

Vacant:

Association of Builders and Contractors seat
Senator District 7 seat

Call to Order

- Meeting was called to order by Chairman Louis S. Reine at 9:34 am.

Roll Call

- Roll was called and a quorum was established 18 of 23 present

Approval of the May 2021 Meeting Minutes

- Chairman Louis S. Reine entertained a motion to adopt the May 2021 minutes. A motion to accept the minutes was put forward by Joseph M. Ardoin, second by Joseph A. Prejean stained with no votes against. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

Welcome and Introductions, Chairman Louis S. Reine

- Chairman Louis S. Reine welcomed everyone and asked that any guest introduced themselves.

Opening Remarks, Secretary James M. LeBlanc

- Secretary LeBlanc welcomed and thanked everyone for attending. He would like to hear about what everyone is doing to connect returning citizens to resources that support their success in regards to things such as:
 - Meaningful employment
 - Housing

- Transportation
- Health care
- Substance abuse treatment
- Education
- IDs
- Medicaid cards
- Secretary LeBlanc stated he was very proud of his staff's effort with making progress in helping returning citizens get their IDs and Medicaid cards.
- Secretary LeBlanc gave an update on the number of incarcerated with the Department of Public Safety & Corrections (DOC). He stated the prison population is 26,376 state prisoners with 13,401 of whom are in state prisons and 12,975 whom are in local jails. He also mentioned this is a reduction of approximately 14,000 since the peak of over 40,000 in 2012.
- Secretary LeBlanc stated that Probation and Parole Community Supervision numbers are down from 72,000 in 2017 to 47,466 at the end of August.
- Secretary LeBlanc gave COVID-19 pandemic response updates for DOC staff/offenders.
- Secretary LeBlanc stated that he met with the Employer Advisory Committee and they are working hard to connect incarcerated individuals with a job prior to discharge. He mentioned that Assistant Secretary Rhett Covington and his team are working hard to make employer connection and promote resources of train individuals releasing from the prisons with programs. He states that the Reentry Workforce Portal is a key to this. He stated that he would love to see virtual interviews with employers prior to release from incarceration. He mentioned that Blake LeBlanc (DOC Mental Health Director) is providing good leadership on the mental health and SHISAP program for substance abuse treatment. He shared that Shelley and her Medically Assisted Treatment team are working and seeing success with pre and post release treatment programs for those with substance use disorders.
- Secretary LeBlanc also shared that once the females are moved from Elayn Hunt Correctional (EHCC), Assistant Secretary Covington and Warden Hooper will coordinate the move of the Youthful Offender Program from Dixon Correctional Institute to EHCC.
- Secretary LeBlanc mentioned new legislation passed for receiving college degrees that will allow offenders to receive an extra 90 days of "good-time" credit for obtaining a Bachelor's degree and an additional 90 days for obtaining a Master's degree while incarcerated. This additional credit is on top of the 360 currently allowed.
- Secretary LeBlanc mention that Heather Watson did a community coordinator year-end report. He stated that it is an excellent report. The report gives some ideas of the activities that are going on in our communities with probation and parole and with our local communities that we have invested in with JRI and actually has some goals settings. He stated that it will be a good document for Assistant Secretary Covington to share with this group to see what we are doing and plan on making a presentation on what is happening on the 10 or 11 parishes that we are actively involved where the majority of our prison population comes from and goes back too.
- Secretary LeBlanc mentioned how he values the support that the council brings to us.
- Louis Reine asked if there are plans to encourage a higher vaccination rate among staff. Secretary LeBlanc answered: the department encourages employees during roll call. DOC has been working to educate/inform our staff related to the COVID-19 vaccine and continues to encourage vaccination
- Louis Reine asked if there was a new piece of legislation dealing with RAC memberships stating if members miss two consecutive meeting that the member would be replaced. Assistant Secretary Covington answered yes; information concerning this Legislation will be emailed to all members.

Remark from Governor's Office, Leslie Chambers, Governor's Office

- Leslie Chambers with the Governor's Office informed everyone that FDA has approved the Pfizer vaccine.
- Mrs. Chambers expressed her appreciation to the RAC membership for the excellent work done by this group.

Statewide IST Updates, Rhett Covington, Assistant Secretary

- Assistant Secretary Covington shared the IST Data Subcommittee is continuing to meet with various stakeholders reviewing dashboards, layouts of data set, etc. that our partners may need access to and how we can be better responsive. We are limited on how we can present data because of the data sets we have available and the age of our system. We are working with our partners to figure out the best way to provide not only specific information at the offender level but also the aggregated data across the state for the greater state stakeholders. If you are interested in being a part of that contact Heather Watson.
- Assistant Secretary Covington gave updates on the Justice Reinvestment Initiative and Emergency Transitional Housing (ETH) program sharing that over 400 participants have been assisted and there are 37 providers over 17 parishes, so it has been very successful. He reported that HUD (US Department of Housing and Urban Development) recently released on July 23, 2021, a letter to all public housing authorities regarding returning citizens and their needs to try to find ways to bring them into public housing and to remove barriers. We will share the letter after the meeting. The IST Housing committee is looking at ways to encourage and meet with public housing authorities across the state about changing their policies and practices so that we can end up with a better success rate in getting individuals placed in post release housing.
- Assistant Secretary Covington gave IST Employment updates sharing through the Reentry Workforce Portal there are 20 employers signed up so far. We will continue to push for more. He stated we are trying to move toward more telephone and virtual interviews for individual prior to release as use of the Portal develops.
- Assistant Secretary Covington stated that the department is collaborating with the Urban League out of New Orleans to conduct resume writing boot camps. He shared the department participated in the virtual job fair back in April. The department is planning to participate in another virtual job fair September 29, 2021 in an effort to reach more facilities. The department is also partnering with the LA Workforce Commission for a statewide training initiative to do welding programs in Caddo and Rapides and a Deckhand training program out of Tangipahoa but we are currently waiting on a response from the US Department of Labor approval so we can complete our MOU.
- Assistant Secretary Covington stated the IST Health Subcommittee meets every other month. Sharing they have been doing a fantastic job with working with the department not only on with looking at all the hurdles and issues that we have related to getting Medicaid connections as a person releases.
- Camille Conaway gave IST Education Subcommittee updates that there are three different federally funded efforts that are underway right now that we are engaging in prison education:
 - Reboot your career -Focus on technical training that is nonacademic in nature. The reboot program is pushing LCTCS programs to function in a similar way to WIOA funded training. LCTCS has a number of partnerships with local jails to implement that program. In north Louisiana, the participants are learning NCCER courses, forklift operator, OSHA and then exiting with three or four credentials as they prepare to re-enter the community. That has been funded through a 10 million dollar grant that LCTCS received for any adult that need to be retrained or reskilled to meet the needs of a post-COVID economy.
 - MJ Foster Promise Program- This is the state's first TOPS program for adults that will start July 2022, which will also include non-violent formerly incarcerated individuals. The Board of Regents and the Louisiana Office of Financial Aid administer the program. All 12 of the community colleges will be enrolling students in that program, as well as LSU in Eunice and Southern University in Shreveport.
 - Justice Pell Reinstatement- Available only for offenders housed in local jails. LA Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) is working with DOC and colleges to begin helping offenders fill out for FASFA beginning in 2023. LCTCS is seeking alignment

with private sector partners across the demand industry regardless of the funding source. What LCTCS is utilizing whether that is Reboot, Justice Pell or MJ Foster all of which is connected to career pathways with high demand high wage job as defined by Workforce Commission data, as well as our private sector employers' partners' trade associations and Chambers of Commerce. Mrs. Conaway also stated LCTCS is currently working with "Coffee Bean" foundation to train African American males who are returning to our communities to be certified teachers upon their release. LCTCS has identified some potential candidates and once COVID allows, will start interviews.

- Assistant Secretary Covington gave updates on the IST Legal Subcommittee mentioning there was a survey conducted and of the 50 states, 28 states responded on detainers and how those states handled detainers. He shared this survey was done to combat the issues the state is having with unknown/unresolved detainers upon discharge.
- Assistant Secretary Covington stated just as a reminder the Workforce Portal is not associated with our "Work Release", or Transitional Work Program. The Workforce Portal is a mechanism for employers in the community to register much like a Monster.com or LinkedIn to get access to potential job candidates who are soon to be released.

Employer Advisory Committee (EAC), Rhett Covington, Assistant Secretary

- Assistant Secretary Covington shared this committee is planning a site visit to RLCC pending COVID restrictions. The importance and goals of the EAC is to have the business sector reviewing materials and procedures to make sure that the department's programs are staying current and up to date. This will insure employers are willing to hire returning citizens trained in these programs.

RAC Subcommittee Updates:

- **New Beginnings:** Mrs. Mallet stated she has 58 participants enrolled in the New Beginnings Grant. She stated that since COVID there have been 15 new enrollees. Mrs. Mallet shared she is still able to do programming at LCIW and EHCC without restrictions. She added there are 16 participants active in the pre-release portion, 17 active post release, 12 have made 6 months without any re-arrest (which is a success for us) and five are still active and have not made their 12 months.
- **ARES:** Mrs. Bradford stated with the Reentry Workforce Portal, we were able to get about 30 employers currently enrolled and that is thanks to our Re-entry Program Managers (RPM) and Community Coordinators (CC) going out to job fairs interacting with employers. Of the 30 employers currently enrolled, we have seven active job postings. She stated as we continue to promote the workforce portal we are focusing on increasing the employers' interaction in the portal. She stated we are planning to do a sales training as well as the narrative training. Mrs. Bradford plans to do a second push for the Return for Good Campaign. She is looking for webinar topics to capture interest of employers looking at partnerships to help with the webinars. If any suggestions we would love to hear from you please email Allison Bradford, Robert Vehock or Heather Watson.
- **Pay for Success Grant:** Mr. Vehock mentioned the Pay for Success grant is a grant that DOC was awarded last year to better implement an outcome based contracting system for recovery housing. Jessica Exkano was recently hired to oversee the Pay for Success grant. He stated a lot of the work up to this point has been around data and defining problems with good conversations. Mr. Vehock commended Angela Whittaker and the rest of the Data Research team on their work with the project up to this point. Their patience and dedication to this project is an early indication of success and speaks to the potential moving forward.

ROAR Update, Shelley Edgerton, DPS&C

- Mrs. Edgerton explained that ROAR is a BJA grant, which DOC received in the late fiscal year in 2019. ROAR stands for Re-entry from Opioid Addiction and recovery. The goal of ROAR is to reduce post release recidivism rates among the opioid users housed at Bayou Dorcheat, which is unfortunately only for men. She stated the program provides integrative care to offenders with

opioid use disorders in our rural community; intensive substance use treatment, comprehensive treatment and discharge planning and it provides pre- and post- release medication assisted treatment in the form of oral Naltrexone from the time they enter the facility and join the program. The program offers oral Naltrexone, which is an antagonist to opioids as well as help stops cravings while they are incarcerated. The participants can also opt in for Vivitrol injections, which is also a form of Naltrexone in a Depo extended release injection.

- Mrs. Edgerton stated that ROAR joined with Sobergrid, which is a peer support cell phone app that allow participants to pick their peer coach and peer support specialist. She stated Sobergrid also allows the participants to use GPS location while traveling. For example, if traveling, they can put in their location and it will show the nearest AA or NA meetings in that area if they need to or feel the need to attend.
- Mrs. Edgerton asked that everyone please consider making referrals to the program, especially if representatives are present from Probation and Parole.

Other Business, Rhett Covington, Assistant Secretary

- Assistant Secretary Covington stated as mentioned earlier in this meeting that Act 236, which becomes affected August 31, 2021, states that an appointed RAC member who is absent for 2 meetings out of 4 consecutive meetings may be removed from the RAC. The RAC shall notify the nominating entity if the person has been removed from the council membership pursuant to this Subsection and request that the appointing entity provide a list of three nominees to the governor to fill the vacancy. The former member shall not be eligible for reappointment until expiration of the balance of the vacated term.

Public Comment

- No public comment.

Adjournment

- Joseph Ardoin entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:53 AM. Alfreda Bester adopted the motion and the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting will be held on November 18, 2021 at 9:30 AM the location is TBD.