

**REENTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL &  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MINUTES  
Thursday, December 05, 2013**

**Advisory Council Members Present**

Whalen Gibbs, DPS&C Designee  
Secretary James LeBlanc, DPS&C  
Joseph Ardoin, LBCTC  
Mike Cazes, La Sheriff's Association  
Sue Austin, DHH Designee  
Rev. Ross English, La Chaplain Assoc.  
Kim Matherne, Designee, DCFS  
Charles Habig, Jr., AFL-CIO Designee

**Advisory Council Members  
Not Present**

Sen. Elbert Guillory, State Senator  
James Landry, LABI  
Dale LeBlanc, Associated Builders & Contractors  
Curt Eysink, LWC  
Jimmy Sawtelle, LA Community/Technical College  
Steve E. Pylant, State Representative

**Others Present**

Rita Thomas, Office of Reentry  
Gretchen McCarstle, Office of Reentry  
Rhett Covington, DPS&C

**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 July 31, 2013. Sheriff Mike Cazes motioned that the minutes be approved and the motion was seconded by Joseph Ardoin and passed with a unanimous vote.

**Opening Remarks**

Secretary Leblanc opened the meeting by thanking the Council for attending and being a part of Reentry. Secretary Leblanc informed the Council of several updates on the Department. He stated that the Budget meetings have started for the next fiscal year at this point it's still uncertain as to exactly where the Department's budget will be. He indicated that there would most likely be some budget challenges in the upcoming fiscal year. The Secretary also mentioned our prison population was down as we have almost a thousand fewer inmates as compared to a year ago and feels that our state prison reentry efforts and Local Regional Reentry efforts in providing programs has helped lead to this reduction. The Secretary indicated he is optimistic that at some point maybe we can get out of this label of "Highest Incarceration rate

per capita in the World". Secretary LeBlanc indicated that the state's general population is going up, while our prison population is going down.

The Secretary mentioned a couple of grants the Department received which we are in the process of working with Sheriff Cazes on in the Capital Region for Reentry Program for the local level like we have in Northwest Louisiana and Southeast Louisiana. The goal is to establish the program by March 2014. He indicated DPS&C staff had a couple of meetings with Sheriff Cazes and some of his staff and we are moving in the right direction. Along with that grant, the Department received a couple of grants for Draft Design training for offenders which will be taught at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women and Allen Correctional Center. Warden Cain and the Reentry Court Program are continuing to move in the right direction. We have had a couple of offenders in Orleans violate, but the overall success of the program participants is promising. Judge White, Judge Hunter both of Orleans and Judge Knight from St. Tammy, are very energetic and doing a great job in getting people in the Reentry Court process. The program is opened to offenders sentenced by the court to ten (10) years or less for a non-violent, non-sex offense. Once sentenced to the program the offender is transferred to Angola for vocational programming, educational programming, substance abuse programming or whatever the case might be and then go back to court and get put on probation.

The Secretary indicated one of the biggest challenges for our department is local level housing of offenders with sheriffs and trying to get programs there. He stated that some of the local jails are on track with reentry programs. He stated that we have over 100 certified treatment programs at the local level. It's really kind of the way to "crack the nut" if you will. 11,000 of 15,000 discharging annually are released from local jails which recidivism rates are higher compared to offenders released from state prisons. The average length of sentence for offenders in state prisons is 20 years compared to eight (8) years for offenders serving time on the local level. The recidivism rate at the local level is almost 50 percent and the recidivism at the state prison is approximately 44 percent. You think that would be the opposite but you can contribute that to probably the lack of programming at the local level. The recidivism rate is going down. The average at 49 percent back in '08 now the average is right at 45 percent. So, that's a good thing. It doesn't sound like a lot but it means a lot when you look at 15,000 that are coming back into the system. So there are a lot of good things going on right now.

The Secretary again mentioned the budget and the hopes that the Revenue Estimating forecast would be positive for the State and the Department. The Secretary indicated that merit increases for our employees were very important. He indicated that the Department hasn't given our employees a merit raise in four or five years. He indicated the merit increase for department staff is still a high priority as "they deserve that". He stated when he became Secretary in 2008 the department had approximately 7,000 employees and now that number is approximately 4,700. He indicated that during his tenure, four state prisons have closed and the officer ratio to the inmate population is fairly significant and a little concerning in some places and those things we have to be careful with.

Secretary LeBlanc indicated the department is working on a project in southwest Louisiana that will be an innovative project to assist with workforce needs in that area. He indicated it isn't public yet, but it's an enormous project that deals with the transitional work program. It has a

little bit to do with Phelps Correctional Center and possibly getting it reestablished as a Transitional Work Program and training site for offenders. There's a lot of work to get us there but he stated that he has been meeting with other state department heads regarding this project. He stated that their intentions are that once they get the RFP ready to go on bid that it will probably be a private sector but they are going to call it a Workforce Development Transition Program where they are going to partner with businesses and industries to come in and tell them what they need training wise and get them to invest in the training upfront That will probably be our next big step in this reentry efforts and the Council can help with that.

Secretary Leblanc stated that he discussed with Mr. Gibbs about the Council getting involved with the Sentencing Commission on these sorts of projects and have the Council on board with this. He stated that once he gets it official, he will come and sit down with Council and see how they can help with the Sentencing Commission and get involved with this and help them move forward. Outside of that, he stated this was a quick update as to what was going on in the department.

Secretary Le Blanc stated that the Department is looking at Six Sigma and how we may be more efficient. A consultant is going to be hired within a couple of weeks to come in and review nine different agencies on how we may be more efficient and save money. Strengthening Probation and Parole is an area we can look at and I'm going to continue to stay focused on. A real key area, we have 70,000 people on probation and parole. That number is down from previous years. Actually, it's down by 1200 which is good. Administratively we are doing some things to help reduce the workload of probation and parole officers and doing it in a very conscious public safety way enabling our agents to spend more time with the offenders that needs to spend more time with and not spend as much time with the ones that don't need to be as supervised.

Secretary Leblanc again thanked the Council for attending the meeting knowing that they have busy schedules. He stated that he does have plans for the Council to be an integral part of this workforce development initiative that's going to be happening for the department.

**Asst. Secretary Whalen Gibbs asked that Gretchen do a Roll Call. Please see above as to who were in attendance.**

**Item #3: Introduction (New Appointments – Dale LeBlanc and Joseph Ardoin)**

Whalen Gibbs introduced Joseph Ardoin, new appointee for the Louisiana Building & Trade Commission and Dale Leblanc, who was appointed to represent Associated Builders and Contractors. Mr. LeBlanc isn't present today but these are the two new appointees to the Council. We would also like to congratulate Sheriff Cazes. The Governor reappointed him to represent the Louisiana Sheriff's Association.

Mr. Gibbs asked Mr. Ardoin if he wanted to introduce himself. He did an introduction to the Council.

Mr. Gibbs welcomed Ross English who is filling in for the Chaplain Association.

#### **Item 4: Legislation (Tax Credits)**

Senator Guillory had talked at a previous meeting about wanting to revisit the tax credit for employers that hire ex-offenders... Secretary Leblanc also indicated that he wanted to revisit the tax credit as well. Mr. Gibbs referred them to HB 578 and HB 750 that were included in their folder. He explained that they are tax laws that are currently in existence. In 2009, then Representative Richmond introduced Legislation 578 which actually passed the Legislature but was vetoed by the Governor and HB 750 proposed raising the tax credit amount from \$200 to \$1000 tax credit for employers that hired ex-offenders. It also allowed a \$2500 tax credit for business or corporations that hired ex-offenders. This was a significant increase from \$200 to \$2500. Mr. Gibbs indicated in the Governor's veto message he indicated why he generally supports programs which targets reducing recidivism, he vetoed the bill largely because of the fiscal impact. It was going to be a \$750,000 impact and at that time the State was facing about a 1.2 billion dollar deficit. We are thinking that we can revisit that again at this time. Senator Guillory has agreed to carry this forward for us. We also have Representative Plant on the Commission with us so we believe that they can carry the legislation forward.

There was another piece of legislation and was introduced in 2009 by Representative Guillory which increased tax credits for skilled craftsman and actually introduced tax credit for a person that was a skilled craftsman for a \$1000 credit. That piece of legislation didn't make it out of committee but he is looking at revisiting that again. I think this is especially important in light of what we are trying to do at Phelps with the skilled craftsman.

Question – Is there anything on the books now for skilled craftsman?

Mr. Gibbs responded that there is nothing on the books now for skilled craftsman. What he did was tack it onto a current legislation for intensive incarceration for that \$150 tax credit so he added the skilled craftsman into that but it did not make it out of committee. But, he is going to revisit that again and that is especially important now that we are trying to get established in Southwest Louisiana. It is also important for skilled craftsmen returning to our communities every day. So those are two pieces of legislation that we will be looking at to see if we can get one or both through.

Mr. Gibbs opened the floor for any questions or comments regarding this issue.

#### **Item 5: Overview Louisiana Chaplains Association**

Mr. Gibbs asked Mr. Ross English for a presentation from the Louisiana Chaplains Association. Mr. English stated that the Louisiana Chaplains Association is going through a transition/reorganization. What they have ended up becoming over the past couple of years is certification committee for others who want to work within the system. Our whole organization has changed like reentry and all these other things that have taken place. I know that there are a

number of chaplains that have had an interest in working with reentry up in north Louisiana, Hunt and at DCI. We have never done anything to train and equip to work with the faith-based community out there to really be effective in dealing with Corrections. What's going on with inmate? We have a lot of churches. A lot of volunteers that really interested in helping us but if those churches and those volunteers don't have the understanding about the people they are dealing with when they come out of prison, they are in trouble. So a lot of what the organization is looking to do now is to expand our net, if you will, to really work on reaching out to their hospice chaplain, police chaplain, there are a whole lot of other chaplains in this State that we don't have contact with to speak of. So wanting to really expand who we are into a net not only with chaplains dealing with the criminal element or those that are somewhere in the corrections system but dealing with all the other parts of this because hospice in this State has gotten to be very large organization.

Chaplain English indicated LCA wants to be more than an entity that simple goes through a certification process for chaplains. We want to also become an organization that helps to train and equip people in their area of expertise and that's really not been the case. So, that's the reorganization that we are going through. It's kind of turned into a "good ole boys" club not necessary out of intent but it just ended up being that. A lot of retirees have gone out. A lot of senior people that were involved with the Louisiana Chaplain's Association have retired and no longer active, so we are kind of growing up younger people involved with us because if all we are going to do is certify chaplains that are going to work within the state hospitals systems for the Department of Corrections that whole thing is going to change with the budget changes. Eliminating those spots with everything else that is going on we won't exist if that's all we do. So we are really looking at what are the elements that are important in this State that we as chaplains can do because the majority of chaplains that are in key position are pretty much well trained. We have to have not only bachelor degrees but master's degrees and post graduate training in the expertise of where we are going. So all we are focusing on is doing a worship service and bible study in prison and making rounds in the hospital, we are really allowing ourselves to be gravely underutilized and that's what we are really looking at right now. How do we reach out into things like what's going on here and have an impact? There are a lot of faith-based groups out there that want to help people that are struggling and whether they are people trying to reintegrate back into society or whether they are people with medical problems or any legal issues. We are looking at ways to help in the future.

#### **Item 6: Workforce Development Transition Work Program**

Whalen Gibbs stated that Secretary Leblanc previously touched upon this issue. And that it is very important for us to do all we can to get these individuals placed when they are released. What has come to mind now is a program that we have up at Angola, the Reentry Court. We have taken a look at those individuals completing the program. They are getting out and skilled in welding and carpentry and a host of trades, but not many are going to work in the trade that they have acquired. We need to find a way to better plug them into the workforce. Our workforce friends are not here today, but they are actually part of this Council and what I would like to see happen there is find a way to get those individuals in the pipeline before they are released from prison. We have been in discussion with the workforce commission for

approximately two or three years regarding getting them plugged in and getting the application process started before they actually get out of prison. But, that hit a snag and hasn't gone anywhere. I think that is really key and they are actually important part of the Reentry Court. Whenever the Reentry Court program was developed, they actually were the lead agency. It was all allied with workforce development. So we are going to try and get them a little bit more involved and somehow improve on getting these offenders in the workforce pipeline. As we look at the many offenders releasing with skilled trades and being involved in a legal occupation, that's great; but, if you can get them involved in the trade they have acquired that's even better then they can earn a livable wage. So we are going to see if we can do a little bit better there. Of course, anything the Trade Organization, Mr. Ardoin, your group, and Louisiana Association of Business Industry can do to promote employment would strengthen opportunities for offenders.

Secretary Leblanc made a comment about the fines, court cost, and reinstatement fees that the offenders have to face when they get out of prison and try to secure a driver license. He indicated this is an area we are exploring in an effort to assist offenders and streamline the process.

#### **Item 7: Reentry Strategic Plan (Identifying goals for 2014)**

Mr. Gibbs stated that he forwarded the latest copy of the strategic plan as well as putting a copy in the folder for today's meeting. He stated that a manual to be done will include a reentry strategic plan and other items needed to go into that manual related to the Council and once completed each member will receive a copy. Mr. Gibbs indicated a review of the Act creating the Council charges the Council with improving reentry and one of the goals is to seek funding for reentry opportunities. We were awarded a Planning Grant that we were able to use to produce the five year strategic plan. We also were awarded a grant for Design Technology training that will be implemented at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women and Allen Correctional Center. These are actual accomplishments that we have made that are in Legislation regarding funding. We will continue to seek other funding mechanisms as well. Sometimes we think that we are running in place and not getting anywhere, but this shows that we are working and we are accomplishing some goals that are going to prove to be a good shot in the arm to reentry.

Mr. Gibbs mentioned offenders serving time on the local level and most of them don't have the necessary opportunities for programming like we have in the state facility. Correction Education Director, Ms. Kim Barnette is expanding the educational opportunities on the local level where Corrections is now becoming the lead on that. Right now we have six local jails where we are leading the charge where it relates to the academic/educational program and we plan on bringing on more as well. We've heard over the years that we are releasing 15,000 annually, but as I spoke with one of our computer technicians, she indicated that annual releases now is 17,000 that we have been releasing in the past three (3) years and of course most of those are being released at the local level.

Mr. Gibbs asked the members to select two major goals out of the Strategic Plan that they feel would be a priority in 2014.

**Item 8: Expansion of Regional Reentry Programs**

Mr. Gibbs asked Rhett Covington to elaborate on the expansion of regional reentry programs. Mr. Covington stated that one of the strategic plan goals for this body and for the state and for the DOC was to continue to put in regional hubs for pre-release training and preparation for people coming from the local jails into the communities. Also to prevent or reduce recidivism by taking those people who are out on probation or parole in a particular area and who have technical violations. They haven't been arrested for a new crime. They just are not holding it together, so they start going back to court with violation. They start piling up like failure to pay restitution and put them in a day reporting center where we can start to give them some true case management, a lot closer attention, cognitive behavior interventions, try and get their thinking pattern changed, and help them be better organized and get them back on track. Mr. Covington indicated that we were awarded a grant from the Federal Government that would allow us to establish two of those programs in Baton Rouge, Day Reporting and Regional Reentry Programming. The Department is going to work with Sheriff Cazes to put the regional reentry program in place. We are waiting right now on the Federal Government to give us the okay to spend the money. They still have a few things they want to review before they give us the go ahead. We are working in 2014 with Sheriff Cazes to put together the regional reentry program for the local area. We are also putting in a Day Reporting Center which will help and try and get those offenders falling into problems back on track and reduce the number of violation they have going on in this area.

Mr. Gibbs indicated that as part of the goals for this Legislation, we were also charged with researching evidence based practices. I'm pleased to report that one of the evidence based practices that we have researched, and getting ready to implement is "Thinking for a Change Behavior" program model. We have staff that has been trained at our institution at the state level and now we are moving to implementation at the state level. As you hear more about cognitive behavior, there's a lot out there about education. Education is usually important and so is substance abuse treatment in getting the offender on track. There is growing information in corrections that cognitive behavior is where we actually are getting the biggest bang for the buck. As you get to those individuals with thinking errors which most often has lead them down the wrong path. There are several states that have actually implemented "Thinking for a Change" and what we like about it is that it's an evidence based program and other than training there is no cost to implement...

**Item 9: Meeting scheduled calendar year 2014**

Mr. Gibbs asked the Council to look over the proposed scheduled calendar for 2014 - 2015 (March, 2014 – December, 2015). Meetings are held on Thursdays at Headquarters starting at 9:30 a.m.

Mr. Gibbs stated that regarding the Federal Reentry Advisory Committee Myths and Fact, he would like to see the Council develop in Louisiana Myths and Facts relating to Reentry. Examples like mentioned regarding food stamps in the Federal Reentry Myth Busters.

**Item 10: Transaction of such other business as may properly come before the Council**

No new business.

At 10:48 a.m. Joseph Ardoin move that the meeting be adjourned which was seconded by Sheriff Cazes.