

Work Release Siting Advisory Committee

Minutes – November 14, 2007

Hilton Hotel in Vancouver, WA

5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Committee members present: Anne Fiala, Ross Gallagher, John Hickman, Ed Holm, Nancy McLaughlin, Tim Quenzer, and Marie Sullivan

Committee members absent: Ida Ballasiotes

Moderator: David Jansen

Support: Simone Currier and Sandy Robertson

Welcome

David Jansen welcomed the committee and asked them to introduce themselves.

The Committee reviewed and approved the agenda.

Judge Hickman motioned to approve the October 3, 2007, committee minutes; Tim Quenzer seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as submitted.

Review of Data

David led a review of data and information provided to the Committee and made available to members of the audience. Regarding the capacity at each work release facility, David explained that the population measurement consistently used by the Department is capacity rather than available bed space. However, since this committee is evaluating physical bed space, David would be walking the committee through the difference, and would then only discuss physical beds.

With recidivism rates increasing locally and nationally, the Department hopes to reduce the demand for prison beds; however, it is anticipated that additional prisons will be needed in Washington. In August 2007, Secretary Clarke outlined the re-entry initiative for the Committee. The plan reflected on page six of the presentation reflects the work release component of the re-entry initiative.

In reviewing the information on page seven of the presentation, Tim Quenzer asked about the recidivism rate of work release compared to that of offender released from medium security facilities. Anne Fiala referenced the report by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP), which is due to be released November 15, 2007. The WSIPP studied work release participants compared to a cohort of identical individuals that served their entire sentence in prison.

Nancy McLaughlin asked about the potential for a “matching” program to send offenders to the work release that is closest to their county of origin. Anne indicated that the Department is working to get the offender into the work release facility that is closest to the county of origin;

however, availability of work release beds is always a consideration. Nancy suggested that employers may not want to hire a work release offender, knowing that the offender will have to return to the county of origin upon completion of the sentence. Anne agreed that this will be an issue; however, the time an offender spends in work release should allow for the offender to become stabilized, resulting in an easier transition into the community.

David explained that the Department is faced with a shortage of prison beds; the trend-lines reflected on page eight of the presentation reflect these shortages. Chairman Holm asked if work release facilities accept out-of-state offenders; Anne indicated that is not the case and this was confirmed by Steve Johnson, Field Administrator.

The group discussed the gender analysis data, which indicates 93% of the current prison population is male and 7% is female. With the projected increase in the female population, the data provided reflects a ratio of 90% male and 10% female. Ross Gallagher asked if it is more appropriate to have gender-specific facilities; in the case of female facilities, those may be better utilized if they were regional. Anne indicated that this is definitely a possibility.

Audience member Bertha Fitzer stated that the female beds at Progress House Work Release were not restricted to females only, but can be converted to male beds if needed. Anne indicated this is incorrect – the female beds at this facility are dedicated to use by female offenders only. Anne explained there are specific sections of most facilities that are kept separate for the use of female offenders.

Nancy recently toured Pine Lodge Corrections Center for Women in Spokane and was very impressed. She asked why some of those women are not housed at the Spokane work release facility for women (Eleanor Chase Work Release). Anne indicated that Eleanor Chase Work Release has a dedicated space for mother/baby rooms and works to accommodate female offenders with babies. This puts some limitations on the facility.

The group discussed the criteria for an exception to the county of origin placement. Anne indicated that victim issues are one of the criteria that results in a placement exception to the county of origin.

Nancy expressed interest in data regarding the offenders who were historically housed at work release, in terms of their current employment and housing locations. She is also interested in knowing the degree or level of assistance that counties have provided to each other. Anne indicated that the Department does not have this information in the data system. Audience member Bertha Fitzer argued that she obtained the data for a report she recently prepared and that the Department definitely has access to this information.

The group discussed specific counties, regional areas currently covered by specific work release facilities, and the utilization of current work release beds.

Overlay Factors

Tim previously provided input to David; it is reflected in the information provided. Other input from Committee members included:

Nancy – housing availability upon completion of work release and the Department should provide financial assistance and/or incentives if a work release is interested in adding beds

Judge Hickman - offered several additional overlay factors

- how to mitigate for historically under- or over-used facilities
- regional incentives and/or regional coordination
- consideration of those counties that have historically carried more than their share of this population
- the number of sex offenders in a community (no county should have more sex offenders than another county)

Ross – consider volunteer partnerships between counties

The group then discussed sex offender placement. Ross asked if sex offenders are released back to their county of origin; David indicated that is the case, unless an exception applies.

Judge Hickman asked why work release does not house many sex offenders. Anne believes it is hard for sex offenders to meet all of the screening criteria to be eligible for placement in work release facilities. In addition, many communities have required commitments from the Department to not house sex offenders at local work release facilities. Judge Hickman asked Anne if there is information available on the recidivism rate of SOSSA offenders; Anne indicated that SOSSA offenders do have lower recidivism rates and that the Department does have data on this population.

Ross asked if the intent is to double to work release capacity for sex offenders. Anne replied that the Department has not separated that specific population, in terms of new beds. David indicated that even if the work release bed capacity is doubled, there will still not be enough beds so that all offenders can participate in work release.

Judge Hickman stated that nobody wants a sex offender in their community. Anne indicated this is a common issue. With the local agreements that prohibit sex offenders in work release facilities, there will not be equitable distribution of capacity for sex offenders unless the local agreements are re-negotiated.

Marie Sullivan asked if the Department has data regarding county of origin. Anne responded that there is very limited data, since the law just took effect in July 2007. Secretary Clarke has asked the Department to focus on specific catchment areas and put offenders at local work release facilities so they can release in (or near) their county of origin. Offenders may apply to different work release facilities; however, the Department's screening process will determine final placement. Marie asked if the new Secretary will continue this practice and Anne replied that she has not yet discussed this with the Interim/Acting Secretary.

David added that the Department wants work release to be as successful as possible. The equitable distribution requirement is a legal requirement – not just Secretary Clarke's direction.

Judge Hickman does not want to over-burden specific counties or locations. The county of origin is an overlay by law.

Anne agreed, stating that the law says "upon release", which means either release from prison or from work release. The Secretary has decided to put offenders as close to their county of origin as possible so they can establish local networks and utilize available re-entry programs.

Public Input

Following a brief recess, Chairman Holm invited audience members to address the Committee.

Gary Nelson, Snohomish County Council Member, gave a brief history of work release in Washington, starting with the Honor Farm at the Monroe prison where offenders learned discipline, work ethic, and responsibility. The Department chose to eliminate this program, which could easily be re-instated and replicated at McNeil Island Corrections Center, Airway Heights Corrections Center, and Clallam Bay Corrections Center. Mr. Nelson spoke about the downfalls of external work release facilities, including the lack of adequate employment opportunities. Mr. Nelson also reminded the Committee of the work release offender (Charles Rodman Campbell) who killed three people in Snohomish County. Mr. Nelson indicated that the Department did not follow the restraints imposed by the judge in providing adequate supervision of Campbell. Mr. Nelson supports a shared/regional approach to provide adequate employment opportunities. He also suggested that the overlay include the need for family support for offenders releasing into the community. The city of Monroe is currently struggling with the burden of having so many offender families and the major impact this has on the school system. Mr. Nelson asked the Committee to consider where crimes are committed and where the criminals reside at the time they commit crimes. Finally, he suggested the need for vocational and educational opportunities for offenders.

Deanne Dawson, Snohomish County Executive, supports the testimony of Mr. Nelson. The Campbell incident is still very raw to the residents of Snohomish County, as is the great animosity that the residents have for the Department. Regarding the overlays, Ms. Dawson suggested the Committee look at other correctional facilities in counties (to include prisons). The ability to site, build, staff, and operate a work release facility should be carefully considered, as well as the affordability of the sites. Ms. Dawson also suggested the Committee consider the availability of affordable housing near work release facilities. There are currently four correctional facilities operating in Snohomish County and those are not fully staffed, due to the difficulty in finding interested and qualified employees.

Diane Oberquell, Thurston County Commissioner, presented several concerns. Dangerously mentally ill offenders and seriously mentally ill offenders should be placed in areas where there are support services for these populations. Thurston County has received two dangerously mentally ill offenders and has no support services available. Additionally, Ms. Oberquell expressed concern that a local citizen is providing un-supervised housing for offenders; the county is now looking at zoning codes. She indicated there is a dangerously mentally ill offender who county of origin is Clark, yet he was placed in Thurston County. Ms. Oberquell believes Thurston County is becoming a dump site. Anne indicated she is not familiar with the specific cases being referenced; however, she will work with Ms. Oberquell to gather more information for follow-up.

Bertha Fitzer, Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, spoke at length about the lack of information before the Committee and asserted that the data provided thus far is incomplete. Ms. Fitzer pointed to the data analysis and report conducted by her office to support her belief that additional data and information is available and should be provided to the Committee. Ms. Fitzer is concerned that the only work release for mentally ill offenders is located in Pierce County. She referenced the partnership between the Department and Clark County and suggested the Committee expand these relationships with more county jail facilities. Judge Hickman asked Ms. Fitzer if she supports a regional approach; Ms. Fitzer believes the population would still "spill over". She strongly advocated for mitigation for Pierce and Spokane

Counties. Ms. Fitzer closed her testimony by asking the Committee if they have been provided with enough information to make informed decisions.

Chairman Holm reminded the Committee that it is not their task to evaluate the use of work release facilities; that is the job of the Legislature. The Committee is tasked with the issue of siting new facilities.

Judge Hickman stated the conversations have raised factors that should be considered in the Committee's recommendations to the Department. If there is additional data or information available, the Committee should have it. The Committee needs to look at the broad picture and made recommendations accordingly. How work release facilities operate is not within the purview of this Committee. David Offered to capture operationally related comments as a side bar to the main task and supply it in a letter to WDOC.

Chairman Holm asked Ms. Fitzer to provide the additional data and information that she referenced.

The group discussed appropriate employment opportunities for work release offenders. David suggested the Committee review page six of the presentation, which shows the focus on education and vocational training. These skills are intended to be obtained in prison so that they can be utilized once offenders get to work release. The last few months of work release should then be spent in outside employment so that offenders obtain the foundation upon which to build once they release into the community.

David indicated that he will forward the WSIPP report to the Committee members, once it is available.

Tim asked if the Department has considered transitioning to statewide jail partnerships. Anne responded that this has been an option for at least fifteen years; however, it depends on what the communities propose in terms of partnerships.

Judge Hickman added that jails are very overcrowded, especially in metropolitan areas. This often results in early release from jail; many counties would not have the ability to enter into such partnerships with the Department. Anne indicated that King County has contracted with the Department to have their jail offenders go to Department work release facilities, due to overcrowding. She added there are many different models available for consideration.

David said the overall direction of the Committee seems to be to use population with overlays. He suggested the Department begin to capture the Committee's ideas into a report format for review at the next meeting. Additionally, the Committee will have the WSIPP report by then, which can also be used to create a foundation upon which to base the next meeting's discussion.

Next Meeting

Simone Currier will schedule the next meeting in early or mid-December in the Olympia area.