

Prison Reform Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2018
9:00am - 12:00pm
Governor's Crime Commission – Room #100

Board Members Attending: Beth Austin, Art Beeler, Stanley Drewery, James French, Stephanie Hollembaek, Mike Killmer, Gary Mohr

Board Member Not Attending: Dorothy Ledford

Department of Public Safety Officials Attending: Secretary Erik A. Hooks, Reuben Young, Pam Cashwell, San Hoekstra, Jane Gilchrist, Pam Walker, Kenneth Lassiter, Joe Prater, Tim Moose, Billy Lassiter, Tracy Little

Department of Public Safety (DPS) Secretary Erik A. Hooks welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended thanks for the collective effort to form the Prison Reform Advisory Board. Secretary Hooks recognized Interim Chief Deputy Secretary, Reuben Young, and Special Assistant, Tracy Little, and welcomed them back to the Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice (ACJJ) team.

Secretary Hooks stated that agency officials are all available to respond to members' questions and inquiries. He stated the agency is seeking input from the Governor and the Legislature as well. Secy. Hooks further stated that many initiatives were undertaken over the last year, but the agency and its leaders can never do enough to truly take away the pain and loss that the families, co-workers, and communities have felt as a result of the tragic incidents that have occurred in the last year. He noted that DPS faces a daunting task and he recognizes that he is ultimately accountable for what happens. Secy. Hooks also stated that everyone collectively should hold steadfast to our commitment to enhance prison safety and security and focus on moving forward. He stated that agency staff needs the Board's input and fresh perspectives. Further, he noted that DPS employees cannot allow themselves to become complacent, go into a cycle of silence and suffer another tragedy. He recognized that the nature of public safety is dangerous; however, we must move forward with determination.

Beth Austin, Chair of the Prison Reform Advisory Board, gave opening comments. Ms. Austin retired from the military after more than 39 years. She stated that she is honored to serve and looks forward to the task of helping bring improvements to the prison system. She indicated that while she is not familiar with prison operations, she has experience in areas such as standard operating procedures, command structure, and critical incident management. Chair Austin recognized the diverse correctional experience of the other Board members and stated she looks forward to working with them.

Board members introduced themselves and gave a brief overview of their experience.

James French

Mr. French thanked the Secretary for the opportunity to serve on the Board. He indicated he would let his resume speak for itself. After retiring from the Department of Public Safety in 2012, he said he's had the opportunity to share his experience and knowledge on several issues related to reform. He worked with fellow Board member, Mr. Art Beeler, on mental health care in the prison system and most recently with CDS Young and Director Lassiter on safety and security issues. He stated his passion for this industry runs deep; he has walked in staff's shoes and knows their daily work and tasks.

Gary Mohr

Mr. Mohr serves as director of the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction in Ohio, serving in the Governor's cabinet. He served as a warden for 12 years. Mr. Mohr stated he loves this work and the people who do it. Mr. Mohr commended NCDPS for its transparency. He noted corrections gets criticized a lot, but there are many heroic acts within the corrections profession. Mr. Mohr stated that he is pleased to be a part of this Board, and after reviewing the other members' resumes he realized that they all have extensive experience. He looks for heartfelt responses from this group, and knows they will be aimed at making this system better and improving the lives of those who work here.

Mike Killmer

Mr. Killmer retired from the Federal Bureau of Prisons in 2016. Following a brief retirement, he began working part-time at Correction Enterprises. He reached out to CDS Young and Secretary Hooks after the Pasquotank Correctional Institution incident, saying he felt compelled to share some things that he had observed within the prisons in the hopes that it would help ensure that staff go home safely at night. He has experience in industry settings and custody, and his mission is to get both groups to the table to improve communication.

Stephanie Hollembaek

Ms. Hollembaek retired after 25 years with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Corrections has been her life's work. She stated she is very committed to public safety and safety of the staff and inmates. She indicated she appreciates the opportunity to learn more about the state corrections system and looks forward to sharing her experience and helping improve safety.

Art Beeler

Mr. Beeler has more than 40 years of work experience in corrections and held seven positions as warden over the years. He stated his real passion is for the correctional officers. Mr. Beeler started his career as a correctional officer and in the first two years of his career, he stated he learned more about the behavior of offenders than he did at any other time in his career. He indicated two things that must be accomplished every day: first is to keep everyone (offenders) inside the fence, and second, to ensure everyone (staff) goes home safe at the end of the shift. He reminded all to never forget the mission to keep the correctional officers and the corrections workers safe.

Stanley Drewery

Mr. Drewery is the president of State Employees Association of North Carolina (SEANC), which currently has over 50,000 members. Mr. Drewery retired from the NC Department of Correction in 2012. He held the position of lieutenant and then went to Staff Development and Training and trained staff seven years before retiring. He currently contracts with three community colleges in eastern NC to conduct training for corrections and probation and parole staff. He indicated he listens to staff daily and knows that until you walk in their shoes you really wouldn't understand their needs. He feels for these employees and hopes that he can provide input to the Board that will help employees.

Staff introductions were made, which were followed by formal presentations. All presentations are posted on the DPS website.

Beth Austin introduced Michelle Hall and John Madler from the NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission.

Michelle Hall/John Madler - Sentencing Commission Presentation

Sentencing Commission staff presented information related to sentencing policies under the Structured Sentencing Act, policy changes as a result of the Justice Reinvestment Act, and an overview of the current and projected state prison population.

- Art Beeler commented that as a result of some legislative sentencing policy changes, misdemeanor offenders now serve their sentences in local jails across the state and the people left inside of the state prison institutions are more violent than when there was a mix of misdemeanor and felon offenders.
- Gary Mohr asked if there is data showing trends on how many offenders within the prison population were convicted for violent offenses. If so, does Prisons look at the data by institution to determine how the population has changed? Michelle Hall stated that this question would be addressed later in the presentation when trend data would be covered. She stated she will need to research the options for looking at the data by institution, but it's certainly something that can be done if that is needed.
- Art Beeler commented that one thing that sticks out to him relates to classification of offenders. He noted that classification relates to both the offender and the institution, and that the two of those should be coordinated.

Prisons Director Kenneth Lassiter clarified that the classification instrument assigns points to various offender-related characteristics and the custody assignment (close, medium or minimum) is based on the point total. Offenders are housed in facilities whose security level is consistent with the assigned custody level.

Kenneth Lassiter – Prison System Presentation

Director Lassiter's presentation included information on the prison system's organization structure, staff demographics, offender population and demographics, health services, training, and strategies for managing a challenging offender population.

- Mike Killmer asked if a "mission-critical" roster had been made available to designate which vacancies were most critical and needed to be filled first to ensure the agency meets its mission. Director Lassiter assured Mr. Killmer that a priority list exists.
- Art Beeler asked if there was self-defense training for non-certified staff. Tracy Little shared that a strategic plan has been established, with five workgroups assigned to various topics. One of the workgroups is focusing on training for new and veteran employees, and addressing additional training for non-certified staff is one of their assigned tasks.

Pam Cashwell – 2017 Incidents, Audit Findings and Response Presentation

Chief Deputy Secretary Pam Cashwell provided Board members with an update of actions DPS has taken since the tragic incidents that resulted in staff fatalities. Her presentation included a timeline, and an overview of completed, and ongoing action steps.

Secretary Hooks commented that NCDPS heroes operate on what they are given, and often do not ask for help with what they need. He personally encouraged staff to share their needs, to seek information, and to communicate with each other and management.

Chair Austin shared that proposed bylaws for the Board are being developed and will be shared with the members prior to the next meeting, when they will be discussed and adopted. She stated that the first meeting had been very informative and that the Board needs to examine its next steps and how its input can be beneficial in making improvements in prisons.

Chair Austin adjourned the meeting at 12:00 noon.

Approved 6/19/2018

