

JAIL & CORRECTIONS REFORM TASK FORCE

Minutes of the 4th Meeting of the 2023 Interim September 26, 2023

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fourth meeting of the Jail & Corrections Reform Task Force was held on September 26, 2023, at 9:30 AM in Room 169 of the Capitol Annex. Senator John Schickel, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator John Schickel Co-Chair; Representative Josh Bray Co-Chair; Senators Brandon J. Storm, Whitney Westerfield, and Phillip Wheeler; Representatives David Hale, Keturah Herron, and Jason Petrie.

Guests: Alecia Webb Edgington, President & CEO, Life Learning Center; Kentucky Jailers Association Board Members Steve Harmon, Warren County Jailer; William Hensley, Boyd County Jailer; and Lisa Yeary, Mason County Jailer.

LRC Staff: Roberta Kiser, Randall Roof, and Jennifer Smith.

Approval of Minutes of the July 24, 2023, Meeting and of the August 28, 2023, Meeting

Upon motion by Representative Hale and second by Senator Storm, the minutes for July 24, 2023, and August 28, 2023, meetings were approved without objection.

Inmate Reentry Programs

Alecia Webb Edgington, President and CEO, Life Learning Center, provided an overview of the work the Life Learning Center does for those with felony convictions in Northern Kentucky to achieve successful reentry upon completion of their sentence. Inmate reentry programs are provided by non-profit organizations that support the at-risk in the community. A good portion of those served suffer substance abuse and mental health disorders. The Life Learning Center was established with the mission to create a cognitive approach to change and help at-risk citizens reach their highest potential.

Ms. Webb Edgington shared the experience of one of the individuals they have been able to serve, Mr. James Lay. Mr. Lay endured trauma during his childhood and experienced a cycle of incarceration as an adult. Through programming provided by the Life Learning Center, Mr. Lay learned the life skills necessary to obtain employment and full custody of his children.

Ms. Webb Edgington described the methods the center uses to help everyone that is court ordered to receive treatment and other citizens who participate in the center's programming. Ms. Webb Edgington described the methods the center uses to help individual that is court ordered to receive treatment and other citizens who participate in the center's programming. There are twelve steps to the Life Learning Center program, including some dealing with past or present traumas and mental disabilities. With this program there are five pillars; physical, emotional, relational, financial, and spiritual. The care continuum is administered by social workers and peer support specialists who have three years of sobriety. In 2023, the center received 943

referrals, conducted 623 interviews, and accepted 312 individuals into the program. There were 271 individuals that required a higher level of care, meaning they were in active use or in an active state of psychosis. The other 40 individuals did not qualify because of the nature of their convictions. However, 127 individuals have graduated the program.

Senator Schickel said he appreciated that the center and its relationship to clients is not transactional and thanked Ms. Edgington for her leadership.

Senator Westerfield said after touring the Life Learning Center he would love to see it replicated in other communities.

In response to a question from Representative Bray, Ms. Webb Edgington responded they have been visiting other facilities and speaking across the state. There is definitely a way to communicate with community action groups, hospitals, and other rehab facilities. People appreciate that the Life Learning Center knows who they are and that the services provided are not transactional. If given the opportunity to move into other areas of the Commonwealth, that is her passion right now.

Alternatives to a State Administered Correctional System

Kentucky Jailers Association Board Members Steve Harmon, Warren County Jailer; William Hensley, Boyd County Jailer; and Lisa Yeary, Mason County Jailer, were present to propose alternative solutions to the current problems the corrections system is facing. Mr. Harmon proposed that the General Assembly create an office within the Department of Corrections to perform jail inspections and create a new grading scale. Mr. Harmon also proposed that the Department of Corrections be authorized to enter into contracts with individual detention facilities. This would allow the Department of Corrections to make contracts with local facilities based on the needs and resources of both parties.

Mr. Harmon stated that classification of inmates is still an issue for local jails because the inmates are unable to participate in any programming. The length it is taking to classify inmates is becoming a financial burden on the county and the Commonwealth. Finally, Mr. Harmon proposed that inmates with mental health issues should be housed by the Commonwealth because not all local facilities have mental health providers on staff and the financial burden is too high.

Lisa Yeary, Mason County Jailer, provided 3 more proposals from the association. First, Ms. Yeary proposed that the Commonwealth reimburse the county when an inmate receives credit on their sentence for time they have served in the local facility. Second, Ms. Yeary proposed that the General Assembly provide for specific speedy trial timelines in statute. There are 35 other states that have speedy trial rules either by statute or court rule. Finally, Ms. Yeary suggested that the General Assembly consider expanding the diversion program. Kentucky's current diversion statute is unique because it prohibits entry into the program for people previously convicted of specific types of offenses and establishes a lookback period for any prior conviction. Only California and Delaware have equally exclusionary laws.

Senator Storm stated that the speedy trial bill he filed in the 2023 Regular Session had the support of the district judges, however, the circuit court judges were not in favor. Senator Storm further explained that 98 percent of cases are resolved by plea bargain and only 2 percent of cases go to trial.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the task force, the meeting adjourned at 10:46 A.M. The next meeting of the task force will be October 23, at 11 A.M.