

Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition  
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction  
Union Conference Room  
Columbus, Ohio  
June 17, 2009  
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Minutes

*Statutory Members:*

Director Terry Collins (ODRC)	Director Angela Cornelius Dawson (ODADAS)
Director Barbara Riley (ODOA)	Kevin Aldridge (ODMRDD)
John Flinn (ODJFS)	Kim Hettel (GOFBCI)
Cheryl Martinez (RSC)	William Russell (BR)
Kevin Shepherd (DYS)	Jamie Blair (ODH)
Debbie Nixon-Hughes (ODMH)	Tom Dilling (Licensing)
Brian Misencik (ODC)	Sharon Schnelle (DPS)
R. Linn Davey (ODE)	

*Members-At-Large:*

Lenora Berry	Bobbie Boyer
Judge Bob Fragale	Mary Gillette
Stephen Johnson Groves	Alicia Gardia
Betsy Johnson	Mary Spottswood
Edward Little	Sally Luken
Phillip Nunes	Jim Slagle
Melissa Pierson	Wesley Pullam
Denise Robinson	Judge Michael Russo
Bishop Joseph Sprague	Kim Linkinhoker
Linda Thompson Kohli	Wendy Neihaus
Blain Brockman	Scott Sylak
Edward Little	Jody Demo-Hodgin
Anne Connel-Freund	Joann Decker
Reggie Wilkinson	

*Other Attendees:*

Robert Hammond (ODRC)	Katrina Ranson (ODRC)
Tracy Tyson-Parker (ODRC)	Wanda Suber (ODRC)
Chris Yanai (ODRC)	Doug Forbes (ODRC)
Alicia Handwerk (ODRC)	Rod Woods (ODRC)
Ed Rhine (ODRC)	Angi Lee (ODRC)
John Matthews (ODRC)	Joyce Starr (ODADAS)
Lauren Spero (ODOD)	Lauren Massie (BR)
Kim Hall (ODE)	Steve Vandine (ODRC)
Toni Brooks (ODRC)	Melissa Knopp (Supreme Court)

Director Collins opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, giving thanks to both the statutory and at-large members for their commitment to the coalition.

## **Strategic Planning Committee**

The strategic planning committee will become the annual report committee. Brad DeCamp, ODADAS and Angi Lee, DRC, are co-chairing this committee. The annual report, as described in HB130, is due on December 1, 2009. This committee will begin working closely with the Quality Improvement Research Committee to determine how to collect and interpret information regarding the goals and objectives set forth in the plan for the report. The strategic plan is an evolving document that can and will change over the course of the next several years, as its goals and objectives are completed and/or subject to revision.

As they form, and become operational, local reentry coalitions across the state will continue to be encouraged to review and draw from the Reentry Coalition's reentry document for the development of their local strategic plans, and when applying for federal grant dollars under the Second Chance Act.

The annual report committee will also draft by-laws that will provide guidance and direction on roles and responsibilities for both statutory members and Members-At-Large. It will be prepared for review at the next meeting of the Reentry Coalition.

## **Grants Development Committee**

The intent of this committee is to make Ohio more competitive for grants, offer non-financial technical assistance, and provide state level support and review for funding opportunities for those preparing and/or submitting reentry proposals.

The committee developed a protocol for requesting letters of support from the coalition. The request must be made at a minimum of 72 hours in advance of the grant submission deadline, and must be accompanied draft of the program proposal.

If an applicant wants to conduct work inside a DRC correctional facility, they are asked to get in touch with that specific site early in the grants development process. This will ensure that there is an agreement by all the parties involved about the program being proposed and what will be required for its implementation.

The full protocol for securing letters of support from the Reentry Coalition will be posted on its soon-to-be activated website. The state agencies who are members of the Reentry Coalition are asked to send their protocol for letters of support to [Angi.Lee@odrc.state.oh.us](mailto:Angi.Lee@odrc.state.oh.us) so that they can be posted on the website as well.

A spreadsheet of grant information has been prepared by DRC that highlights upcoming funding opportunities and the status of submissions. Another spreadsheet has been developed that is used by legislators to lobby in

Washington for funding for Ohio applicants. Information on these documents will be posted on the website.

The Office of Criminal Justice Services has approximately 700 applicants for Byrne/stimulus money currently under review. Announcements will be made on the awards on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

There has been some discussion about setting aside stimulus money specifically for reentry. More details will be forthcoming over the summer.

### **Quality Improvement Research Committee (QIRC)**

Bob Swisher, OCJS, has stepped down as the chair of this committee. Sharon Schnelle, OCJS, will become the chair. She is requesting that someone volunteer to serve with her as a co-chair from one of the member agencies of the Reentry Coalition.

This committee will be responsible for collecting and interpreting the data and other performance measures to be included in the Coalition's annual report. In approximately 30 – 60 days, the QIRC will send out a survey to find out what data elements are already being collected to determine what data measures may need to be developed.

The data collection and interpretation will be used to update the strategic plan, complete a process evaluation, and determine the overall impact of the coalition relative to its strategic plan.

### **Website Committee**

A preview was given of the design of the Reentry Coalition's website. The design was developed by offenders at the Prison News Network at Marion Correctional Institution.

The website, which is expected to go live in three weeks or so, will be dynamic in that information and content will be added routinely. Coalition members and others are encouraged to send pictures, articles, press releases, major reentry-related accomplishments, reports, appropriate conference information, especially in-state, and other such items to [John.Matthews@odrc.state.oh.us](mailto:John.Matthews@odrc.state.oh.us) for inclusion on the website.

### **Certificates of Good Conduct and Employer Immunity**

Senator Bill Seitz and Representative Peggy Lehner are interested in pursuing legislation focusing on Certificates of Good Conduct (sometimes called Certificates of Rehabilitation or Certificates of Relief from Disability), employer

immunity, and the expungement of criminal records. They met with representatives from the Ohio Justice and Policy Center, PowerNet of Dayton, the OSU Bar Foundation, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, and DRC to share their views on these issues. It was agreed that forming a workgroup under the auspices of the Reentry Coalition offered an appropriate vehicle to guide this effort. The expectation is that the workgroup will prepare a report with recommendations for legislation that will be presented to the Reentry Coalition, and with its endorsement to the legislators. The due date for the completion of this initiative is October 1<sup>st</sup>.

Certificates of Good Conduct have been discussed as a possible incentive for an individual following release from prison though it can be expanded to include individuals who have been convicted of a felony, but remain in the community. This certificate is intended to certify that the ex-offender/returning citizen has been law-abiding for a period of time.

The Certificate of Good Conduct would be tied to providing employers limited immunity from issues of negligence "if anything happens" on the job.

It was noted during the discussion that record expungement should and will be considered as part of this overall discussion.

One of the legal effects of the certificate might include allowing the holder to obtain certain licenses.

Critical to this discussion is a survey of the employer community to determine what they would need for the certificate to have credibility and for them to honor it by considering and hiring ex-offenders.

There are many issues that will need to be considered by the workgroup that is formed. Several of these issues include - what about felony offenders with no prison number? - Is it feasible to consider a state tax credit for hiring someone with the certificate?

During the open forum, Member-At-Large, Reginald Wilkinson raised several points. He noted that:

- The Certificate of Good Conduct could create an elitist system possibly creating stigma for those who do not receive the certificate.
- If the recidivism is 38%, then 62% don't return. The certificate should be given out at the same rate.

## **Collateral Sanctions in Ohio Database**

Stephen JohnsonGrove from the Ohio Justice and Policy Center discussed the creation of “an online database where someone can put in a criminal charge and get a list of all the housing, employment, civil rights, and other consequences that will entail under Ohio law.” In terms of employment, it will tell offenders, based on their offense, what jobs might be off limits or those that might hold the most possibility for them.

He talked about collaborative efforts underway between the Policy Center and the Ohio Public Defender to launch the Ohio Collateral Sanctions Project. The creation of such of a readily available database would greatly reduce the amount of legal work from a defense attorney to find out the collateral sanctions that result from a plea agreement on certain offenses, and help ensure that individuals when accepting plea bargains understand the consequences of their decisions. Since 98% of those that come to the Ohio prisons come as a result of a plea bargain, this project could have a dramatic impact. For information on collateral sanctions, see:

[www.sentencing.nj.gov/downloads/pdf/articles/collateral1.pdf](http://www.sentencing.nj.gov/downloads/pdf/articles/collateral1.pdf)

Mr. Johnson-Groves made reference to the Collateral Consequences Calculator that would be quick and user friendly to give this kind of information to offenders to allow them to make more informed choices when entering a certain plea bargain. Columbia Law School has developed a tool and Minnesota and North Carolina have or are developing such tools. See:

[www.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/portfolio/law/collateral\\_consequen.html](http://www.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/portfolio/law/collateral_consequen.html)

During the Open Forum, Member-At-Large, Reginald Wilkinson suggested that instead of a collateral sanctions calculator, boards who issue licenses should only restrict those who have crimes that relate to the job or license they are seeking. Additional discussion on this topic centered on the need to dismantle collateral sanctions altogether.

Director Collins said that DRC is supportive of this project, and is willing to consider some limited allocation of funding to move it forward.

The Coalition agreed to endorse this project.

## **Family Engagement in Reentry (PEW Foundation/Family Justice)**

Discussions are underway regarding a partnership between DRC, the PEW Foundation, and Family Justice (in NYC). These groups are interested in collaborating on the design and completion of an overall assessment of the

Department's family-centered, reentry-focused strategies, policies and practices. The project will conduct a comprehensive assessment of how effectively DRC is working with and engaging families in achieving successful reentry outcomes, and the policies and procedures, cultural issues, staff understandings, and barriers that impact on family stability and reunification following confinement.

The overarching objective of this initiative is to enhance current and future efforts within the Department and across the state in recommending system enhancements aimed at improving and strengthening families as primary systems of support as offenders leave prison and return home. From an inter-systems point of view, consideration will be given to the strategies and legislation needed to assist the department and other state agencies in investing in ways that leverage mutual resource support and expertise working with multi-service families and children.

The Coalition agreed to endorse this project.

### **Introduction of Members-At-Large**

Statutory Members under HB 130 were introduced followed by volunteer Members-At-Large.

Director Collins noted that Members-At-Large should provide the Coalition with ideas, will, and a voice. This is a grassroots level effort including a wide group of individuals. With 28,000 individuals returning each year, this is the Members-At-Large opportunity to bring their voice to the table. The statutory language calls for the Coalition to be fully inclusive of those who want to move reentry forward in Ohio.

During the open forum, various comments and points were made including, but not limited to, the following.

- It was suggested that the Reentry Coalition needs to view the problem of reentry from the ground up and consider the value in bringing in ex-offenders (or returning citizens) to speak with those who are incarcerated, as well as with the Coalition itself.
- The National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) suggested a Frontline production called *The Released* to understand what they do.
- When considering a policy decision, when we ask who is this good for, we should also ask, who is this bad for?
- The Ohio Housing Finance Agency is thinking about how providers can work together to address the continuum of housing programs and options relative to reentry. OHFA seeks to encourage a solid understanding of the issues,

barriers and opportunities, aimed at eliminating misconceptions in the affordable housing arena.

- The Coalition should consider adding representation from the Metropolitan Housing Authority. Dennis Guest, from Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority, is the suggested member
- Jim Slagle, Attorney General's Office, noted there appears to be an underrepresentation from the criminal justice system. He suggested that the Reentry Coalition might want to include representatives from other components, including law enforcement officials, and prosecutors.
- Reentry thinking must move away from jails and prisons to community transition model with a focus on community thinking.
- Director Cornelius-Dawson, ODADAS, suggested working toward communities empowered to take care of themselves rather than systems changes being driven into the community.
- There should be consideration given to addressing the loopholes that now exist in the information that is publicly available about ex-offenders' records. There are screening companies who routinely provide background checks and criminal history information to businesses upon request. The accuracy of what they report is rarely monitored as they are largely unregulated in what they can provide.

**The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m. The date and time of the next Reentry Coalition meeting date and time will be announced on the website once it is activated.**