

Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition
State Library of Ohio
Boardroom
Columbus, Ohio
September 17, 2009
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Minutes

Statutory Members:

Director Terry Collins (ODRC)	Director Angela Cornelius Dawson (ODADAS)
Scott Layson (ODOA)	Vicki Jenkins (ODMRDD)
John Flinn (ODJFS)	Kim Hettel (GOFBCI)
Cheryl Martinez (RSC)	William Russell (OBR)
Kevin Shepherd (DYS)	Dwight Anstaett (ODE)
Debbie Nixon-Hughes (ODMH)	Tom Dilling (Licensing Board)
Sharon Schnelle (DPS)	Michael Norton-Smith (ODOD)

Members-At-Large:

Lenora Barry (NWORC)	Jody Demo-Hodgins (ADAMH Mrn-Crw)
Gayle Dittmer (Franklin County)	Betsy Johnson (NAMI Ohio)
Lusanne Green (OCCA)	Melissa Knopp (Supreme Court)
Ed Little (Cuyahoga County)	Jim Slagle (Attny. General)
Scott Sylak (NWORC)	Wesley Pullen (Urban League)
Denise Robinson (Alvis House)	Sally Luken (CSH)
Judge Bob Fragale (Marion County)	Judge Michael Russo (Cuyahoga County)
John Theobald (Mont. County)	

Other Attendees:

Douglas Brown (Goodwill)	Judge Robert Fragale (Marion County)
Joyce Gerren (Mont. County)	Sue Giga (OCFC)
Alicia Handwerk (ODRC)	Sue Brannen (Frank. County Courts)
Jed Morrison (OADDB)	Teresa Moorman-Jamison (ODMH)
Rod Woods (ODRC)	Chris Yanai (ODRC)
Katrina Ransome (ODRC)	Ed Rhine (ODRC)
Joseph Holne (Goodwill)	Joe Stan (Powernet)
Scott Neely (ODRC)	Irene Lyons (ODRC)
Rhonda Johnson (ODRC)	Ernie L. Moore (ODRC)
Tracy Tyson-Parker (ODRC)	Robert Hammond (ODRC)
Melissa Lindsay (OPLC)	Brad DeCamp (ODADAS)
Angela Sausser Short (OFCF)	Wanda Suber (ODRC)

Welcome and Introductions

Director Collins opened the meeting by welcoming and thanking members of the Coalition. He commented that a lot of work has been accomplished since the first Coalition meeting. He reminded everyone that reentry is a community issue

stating he is excited about the work and the wide array of support for this effort. He noted that other states do not have the collaboration across groups that Ohio has and because of the commitment to reentry, other states contact the Ohio Reentry Coalition for technical assistance.

Annual Report Update

Statutory members of the Coalition received a draft copy of the 2008 Annual Report which is due to the legislature by 12/1/09. The Annual Report Committee plans to have the report approved by the public information and legal service offices by the end of October. The final report will be distributed in December and will be available on the website. Because the Coalition was formed so recently, the current report is qualitative but future reports will be more quantitative.

The committee thanked the Department of Aging for providing the template and the Prison News Network at Marion Correctional Institution for developing the document.

It was suggested that a list of members (Statutory and At Large should be added to the report as well as partnerships) should be added to the report.

Reentry Coalition By-Laws

The committee focused on two primary issues: How to let others into the coalition and the formation of an executive committee.

It was discussed that At-Large membership could be expanded by application and a vote by the full coalition. The statutory membership agreed with the proposed action and the committee will firm up the application which will allow for inclusive membership.

It was suggested that an Executive Committee should be formed for use when something has to get done quickly, or in an emergency situation. The committee proposed that the Executive Committee would be made up of the following members:

- Chair (The ODRC Director will always be the Chairman)
- Assistant Chair
- Secretary
- 4 members chosen by nomination and voting

The committee was instructed to focus on the statutory framework that should guide the development of the by-laws. The committee was also asked to review the legislation to see if there is a provision for the Coalition to delegate authority

to an Executive Committee. Since this is a statutory body, there is a question about the Executive Committee doing the work of the larger statutory group. This question will be posed to the Legal Counsel at ODRC.

Hamilton County Commissioners

Director Collins shared information about the Hamilton County Commissioners unanimous vote to reform their ex-offender hiring practices.

By consensus the group authorized Director Collins to send a letter on behalf of the Coalition thanking them for taking a stand and speaking out. The letter will be posted on the Reentry Coalition website for others to read.

A discussion followed about the venues to be used to show support on this and other important issues. Since letters only reach certain groups, there should be a way to get information out to a broader group. Other boards and commissions issue resolutions. Ed Rhine will research resolutions and how to make this happen.

There should be a section in the next annual report for resolutions, support, and policy statements that the Coalition makes.

The Ohio Justice Policy Center has a 12 minute video that highlights the offender whose criminal background and denial of employment started the discussion in Hamilton County. Access the video at <http://vimeo.com/6055716> .

College Admissions Screening

Individuals seeking admission to colleges have brought to the attention of state representatives and Director Collins that some higher education facilities are asking detailed questions on admission forms about criminal offenses. Questions were raised about the rationale for asking certain questions. This needs to be addresses as there are numerous efforts to encourage adult education by providing college credits for career technical credits, knowing that those who seek education recidivate at a lower rate.

As William Russell (Kim: insert his title) discussed, several years ago the rationale at one community college was to assist students up-front avoid enrolling in and receiving degrees from programs where they will be prohibited from licensure and employment upon completion. In addition, this particular community college has a child care center on grounds. Colleges have a great concern about liabilities for offenses that might occur on their campus.

Public universities have different forums than private institutions and each public institution has a Board of Trustees who are appointed by the Governor but they set their own policies and procedures.

The Board of Regents will do an inventory of the policies and procedures relative to criminal background checks, and report the results to the Coalition. The Board will share information about the Coalition's work.

It was suggested that questions during the admission process would be better asked on an information sheet because asking on an application implies that admission is contingent on the conviction information.

Director Collins stated that he does not have any problem with colleges educating students on collateral sanctions or know the person's conviction information, but the process by which this information is conveyed is extremely important.

Committee Updates

Collateral Sanctions Database Project:

A grant was submitted to the Ohio State Bar Foundation by the Ohio Justice & Policy Center to fund the collateral sanctions database project. The purpose of the database is to create a user friendly online database of all civil collateral sanctions under Ohio law that will allow the user to enter a criminal charge and obtain a list of all of the legal barriers to employment, housing, and other social privileges triggered by that charge. The overall project cost is \$52,000 - \$55,000 for the first year set up and roughly \$9,000 for yearly updates and maintenance. An application for \$5,000 was submitted to the Toledo Bar Association, and ODRC has committed limited funding to support this initiative.

The database will allow the user to search a field of employment to find all criminal offenses that might be a barrier to that field. It will be accessible and beneficial to a wide user base, including defense attorneys, prosecutors, judges, social workers, school admission offices, educators, job placement specialists, and others working with people with criminal records. The database will allow these professions to direct their clients to appropriate employment opportunities and job training programs.

Ohio is benchmarking with Minnesota for the creation of the database. An example of how the model might work can be found at www.collateralsanctions.org/mn/search.php. Entering "theft" in the keyword box would give a sense of how anyone could approach a database like this.

The Ohio Justice Policy Center will be the lead agency on this project with the support of the Coalition, ODRC, the Public Defender's Office, and other key parties.

Certificate of Good Conduct and Employer Immunity:

The work group is looking at developing two types of Certificate of Good Conduct that are tied to employer immunity. The purpose of both types of certificates is to increase public safety and increase the economic contributions of people with criminal records by creating and promoting a statutory mechanism to assist them with employment.

Once certificate would address recently released person from incarceration/supervision and the second the person who has been living crime-free in the community for many years. The first type of certificate could be for good conduct under supervision or program participation and although it would have less legal “teeth,” it might get an employer to look more closely at ex-offenders. The certificate might also be an incentive for program participation and behavior for those with a definite sentence.

The project has been benchmarked with Illinois and New York.

The group is working to draw support and recommendations from key stakeholders within and outside of the criminal justice system. Some examples of these groups are victim advocates, the faith-based community, and Chambers of Commerce. There are discussions about legislation that would be necessary for employer immunity and to specify who might issue such certificates.

Several ideas for the name of the certificate have been discussed including Certificate of Good Conduct, Certificate of Rehabilitation, Certificate of Readiness, Certificate of Release from Disabilities, Certificate of Employability Restoration Certificate, and Certificate of Employment Freedom Certificate. After the committee has reviewed the recommendations, it will submit the final name to the Reentry Coalition for review and endorsement.

It was suggested that perhaps instead of a Certificate of Good Conduct, a Certificate of Accomplishment could be issued for the person who is recently released. The certificate would speak to education, programming, and behavior while incarcerated or under supervision.

The Coalition discussed the need for the certificate to be based on something that is quantitative and can speak to their conduct for a specified period of time. The certificate cannot be used to predict behavior in the future.

The Northwest Reentry Coalition has been in contact with ex-offenders who have been in the community and working for several years and have been, due to the economy, downsized and unable to find another job. They feel like they are starting at ground zero and it is plausible that a Certificate of Good Conduct could be helpful to them to be able to obtain employment.

Other issues discussed as well. It was suggested that the Better Business Bureaus might be contacted to assist or at least provide input into the development of the certificate, and to describe the factors that should be considered when issuing a certificate and what is important to the business community. The applicability of the Certificate of Good Conduct might extend beyond employment, to target housing and other restrictions. It was suggested that local reentry coalitions might issue certificates. Though the workgroup has discussed this issue, this matter was not endorsed by the sentencing commission when it was presented several years ago.

Expungement Sub-Committee:

Scott Neely will chair the expungement sub-committee that will be pursued independently of the workgroups mentioned above.

Grants Development Committee:

It was requested that if funding is received to let the Coalition know through the the Grants Committee so it can track the total dollars awarded and brought into Ohio – if the Reentry Coalition provided a letter of support.

The procedure for receiving a Letter of Support from the Coalition is on the website. Each statutory member is asked to provide a description of their agency's procedure so that it can be included as well. This information should be sent to Angi.Lee@odrc.state.oh.us . This information will be posted on the Coalition's website.

Second Chance awards for the demonstration and mentoring grants should be awarded by 09/30/09. The procedure for notification has changed with Congressional Districts being notified first followed by the awardees.

Gary Dennis, Bureau of Justice Assistance, reported in a separate forum that there were 107 applications for 101 demonstration grants of which 15 will receive awards. Of the 500 applications for 211 mentoring grants, 36 will receive awards.

Additional Second Chance Act funding is expected to be released through a variety of Federal Agencies beginning February 2010. The Council of State Governments has developed a checklist for Second Chance Act funding that should be very helpful when developing proposals.

Ohio is unique by having a state level coalition that works closely with the local/county which should position state/local agencies well for future dollars.

Quality Assurance Committee:

The committee wants to be able to report outcome measures that focus on recidivism and the metrics of success that will provide support for the Annual Report Committee. Before they get to far into their work, the committee needs an agreed upon definition of recidivism. The Bureau of Justice Assistance has recently defined recidivism as “a return to prison and/or jail with either a new conviction or as the result of a violation of the terms of supervision within 12 months of initial release” and Director Collins asked for the committee to reach out to ODRC Research Bureau Chief Steve Vandine to assist as they develop the definition for the Coalition.

The Reentry Coalition has an opportunity to redefine recidivism beyond the current narrow definition. It is critical to measure impacts in areas other than a return to prison.

The committee needs a point of contact from each statutory member to collect meaningful data from their state department. The committee has considered using Survey Monkey to collect a data dump.

Doug Althausser will sit on the committee to bring a juvenile perspective to the discussions.

Ohio is beginning to share more data between groups, but the committee would like to call the Coalition’s attention to the Michigan data warehouse that is a partnership between Housing Finance and the Department of Correction to collect data about the crisscross of homeless people to corrections institutions.

Website (Activation):

www.Reentrycoalition.Ohio.gov is now active. The site was reviewed by the Coalition and a media advisory issued earlier by ODRC was handed out to the members.

The site is designed to enhance communication by providing open access to current and useful information about offender reentry in Ohio and throughout the country. The site will provide electronic access to public reentry forums and events. In addition, the site will offer timely updates about the Coalition’s activities, including its operating procedures and by-laws, meeting schedule, minutes, published reports, committee work, and other-related news items. The site will also feature information about local reentry coalition efforts across the state.

The committee is developing a process to place information on the website and is requesting subject matter experts from Statutory Members to screen for accuracy.

Local Coalition Updates

There are many coalitions that are already established and many more coming on board. The website shows a list of those who are developed and those who are in the process of developing. Several of the more established coalitions may be tapped to assist and provide technical support to new ones.

The Northwest Reentry Coalition and Montgomery County Coalition are conducting conference calls to share information. As a result of the conference calls, Montgomery County Coalition held their first Legal Clinic. The Montgomery Coalition is developing quickly and the final report will be submitted soon.

The Northwest Reentry Coalition is planning its first legislative session on October 26, 2009 with 200 people expected to attend. They are also having public meetings in the commissioner's chambers, working on a case coordination grant, at the table in the reentry court, and looking qualitatively at what they are doing.

Stark County is developing but a date has not been set yet to fully launch the task force.

The Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry received a \$300,000 Second Chance Mentoring Grant, and \$1,000,000 to support a RFP for Employment.

Marion County has 30 partners who are beginning to break into committees as part of forming a Reentry Coalition. As part of this effort, they are starting work on a reentry strategic plan.

Franklin County has a very unique local reentry coalition composition with judges, commissioners, the Community Corrections Board, and Homeland Security. They have completed a focus study and will have a dedicated staff position for their coalition.

It was suggested that the county coalitions should connect with the Family and Children First Council as they already have the key players at the table.

Open Agenda and Forum

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is announcing an advisory committee for specialized dockets.

Sally Luken, Corporation for Supportive Housing asked for Coalition approval to make a presentation at the next meeting about a policy forum for Ohio.

The Council of State Governments has a website that explains Justice Reinvestment Projects in different states. Ohio has just launched such a project with CSG.

NAMI Ohio is grateful for the Medicaid Reinstatement project for offenders who leave prison within one year, but asked if there are discussions for a solution for others?

Dr. Hammond from DRC suggested there should be a mechanism to discuss the “Good, Bad, and Ugly” about access issues in areas such as mental health, substance abuse, and healthcare. Because they have a sub-committee for healthcare, Ed Little volunteered to help with this effort. This will be discussed at the next meeting.