

**JOINT COMMITTEE TO STUDY
STAFFING LEVELS AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS AT
THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (SR 34)**

Meeting #1

June 18, 2014

General Assembly Building, Richmond, Virginia

MEMBERS PRESENT: Senator David W. Marsden (Co-Chairman), Senator Kenneth C. Alexander, Senator Linda T. Puller, Mr. Donald Baylor, Mr. Steve Morris.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr. (Co-Chairman), Senator Jennifer T. Wexton, The Honorable Kenneth W. Stolle, Mr. Joey O'Quinn.

The first meeting of the Joint Committee to Study Staffing Levels and Employment Conditions at the Department of Corrections pursuant to SR 34 (2014) was held on Wednesday, June 18, 2014, at the General Assembly Building in Richmond. Following introductions and opening remarks, the Joint Committee elected Senator David Marsden and Senator Emmett Hanger to serve as joint chairmen of the Joint Committee.

Scope and Purpose of the Committee

Ms. Sarah Stanton, Senior Staff Attorney, Virginia Division of Legislative Services, provided an overview of the scope and purpose of the Joint Committee to Study Staffing Levels and Employment Conditions at the Department of Corrections. Ms. Stanton reported that Senate Joint Resolution 34, introduced by Senator Phillip Puckett and adopted by the Senate during the 2014 Session, established the Joint Committee to review "the adequacy of staffing levels, employee health and safety, and turnover rates at the correctional facilities of the Commonwealth." Senate Resolution 34 provides that the Joint Committee shall consist of three legislative members of the Senate Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services, two legislative members of the Senate Committee on Rules, two nonlegislative citizen members who shall be representatives of an association of correctional officers or employees, and two nonlegislative citizen members who shall be former correctional officers or employees. The Office of the Clerk of the Senate shall provide administrative staff support to the Joint Committee, and the Division of Legislative Services shall provide legal, research, policy analysis and other services as required by the Joint Committee. The Department of Corrections and all other agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide technical assistance to the Joint Committee upon request. The Joint Committee is authorized to meet four times during the 2014 interim, and must complete its work by November 30, 2014. An executive summary of the Joint Committee's findings and recommendations must be submitted to the Division of Legislative Automated Services no later than the first day of the 2015 Regular Session of the General Assembly.

PRESENTATION: Department of Corrections

Mr. Paul Broughton, Director of Human Resources, Virginia Department of Corrections, provided an overview of the Commonwealth's correctional system and staffing levels at the Commonwealth's correctional institutions. Mr. Broughton reported that the Department operates 42 institutions housing 30,256 offenders, seven detention and diversion centers serving 637 detainees/divertees, and 43 probation and parole districts serving 57,108 offenders.

The Department's approved personnel level for the institutions, detention and diversion centers, probation and parole districts, 3 regional offices and single central headquarters is 12,449.70 employees. As of May 31, 2014, the total number of filled positions was 11,788. Functional staffing areas in major facilities include security, treatment and programs, food services, building and trades, medical, education, and administration. Mr. Broughton provided demographic information about DOC employees generally and corrections officers specifically, noting that approximately 49.3% of corrections officers are black, 48.7% of corrections officers are white, and 1.5% are Hispanic. Nearly 67 % of corrections officers are male and 33 % are female, with officers of both sexes working facilities for male and female offenders. The average age of corrections officers is 39.3 years, with .9% of corrections officers less than 20 years of age, 30.2% between 21 and 30 years of age, 21.9% between 31 and 40 years of age, 26.1% between 41 and 50 years of age, 17.6% between 51 and 60 years of age, 3.2% between 61 and 70 years of age and .1% older than 71 years of age. The average length of service of corrections officers is 7.4 years, with 47.8 % of corrections officers reporting 5 years of service or less, 21.1% reporting 6 to 9 years of service, 10.7% reporting 10 to 14 years of service, 13.6% reporting 15 to 19 years of service, 4.5% reporting 20 to 25 years of service, 1.6% reporting 25 to 29 years of service, and .6% reporting 30 or more years of service. Mr. Broughton noted that the proportion of corrections officers with fewer than 5 years of service has diminished over the last seven years, indicating success in retaining trained corrections officers. Annual turnover rates for the period between July 1, 2013 and May 31, 2014 were 16.47% for corrections officers, which was the highest rate of turnover since the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008. Mr. Broughton noted that the positions with the highest rates of turnover (20% or more in FY 2013) were: nurse technicians, registered nurses, psychologists, and food service supervisors. Other positions identified as difficult to fill included: medical and dental service providers and trades positions. Mr. Broughton reported that for some facilities, corrections officer positions were also difficult to fill. One factor identified as contributing to staffing turnover is low pay and lack of pay increases. Mr. Broughton reported that between November of 2007 and July of 2013, Department of Corrections' staff received two one-time bonuses of 3%, which did not affect base pay. In 2013, employees received a 2% raise plus compression pay of 65 percent. Currently, the average salary for corrections officers is \$33,403.

Mr. Broughton also provided information about the Healing Environment Initiative. Through the Initiative, the Department seeks to ensure an environment that is safe and secure for staff and offenders, that fosters positive change, and in which staff feel engaged and as though

they are making a difference. A recent survey by the Urban Institute found strong support for the Healing Environment Initiative, with approximately 86% of Department staff reporting that they believe the healing environment approach is a good strategy. The survey also found that 67% of Department Employees felt safe in their positions while acknowledging that their jobs are inherently dangerous than other jobs available, and that only 22% of employees felt that changes made as the Initiative was implemented added a dimension of danger to their jobs.

With regards to safety, Mr. Broughton reported that a total of 1719 total safety related incidents had been reported in 2013, down from 1964 total incidents in 2012. No serious assaults on staff, defined as assaults which result in an injury to staff that requires urgent and immediate medical treatment and restricts usual activity, were reported during 2013 as compared to 3 reported during 2012. Mr. Broughton stated that the Department considers health and safety of staff paramount in pursuit of its mission, and that the Department has implemented a health and safety management system that includes comprehensive operating procedures, full time institutional safety specialists at major institutions, designation of collateral duty safety coordinators at smaller facilities, quarterly state-wide training and regional meetings for all institutional safety specialists and safety coordinators, new employee orientation and site-specific safety and health training, Virginia Office of Safety and Health voluntary compliance assistance surveys, Office of Workers' Compensation "Snapshot" health and safety surveys, jurisdictional pressure vessel inspections, multi-causation accident investigation processes, extensive fire prevention and response programs, infectious disease control programs, and a range of other certification, accreditation and other programs to protect the health and safety of staff and offenders.

Discussion of Work Plan

Following Mr. Broughton's presentation, the Joint Committee discussed its work plan for the 2014 interim. Members of the Joint Committee requested that staff arrange site visits to several facilities throughout the Commonwealth, to be conducted in conjunction with the Joint Committee's upcoming meetings. Members also requested that current and retired corrections officers be invited to meet with the Joint Committee to provide input and information about staffing and safety at correctional facilities. In closing, Senator Marsden stated that the Joint Committee should focus on creating integrated environments in facilities where staff and offenders are safe, healthy, and supported and in which staff and offenders are able to bring about positive outcomes.

Next Meeting

The date, time and location of the next meeting of the Joint Committee to Study Staffing Levels and Employment Conditions at the Department of Corrections pursuant to SR 34 (2014) are to be determined. Information about upcoming meetings will be available through the Legislative Information System Meetings calendar.