

**The Joint Subcommittee to Study the  
Commonwealth's Program for Prisoner Reentry to Society**

Pursuant to SJR 327 (2007)

*<http://dls.state.va.us/reentry.htm>*

The third meeting of the 2007 interim of the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Commonwealth's Program for Prisoner Reentry to Society was held Wednesday, September 26, 2007 at the General Assembly Building in Richmond. Following opening remarks by Chairwoman Sen. Puller and a video presentation on Faith-Based Programs at Lawtey Correctional Center, the joint subcommittee received eight presentations.

**Overview of Other State's Prisoner Reentry Programs**

Mr. Michael Thomson, Director of the Council for State Government's Justice Center gave a presentation on the current status of prisoner reentry programming in several states. Mr. Thompson also discussed the work of the Justice Center in assisting states in revising their prisoner reentry programming through the use of justice reinvestment strategies, to save money and reduce recidivism. The justice reinvestment strategy, Mr. Thompson explained, determines growth trends in prison populations, looks at where prisoners come from, identifies characteristics and needs of those communities including social characteristics, educational attainment, receipt of public assistance, and other characteristics, and develops strategies, including cost shifting and reinvestment strategies, to eliminate the growth of prison populations and limit spending on prisons.

**Update on the Activities of the Virginia Policy Academy - Family and Community Reintegration Subcommittee**

Ms. Carol-Lee Raimo provided an update on the activities of the Family and Community Reintegration Subcommittee of the Virginia Policy Academy. Ms. Raimo reported that an Inmate Family Survey is currently being developed, with the goal of using the survey to gain information necessary to improve inmate relationships with their families; family and visitor guide information have been produced to reduce barriers between the DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS and family members by providing information on prison rules, visitation policies and other topics; the Messages from Mom/Dad program has been expanded; video visitation has been initiated from a site in Richmond, to facilitate visiting at Wallen's Ridge; the Preventing Recidivism by Educating for Parole Success curriculum is out for peer review and should be dispersed within the month, and DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS parenting programs have expanded into 5 prisons. However, the Department of Corrections lacks funding to support additional programs. Ms. Raimo also reported that obtaining identification Department of Corrections continues to be a problem.

## **Update on the Activities of the Virginia Policy Academy - Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Issues Subcommittee**

Dr. James Morris, Director of the Office of Forensic Services at the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services presented information on the activities of the Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Issues Subcommittee. Dr. Morris indicated that research has found that an estimated 16,000 to 32,000 inmates with mental illness are jailed annually, that about 1,000 parolees with mental illness leave state prisons annually, with an estimated 7% of the 45,000 current parolees having some form of mental illness, and that a 2006 survey of local probation shows that more than 2,000 local parolees have mental illness as well. The work of the subcommittee, he stated, had focused on identifying relevant systematic health and behavioral healthcare problems confronting offenders both before and after release, identifying current facility and community systems and programs aimed at providing medical, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and developing improvements to promote successful reentry.

Dr. Morris then offered 4 recommendations:

- 1) Improve the planning, assessment and service delivery process with prisons, community corrections and local and state mental health and substance abuse services providers;
- 2) Provide health record summaries at the time of release;
- 3) Create strategies to improve Community Corrections staff access to crisis intervention for ex-offenders with acute mental health and substance abuse treatment needs; and
- 4) Reduce waiting times for access to federal disability benefits and state rehabilitative services for offenders with disabilities.

He concluded by highlighting several challenges, including the need to include state and local responsible jail inmates in reentry efforts; the need to finalize an agreement with the Social Security Administration regarding benefits and to fully implement a DOC/CSB/DMHMRSAS memorandum of understanding to facilitate access to benefits; the need to provide access to consultative examinations for disability determinations; a need for further collaboration between the Virginia Health Department and the Department of Corrections regarding testing for HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis; a need to focus on substance abuse treatment in community corrections and efforts to address limitations in the DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS psychotropic medication formulary, to better support reentry adjustment.

## **Update on the Activities of the Virginia Policy Academy - Financial Obligations, Housing and Financial and Community Resources Subcommittee and the Policy Academy Pilot Programs**

Ms. Jane Brown, Director of Community Programs, Department of Social Services, offered information on the Financial Obligations, Housing and Financial and Community Resources Subcommittee of the Virginia Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy and the

Virginia Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy Pilot Programs. The goal of the pilot programs is to implement, test and evaluate recommendations developed by the Virginia Policy Academy on Prisoner Reentry. Pilot programs are currently being conducted at 5 sites, with 2 additional sites added by the end of the year, Ms. Brown stated. Pilot localities and pilot program participants are selected on a volunteer basis. These programs are characterized by community collaboration, integrated service delivery and connection to positive community influences and family support. Each locality participating in the program is required to develop a Prisoner Reentry Council, convened by the director of the local department of social services. These councils, Ms. Brown reported, are to develop a reentry plan for the community that identifies resources, methods for interagency coordination and implementation of recommendations. During the 12 months following release, individual members of the council will contact ex-offenders, establish on-going communication and provide support for the returning ex-offender, to allow the ex-offender to meet goals and outcomes established in consultation with the council representative. The pilots also include family mentoring and during the reentry process and for twelve months following release.

After describing the program, Ms. Brown noted several challenges for prisoners, identified by program participants. These include paying off debts, obtaining employment and finding a place to live. The most frequently identified needs for help upon release were financial assistance, finding a job, getting health care and finding access to transportation.

### **Good Will Industries Employment Connections for Ex-Offenders**

Ms. Cheri Bever, Director of Workforce Development, Horizon Goodwill Industries, presented information on the Good Will program, which works with offenders to provide job training and allows offenders to gain and maintain employment immediately after release by establishing pre-release connections with inmates to review records, assess needs and develop a plan; conducting pre-release job readiness classes; conducting post-release case management; and offering post-release transitional and permanent employment. In FY 07, Ms. Bever noted, 72% of the program completers gained permanent employment and another 27% gained temporary employment. Ms. Bever stated that the model is primarily funded by the state, with some federal funds and funds from miscellaneous resources. The total cost of the program was \$2000 per participant in FY 07.

### **Repayment of Offender Financial Obligations**

Ms. Mary Vail Ware of Virginia Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund presented information on the Virginia Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund, stating that for FY 06-07, the Fund received 2049 claims for reimbursement, paid \$3.2 million, and collected approximately \$600,000 in restitution. Ms. Ware emphasized that allowing prisoners to begin to pay restitution while they are incarcerated is important because it allows offenders to take responsibility for their actions, to enter society knowing the amount of the debt for which they are responsible, and to enter society owing less in total restitution.

Ms. Ware also noted several challenges in the repayment process, specifically that restitution payment is not a centralized process, that restitution collection entities varies by locality, and that tracking of restitution repayment is a local responsibility, rather than a centralized process. These problems, she concluded, can lead to fraud and dishonesty in repayment programs, result in money orders "going stale" if they are not dispersed, and lead to situations in which offenders either do not repay their debt or continue to pay after the debt has been fulfilled.