

MINUTES

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE AGENCIES & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
CHARITABLE, PENAL & CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Meeting Jointly**

Friday, October 11, 2013

The Senate State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee and the Charitable, Penal, and Correctional Institutions Subcommittee of the Arkansas Legislative Council met jointly on Friday, October 11, 2013, at 1:30 p.m., at the Arkansas Department of Correction, East Arkansas Regional Unit in Brickeys, Arkansas.

Members in Attendance

The following members attended Senators Eddie Joe Williams, Chair and Stephanie Flowers, Chair. Representative Jim Nickels.

Senator Williams called the meeting to order and recognized Senator Flowers for comments.

Review of Policy Changes within Department of Community Correction (DCC)

Shelia Sharp, Director, DCC, stated public safety is DCC's primary focus and they continue to make improvements. She noted the most recent changes within the Department:

- Changed leadership; divided parole and probation departments; and added staff at the Little Rock Office
- Implemented an officer-uniform program
- Added parole and probation officer training programs; and moved classes to the Arkansas Law Enforcement Training Academy in Camden
- Developed an employee newsletter; and distributes it to every DCC employee via email
- Initiated monthly briefings between DCC Managers and law enforcement officials; creating a forum for addressing concerns regarding offenders nearing release
- Revised policies to allow prosecutors access to the offender database
- Revised policies to require Arkansas's Criminal Information Center to issue parole and probation information upon receipt of a booking notice
- Provided officers with equipment allowing them to fax and email information via cell phone, expediting transmittal of information
- Implemented a critical-incident review process
- Centralized responsibility with area managers
- Revised policies to utilize automation more efficiently
- Established committees that address issues and devise solutions for all disciplines involved with DCC.
- Implemented minimum-reporting kiosks for low-risk offenders

Ms. Sharp said DCC is collaborating with law-enforcement officials to develop a five-year plan focusing on public safety. She said the primary message is that DCC needs additional supervision staff. Even with 100% of caseworker positions filled, DCC caseworkers currently carry about 118 cases. The national standard is no more than thirty. She emphasized the importance of working with a sufficient-size staff; and said home visits and assessments are key components of successful rehabilitative programs. The Department is exploring options for outsourcing drug testing, in an effort to reduce expenses.

In 2010, Arkansas's re-arrest rate was 57.5%; the re-conviction rate was 26.5%; and the re-incarceration rate was 42.2%. Ms. Sharp noted DCC is revising policies for the Technical Violator Center; hoping to reduce these statistics. Changes include implementing a 30-day work detail, extending the program beyond 60 days, tailoring programs to individual needs, and adding a re-entry piece to training.

Overview and Tour of the East Arkansas Regional Unit

Ray Hobbs, Director, Arkansas Department of Correction (ADC), said inmates usually enter ADC with addiction problems, histories of unemployment, and needing education. During incarceration, ADC provides the offenders with addiction cessation treatment, general education degree components, and marketable skill training. In his opinion, they are more qualified to be productive members of society upon release than when they arrive at the facility. He emphasized the importance of keeping the staff safe and reminded legislators the job is very dangerous. Having resources for sufficiently paying a trained staff is an integral part of running an efficient detention system.

With no further business, the committee adjourned at 2:22 p.m. and toured the East Arkansas Regional Unit.