

HIGHLIGHTS
COOK COUNTY CORRECTIONS BOARD MEETING
FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2006
HELD AT THE COOK COUNTY CORRECTIONS FACILITY – DIV.5

PRESENT: Chair Iola McGowan, Vice-Chair Munir Muhammad, Board Members Esequiel Iracheta, Gilbert Marchman and Howard Brookins Sr., Acting Director Scott Kurtovich, Terrie McDermott, Executive Director of the Women's Justice Services, Department Legal Advisor Joseph Consolo, Undersheriff Zelda Whittler, Board Secretary Shirley Moore, Vera Bonds, Observer for County Commissioner Bobbie Steele, and Frances Sowa, LWV Observer.

Minutes of the last meeting were approved with minor corrections.

Directors' Report:

As of 8 A.M., March 24th, there were 8,765 detainees. An additional 2,296 defendants were on community supervision and intervention. 17 inmates were in various hospitals. 365 inmates had been transferred to other corrections facilities during the previous week.

In addition, 106 women were in residence under the Women's Justice Services, at the Old Cermak Hospital, 168 women were on Sheriff's furlough, and 12 pregnant detainees were housed elsewhere.

There had been no further escapes, and all eight of those who had escaped in 2006 were back in custody. Three unusual incidents (one stabbing, one fight, one death from natural causes) were reported during the last three weeks. As a result, four inmates were hospitalized, and one staff member was treated for head trauma.

New Security Measures Implemented:

Director Kurtovich explained the measures which he had implemented in the Maximum Security compound in an effort to prevent future escapes.

Previously, Maximum Security detainees were assigned to work details within their own compound, allowing them some freedom of movement within the compound. Now, the work is being carried out by minimum and medium security detainees. These workers are housed in the Maximum Security Compound, but separately from the maximum security detainees. As a result, on several occasions, there have been bed shortages in the compound, requiring some inmates to sleep on mattresses in 3 person cells.

Division of Responsibility within Department of Corrections:

Director Kurtovich explained that he was one of three Directors, each having equal responsibility for the operations under their control. Kurtovich directs the operations in Divisions 1 through 11 of the jail. Director Wallace is responsible for the Department of Community Supervision and Intervention; while Director McDermott is responsible for the Department of Women's Justice Services.

Department of Women's Justice Services:

Director Terrie McDermott explained the operation of the Women's Justice Services (WJS). WJS was initiated in response to a 1996 Northwestern University study showing that 80% of women detainees have suffered multiple forms of abuse and exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. At that time, all inmate services were male focused. With the help of the National Institute of Corrections, criteria were established for "women focused" programs.

The program offers an integrated approach to treatment, including mental health, physical health, addiction, and other support services, as well as life skills training and housing referrals. The average length of stay in the program is 190 days; four months residential in the Old Cermak Hospital, three months day reporting and three months active support services. Three hundred alumni have formed their own association to provide support for each other and current inmates.

According to McDermott, 170 babies have been born drug free to detainees, as a result of collaboration with Haymarket House, which provides both pre-natal and post-natal residential treatment. In addition, 623 women have completed job-training, and have obtained employment or continued their education. Further, the mental health programs have resulted in reduced levels of depression and anxiety among the women.

Unfortunately, while 80% of women detainees qualify for WJS (non-violent, bondable offenders), only 20% of those detainees, (170 women) can be admitted to the WJS program due to lack of funding. The current budget is \$4 million, one half of which goes for substance abuse services.

In an effort to keep costs down, Director McDermott utilizes PhD and Masters Degree candidates as Mental Health interns at Cermak, and has negotiated an agreement under which the Probation Department will fund after-care services at Mt.Sinai Hospital. Physical and mental health services are deemed very important to cut down recidivism. The Department also works with neighborhood clinics for physical health issues.

In addition, a twelve-hour "gender responsive" cadet training program has been developed with Loyola University for jail personnel.

The Department has applied for a grant to fund a pilot project for a one-year women's boot camp program. (Legislation approving a women's boot-camp was signed into law two years ago, but it was not funded.) The boot-camp would accommodate 60 women, each sentenced for one year, at Cook County, but under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Corrections. A similar boot-camp for males has operated at Cook County for several years, and has resulted in lower recidivism rates.

Respectfully submitted, Frances Sowa

