

Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
September 16th, 2022 10:00AM – 12:45PM

Location: Sheridan Correctional Center
4017 East 2603 Road
Sheridan, IL

Members Present in Person or by Video – Delrice Adams, Don Bernardi, Scott Main (Jim Chadd), Edith Crigler, John Cullerton (Chair), Lisa Daniels, Anne Fitzgerald, Doug Harvath (Sharone Mitchell), Rob Jeffreys, Sen. Steve McClure, Dan Hunt (Marcia Meis), Mary Morrissey, Tobara Richardson, Sen. Elgie Sims and Augie Torres.

Members Absent – Ron Hain, Stu Palmer, Rep. Justin Slaughter, Don Stemen, and Rep. Patrick Windhorst and Stu Umholtz.

Non-Members Present in Person or by Video – Kathy Saltmarsh, Michael Elliott, Mark Powers, John Specker, Ryan Kennedy, Abigail Drumm, Javon Gregoire, Millicent McCoy, Dave Olson, Nick Rohm, Mary Ann Dyar, Gwyn Troyer, Yaacov Delaney, Heather Chameroski, Latoya Hughes, Alyssa Williams, Sherwin Miles. Susan Lloyd, Jenny Vollen-Katz, Douglas Thompson, Victor Zapita, Lauren Knutson and Melinda Martinez.

Non-Members Present by Phone – None.

Welcome, Introductions and Updates

Chairperson Cullerton called the fortieth regular meeting of the Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council to order at 10:00 a.m. Chairperson Cullerton gave the opening remarks, including a summary of the agenda and overview of the meeting noting that this was the first SPAC meeting in an Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) facility. Meeting at Sheridan provides an opportunity to talk with a few people who are the prison system, those serving time and those who work to provide programming. The meeting began with an overview of some positive changes in how IDOC does business from Acting Assistant Director Alyssa Williams.

Overview of IDOC's Incentive-based Corrections Model

Alyssa Williams, Acting IDOC Assistant Director, gave members an overview of IDOC's Incentive-based Corrections Model. Assistant Director Williams is a veteran of IDOC, starting her career as a Sex Offender Therapist in the East St. Louis Parole Office with adult parolees, and progressing to Warden at Dwight Correctional Center, Coordinator for Sex Offender Services, Assistant to the Chief of Programs, and Chief of Programs and Support Services.

Overview of IDOC's Incentive-based Correctional Model

- IDOC is actively working to develop and adopt a more seamless and coherent system of incentives and opportunities.
- This system will emphasize the reinforcement of positive behavior and rehabilitation over punishment and a reliance on holding offenses. It's built on clear and attainable rewards for positive behavior as well as easily understood sanctions for misbehavior.
- This incentive-based corrections model is built on six pillars:
 1. Updates to security classification;
 2. Implementation of statewide risk and needs assessment tool;

3. Individualized case planning;
4. Expansion and streamlining of earned discretionary sentence credit (EDSC);
5. Creation of re-entry pathways; and
6. Right sizing of community supervision.

Comprehensive Overhaul of Security Classification (no more “time and crime” classification)

- The Department has moved to establish and maintain a classification level system that classifies individuals primarily according to their behavior and commitment to rehabilitation rather than their crime of conviction and sentence length.
- IDOC aims to improve initial classification at intake to better match people to appropriate parent institutions based on needs, program identification, and other factors.
- Every year, each individual in custody will be reclassified, allowing everyone the opportunity to reduce their security level, and potentially gain more privileges and greater access to programs.
- Those individuals who participate in programs and generally avoid disciplinary infractions will now be able to drive their own reduction in security level.

Using Facility Transfers More Effectively

- IDOC is implementing a new transfer process to allow for the incarcerated population to request transfers under certain circumstances, including additional educational opportunities, work opportunities, or to place the incarcerated individual closer to their home area to allow for more frequent visitation from loved ones. In addition, the new process will allow for the appeal of a transfer denial, an act that was previously prohibited.

Risk and Needs Assessment and Individualized Case Planning

- IDOC has implemented a new risk and needs assessment system in early 2020.
- Based on well-established evidence, these assessments will help IDOC to better understand how to allocate resources to the incarcerated population.
- This assessment system will assist individuals in IDOC’s custody to understand the services that will most help them to avoid recidivating.
- This tool assigns people a risk to recidivate or “risk score,” allowing IDOC to focus specialized programming resources on those higher risk individuals and helping lower risk individuals work to reduce their sentence length.

Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) Progress in IDOC

- As of August 14, 2022, 74.8% of the IDOC population has been assessed under ORAS.

Individualized Case Planning

- Another function of IDOC’s risk and needs assessment is to identify individual needs and to facilitate the development of a case plan that will help individuals in IDOC’s custody to quickly and effectively address those needs.
- These individualized plans will identify gaps and deficiencies and plot a course on how to address them across five domains: criminal attitudes and behavioral patterns, employment, education, social supports, and family.
- Moving forward, especially for individuals identified as high or moderate risk, the individualized case plan will become the guide for programming and effective rehabilitation.

- People will be assigned to programs and prioritized based, in part, on their individualized case plans.

Incentivizing Good Behavior with Sentence Credits

- IDOC has expanded the availability of EDSC awards. All those who are eligible under statute have an opportunity to earn EDSC based on: positive behavior, commitment to rehabilitation, and compliance with an individualized case plan, all at the Director's discretion.
- The Department also relies on the risk assessment and individualized case plans to make award determinations. Individuals who have demonstrated good behavior and who are deemed low risk to recidivate, receive 180 or 365 (depending on sentence length) days of presumptive sentence credit. Those deemed moderate or high risk are able to earn EDSC every quarter based on compliance with individualized case plans.
- Individuals incarcerated on a forcible felony will require an additional review and approval from the Chief of Programs. Individuals incarcerated serving a 100% or 85% truth-in-sentencing sentence, on a parole violation, committing a serious disciplinary infraction in the previous year, or with an active order of protection will not be eligible per statute.

Expanded Reentry Planning and Reentry Pathways

- In addition to individualized case plans, IDOC has sought to expand re-entry opportunities. Specifically, IDOC has established a Re-entry Unit to focus on improved preparation and support for returning citizens.
- IDOC is also working to establish more mission-driven facilities to meet the specific needs of its population. For those facilities serving the general population, a wide array of programs will remain available for education, job skills, mental health, and cognitive behavioral therapy, among others.

Right-sizing Community Supervision

- Most individuals leaving IDOC facilities are required to serve a mandatory supervised release term.
- IDOC has made changes to how it administers MSR terms by adopting a risk assessment tool instead of relying on holding offenses.
- As a result, individuals who are deemed a low or moderate risk to recidivate will be placed on lower levels of supervision and, assuming they complete the orders set by the Prisoner Review Board (PRB) and comply with their MSR conditions, may be able to earn an early discharge from MSR.

Gun Crimes – Serving Time and Policy Changes from the Viewpoint of Incarcerated Persons

SPAC council members heard firsthand from a panel of three incarcerated individuals serving time at Sheridan for UYW felonies. The three men did not want themselves identified, but they were given the opportunity to share their stories, as well as answer questions from council members. The overall theme from the men, who ranged from young twenties to early forties is that they all felt compelled to possess a gun illegally without applying for a FOID card due to the environment that they live in. When asked where they obtained their guns, details were not explicit, but they all knew someone who could get them one and did at very early stages of their lives. They felt that their safety was more important than the fear of arrest for illegally possessing their firearms. Everyone they knew carried a gun because they never felt safe in their own communities. None of these men ever fired their weapons and they were all arrested for having multiple UYW possessions on their record and often felt targeted by the police for their arrests. They felt the lack of food, jobs and opportunities in their communities has led to this gun culture. Most of the time when people are shot, there is not a specific reason, just somebody either shooting into a crowd or because they didn't like where somebody was walking in the neighborhood.

All the men were very positive when it came to talking about the programming opportunities that were available to them at Sheridan. They specifically spoke about the anger management and inner circle groups that afforded them the opportunity to speak about their feelings with other individuals and realizing at the time others were having the same feelings they did. They hoped to take the vocational skills they learned in electricity, carpentry, plumbing, masonry, and welding to afford them a better job opportunity once they are released. The panel concluded with both the panel and council members debating how can we change the communities and environment the panel members live in. The consensus in the room is that we know we need to keep working on the things that work and find new ways that not thought of before.

Implementing Change in IDOC – IDOC Staff Viewpoint

Clinical Service Supervisor Lauren Knutson and Correctional Assessment Specialist Melinda Martinez provided SPAC council members with their take on the positive changes that are occurring at IDOC, specifically Sheridan Correctional Center. Both noted that when new directors come on board and begin to implement drastic changes, as Director Jeffreys has, it is not always an easy pill for correctional officers/assessment staff to swallow. However, this time it has been different. While it occurs slowly, the buy in from staff in support of these changes has been building due to all the hard work from the Director, down to the wardens and to the staff themselves. Also, doing things differently than before, discerning who gets priority for programming has been a game changer. In previous years those less time to serve were given programming priority in preparation for release and no risk/needs assessments were done. Now, due to the research and analysis staff can use to assess those coming into IDOC, high risk, high need and longer-term incarcerated individuals have received priority. The primary challenge with programming is a shortage of programming staff in the department. Not having enough staff to teach/help more incarcerated individuals is currently the biggest problem they encounter daily. Staff has also noticed a difference in those they serve, as they are more willing to participate in programming than when they first entered.

Public Comment

None.

New Business

Chairperson Cullerton reminded all members that our next meeting will be December 2, where we will be voting on our new vice-chairperson and hearing about SPAC's Gun Crime Report.

Adjournment

Chairperson Cullerton, moved to adjourn the fortieth regular meeting of the Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, seconded by Sen. Elgie Sims. The fortieth regular meeting of the Sentencing Policy Advisory Council was adjourned at 12:45 p.m. by unanimous voice vote.