

February 12, 2013

Town Hall Meeting Responses

Responses to the questions and comments made at the February 12, 2013 Town Hall Meeting are below. We have done our best to provide a response without making it too long or complicated. In several instances, we included a link to a document that provides more information. We also recognize that our answers may not satisfy the participant. This does not mean that the Department does not value the comment. All of the comments are given serious consideration and weighed against the current constraints of the Department. In the course of our planning, we will review public input and make changes when possible to the operations of the Department.

We are thankful for your participation and look forward to future dialogue at the May 15, 2013 meeting.

Town Hall Meeting Questions

1. How can we make the Facts & Figures book accessible to people who do not have computers/internet? Are hard copies available? Who can be contacted with questions?

The Department prints a limited number of the Facts and Figures book. An electronic version of the book is available at: <http://doc.vermont.gov/about/reports/latest-facts-figures-adobe/view>

If you have questions about the material or want to know how to access a hard copy, please contact Monica Weeber at 802-951-5057 or monica.weeber@state.vt.us

2. **Can DHR track the temp turnover? This is the employee entry into the system. They should be given health benefits.**

We are currently reviewing our data and discussing the tracking issue with DHR. We will provide updates as they are available.

The Department has added 24 new CO positions over the last 2 fiscal years. We are monitoring the impact of these new positions and the usage of temporary hours before we request for more permanent positions.

3. **The Vermont State Employees Union mentioned several concerns/issues:**
 - a. **The Union is concerned about the use of temporary positions. They are working on creating 50-60 permanent positions.**

Please see our response to Question #2.

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b. Outsourcing to Corrections Corporation of America is a Union concern.

We work hard to limit the use of out-of-state incarceration. The number of inmates housed out-of-state is lower today than it has been in last few years. We are working to bring the numbers down by use of appropriate furlough and diverting non-violent offenders from incarceration to create more available in state beds.

c. Changes to CHSVT are also a concern. It sounds like we will contract out many services which impacts state employees.

The changes in CHSVT will not result in contracting of more services. Please see the attached presentation that explains the proposed changes.

d. VSEA is in the process of creating a caucus for women in corrections.

We appreciate the information. We take employment rights for everyone seriously. If this caucus takes place, we offer that they meet directly with Deputy Commissioner Lisa Menard.

4. Participant commented on the issue of prescription drugs and the relationship to addiction. The participant recommended that we share the book "Anatomy of an Epidemic" to judges, staff, others who can have influence.

We agree that prescription drugs are a problem in our community. Our Health Services Division has very clear protocols regarding the use of prescription medication in facilities.

5. Participant is a volunteer at a CJC.

a. She recommends increasing the availability of COSA.

Expansion of the COSA methodology is dependent upon available infrastructure and trained volunteers. The program is currently grant funded and additional financial resources are necessary for any expansion beyond current capacity. COSA are not intended for general populations but rather are targeted to high risk offenders especially those with a risk for subsequent sexual offending.

b. Recommends on-going treatment for offenders while they are waiting to get out.

Currently risk reduction services are offered toward the later segment of a person's incarcerated sentence to provide a stronger linkage to transition to community based risk reduction services. The Program Service Division is currently reviewing

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the program delivery system to improve the continuity of services from incarceration to the community.

- c. Mentioned that offenders are accessing college scholarships, signing up for classes and then not attending. She is concerned that the scholarship money is being misused.**

We are not aware of any issue related to scholarships. All high school students in Vermont are allowed to access classes at CCV for no charge. If anyone has a particular case, we would be happy to research it.

- d. Concerned that many offenders work “off the books”. This can impact a child support payment.**

If any one has evidence of this happening, let us know and we can refer the case to the Department of Labor. This is an issue the State takes seriously.

- e. Suggests moving administrative positions to positions that can supervise/support offenders.**

Our caseload ratios are established by legislation and we monitor the ratios on a quarterly basis. At this point we are within our ratios and we do not see evidence to move more positions.

- 6. Can we put more real time data on the website? For instance, the # of offenders being held for lack of housing. Do we have other reports on outcomes we can share? The data in F&F is old. Have we updated any studies?**

The Department is in the process of updating our website. During this process we will identify the types of information we can have available and the ease of finding this information. We appreciate your suggestion.

Traditional research and evaluation can be very time consuming and expensive. We do agree that we need a different method to report on the performance of our programs. We are undertaking several steps to make this type of information more readily available. First, the Program Services Division is reviewing all the programs that are delivered to ensure they are evidence based. Evidence based models have been validated by scientific research to demonstrate their effectiveness. Second, the Department (along with the Agency of Human Service) is moving to a Results Based Accountability (RBA) Model. In the future, we expect to offer more information about how well our programs are performing and the results for offenders that participate.

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- 7. Participant knows an offender who was housed out of state. The offender is now back in VT and dismayed at the operations.**

We have communicated with this participant to learn more about the situation and learn the name offender so we communicate with him. This concerns us because we have heard very different information from offenders returning from out of state.

- 8. Participant commented about the Grievance process. Many think they will be targets for reprisal/retribution if they file a grievance. Can we think of a way to insulate people from this type of behavior?**

This is a very serious issue. In 2012, there were 1,900 grievances filed (this includes field and facility grievances) and 7,507 informal complaints. Our Grievance Directive is very clear about the consequences related to retaliation or threatening. It specifically states:

Employees will be notified that they will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the terms of the Corrections Bargaining Unit agreement if they retaliate or threaten to retaliate against offenders/inmates for using the grievance system.

The full directive can be found at this link:

<http://doc.vermont.gov/about/policies/rpd/correctional-services-301-550/301-335-facilities-general/320.01>

If you know of circumstance of retaliation or threatening, please contact the Offender Hot Line at 1-877-360-2597

- 9. Participant shared a concern/problem with the phone vendor at CRCF.**

The Department communicated directly with this participant to learn more about the issue. We have updated our website with the current contact numbers and emails for inmate phone and commissary services.

- 10. Participant questioned the decision not to use the Blue Spruce Inn as a transitional housing site when we have many offenders held for lack of housing.**

Individuals who are held past minimum for lack of approved housing generally have characteristics, including being sex offenders, mental health or developmental issues, addictive disorders, impulsivity, multiple burnt bridges, etc. which make finding a safe and stable residence difficult. The Department has been aggressively developing transitional housing in recent years and has been commended for the vast range of housing partners and sites which have been created. We have over 300 beds in use or in development and have plans for a total of approximately 500 beds as resources become available. With regard to the Blue Spruce Inn, after careful consideration the Department and our partners did not find the physical location, proposed programs,

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proposed populations and projected costs to adequately meet our needs. Most recently the Blue Spruce Inn was proposed to be transitional housing program for females, an independent review of the proposal found that it was not suitable. However, a proposal was submitted by the Vermont Achievement Center for the same population was deemed suitable. We anticipate opening the program with VAC in April.