

Anchorage Reentry Coalition
Meeting Minutes
3/23/23
Hosted online via Zoom

Representatives in attendance included those from the following organizations/groups:

Civil Survival; One to One Mentorship Program; Alaska Legal Services Corporation; Alaska Behavioral Health; Cook Inlet Tribal Council; Alaska Public Defender Agency, AmeriCorps; Partners Reentry Center; Restorative & Reentry Services, LLC.; Get-By; Running Free Alaska; NeighborWorks Alaska; Alaska VA; Southcentral Foundation, Family Wellness Warriors; Alaska Dept. of Labor & Workforce Development; Anchorage Public Library; The Arc of Anchorage; Alaska Department of Corrections (Spring Creek Correctional Center; Anchorage Probation; HARS); Recover Alaska; Keys to Freedom; Alaska CHARR; Municipality of Anchorage; Alaska Department of Health, AK Breast + Cervical Screening Assistance Program; Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness; Henning Inc.; Office of Rep. Andrew Gray; AK Legislative staff.

Total Attendees: 43

Jonathan Pistotnik, Coalition Coordinator, Anchorage Reentry Coalition (jpistotnik@nwalaska.org)

Mr. Pistotnik opened the meeting and introduced the speakers and meeting agenda.

Rep. Andrew Gray (rep.andrew.gray@akleg.gov; 907-465-4940)

Rep. Gray provided an overview and updates regarding HB 53, of which he is a sponsor. The intent of the bill is to ensure that all people leaving prison have a valid state ID card in their possession when they leave. Rep. Gray stated that DOC has already started to issue an ID card, and went on to state that there was a perception among some that access to valid ID was a non-issue. Rep. Gray reiterated that it was important that the Legislature weigh in on the issue. Rep. Gray stated that there is a substitute bill being written that is intended to improve upon the first version; DOC is weighing in on the bill to reflect current efforts to address this issue.

There was some discussion about the current process; Rep. Gray clarified that there are some correctional institutions where people are getting a photo ID card and that card can be utilized to obtain a regular state ID card at no-cost from DMV. The intent of his bill would be to allow this ID card to be recognized as a valid form of ID for up to six months post-release. One meeting participant, whose son was recently release from incarceration, expressed support for the notion of having a valid ID immediately upon release given the many tasks that usually need to be completed when one is released. Another participant that works with individuals pre-release, that have diagnosed mental health issues, reiterated the notion that many people have numerous tasks upon release and that having an ID in-hand would be helpful. Rep. Gray clarified and reiterated that after discussions that the prudent way forward was to attempt to codify and endorse what DOC has already begun doing in producing ID cards for people releasing from incarceration, and improving upon the old process. Mr. Pistotnik stated that he believed that the reentry simulations hosted around the state over the last few years have helped to shape policy makers thinking on this issue. Mr. Gray also gave credit to Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins for initially bringing forth a prior version of this bill; it stalled out in prior legislative sessions. Rep. Gray stated that he will communicate out when testimony is open for the bill. Mr. Watson added that there are complications that can arise when trying to obtain legitimate employment when one does not posses a valid social security card, and it may be necessary for someone to mail an existing form of ID to SSA; this process could serve to alleviate some of the pressures and complications of that process.

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Kelly Olson, Policy Manager, Civil Survival (<https://civilsurvival.org/>)

Ms. Olson opened by explaining that Civil Survival is an organization based in Washington State, that was created in 2015 and has a staff of 14 people that is led by and for people that are impacted by the criminal justice system. She acknowledged she is formerly incarcerated herself, as is Tarra Simmons the founder of the organization. Civil Survival is an organization that focuses on impacting criminal justice policy and reducing barriers to successful reentry. Two years ago Ms. Simmons was elected to the Washington State Legislature.

Ms. Olson stated that Civil Survival has advocated for changes to legal financial obligations (fees, fines, restitution); changes included reducing interest rates on such fees and fines from 12% down to zero. Civil Survival also offers reentry legal aid to help people with some of the legal processes, in addition to providing education around civics (e.g. how bill and laws are made), advocacy workshops, and promoting and empowering individuals to share their personal stories with policy makers. Olson shared that Civil Survival was involved in advocacy around removing barriers to voting and enhancing voting rights for justice-involved people; it was added that currently incarcerated people have been a part of advocacy efforts. Ms. Olson shared that they are currently engaged in advocating for more policy changes surrounding legal financial obligations, and raising wages for currently incarcerated people up to a minimum wage from \$0.42 an hour. It was shared that there is a weekly meeting where updates are provided on bills and legislation of interest, and provide guidance on how to engage in advocacy. Ms. Olson stated that there are coalitions that have specific focuses that they are involved with, including legal financial obligations, solitary confinement, housing, and others.

Ms. Olson stated that there is an intent to start some up some legal clinics inside some of the institutions, and that recruitment and engagement comes through community and grassroots relationship building. Civil Survival also recognizes the need to compensate people for their time and work (such as through stipends), and that trauma is often involved when people are sharing their personal stories. Ms. Olson explained that in Washington State there are a spectrum of attitudes towards criminal justice policies, and that there are still tough on crime attitudes. Ms. Olson stated that constituents that build relationships with their elected officials can be impactful; many elected officials need to be educated about the challenges people face upon becoming involved and impacted by the justice system.

[Articles shared via the chat:

<https://crosscut.com/politics/2023/02/all-former-wa-prisoners-can-now-vote-so-far-few-have>

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/bill-would-pay-was-incarcerated-workers-minimum-wage/>]

Christina Shadura, Case Manager, Partners Reentry Center (christinashadura@pfpalaska.org; 907-272-1192 x2110

Ms. Shadura introduced herself and provided a brief overview of the reentry services that Partners Reentry Center (PRC) offers. Ms. Shadura explained that recently PRC was awarded a new contract for providing releasing planning services, and that she would be transitioning over into that role. Ms. Shadura explained that she would remain on the staff with PRC, but would be working inside Anchorage Correctional Complex to aid those releasing from that facility. Two similar release planner positions will be filled for Goose Creek and Palmer Correctional Center as well. Ms. Shadura spent some time soliciting some information from meeting participants via some polling questions to

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help inform her new role; some discussion followed. In the tables below are the polling questions, response options, and the number of responses.

There was some discussion about the nature of the work at Anchorage Correctional Complex in terms of the movement in and out of the facility, the roles that staff currently have in terms of release planning, the importance of communication and relationship building, and the importance of meeting the needs of individuals and being person-centered (rather than being broad and formulaic). It was also suggested that an important connection could be the PDA AmeriCorps team that is working with individuals engaged with PED. There was further discussion around the intersectionality of reentry and homelessness. Terria Ware from the Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness stated that there is opportunity to highlight this as an issue locally at the Municipal level; it was stated that there is no systematic data regarding the number of people exiting incarceration that find themselves homeless and it is known there is a gap in terms of collaboration when it comes to transitional housing providers in Anchorage. Stephanie Rhoades added that it would be very challenging for DOC to collect data regarding homeless status, and that ACEH has an opportunity to lead on the issue. Rob Seay, with Henning Inc., added that their organization was interested in adding to local data and understanding regarding the intersectionality of these issues.

Q. Name a program, resource, or referral source that works with reentrants or criminal justice-system involved folks? [Frequency of mentions in parentheses]	
Partners Reentry Center/Partners for Progress (13); Alaska Native Justice Center (6); CITC (Recovery Services / Peer Support / Chanlyut) (3); Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (2); DOLWD / Job Center (2); Henning Inc. (2); New Life Development (2); APIC (1); Reentry Coalitions (1); Alaska Behavioral Health (1); Southcentral Foundation (1); DOC Reentry (1); HOPES Program (1); Aurora House (1); AmeriCorps SAME Justice Program (1); ANMC (1); Clitheroe (1); Akeela (1); GEO Reentry Centers (1); Nine Star (1); CSTS (1); DPA (1); Catholic Social Services (1); Employment opportunities (1); True North (1); Outreaching Lives (1).	

Q. What is the PRIMARY advantage of having a community-based Reentry Planner in an institution?	
3	Resource for institutional DOC staff to assist with reentry, program eligibility, knowledge of community resources, etc.
3	Serving as a resource guide to inmates & staff about programs and services; linkage between community and the inside.
5	Point of contact for external partners; able to share info about potential clients (e.g. collateral, assessments, custody status/movement, assigned PO, applications/paperwork).
5	Case Management (an Independent position who focuses solely on the Offender Management Plan/Release Plan/Reentry Plan and plays a role in its creation, possibly even creates their OWN case plan).
0	None (There's no advantage to having a non-doc employee as an embedded Release Planner in the institution, worst idea ever.)

Q. What do you think the BIGGEST obstacle/challenge will be for an institutional-based Reentry Planner in their position?	
5	They have no direct funding to offer immediate short-term housing/vouchers/services/bus passes, not helpful in a "real" way.
1	Not in the community so they won't be able to assist with anything tangible after individual releases from Incarceration.
10	Institutional Staff will not receive knowledge/understanding of what the intended purpose of the Release Planner is and individual will be underutilized.
2	Inmates/Reentrants will not want to work with this individual if they are considered "DOC"

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Q. The NUMBER ONE barrier for reentrants in Anchorage right now is:	
10	Housing (Access to Short-Term and Long-Term Housing, Funding)
1	Food Insecurity (Benefit delays, Access to Food Banks/Short term)
1	Employment (Lack of 2nd Chance Employers, Training opportunities)
2	Treatment Access (Substance Misuse/Behavioral Health/Medical Resource Confusion)
4	Community Unawareness (Resources have shifted to homelessness and Investing in Criminal Justice reform/habilitation is just not priority right now)

Q. Do you believe Reentrants represent the MAJORITY of the current homeless population in Anchorage?	
10	Yes
7	No
9	I am not sure

Q. Of those folks you believe are currently homeless with a criminal history, do you believe the criminal history/offenses happened as a byproduct of being homeless (Ex: trespassing/sleeping in a parking garage) or did the criminal offense happen first which has resulted in the individual becoming homeless (Ex: sex offense/can't find a place to live)	
3	Homeless status impacts criminal history/offenses
4	Criminal history/offenses impacts homeless status
17	Goes both ways
2	I am not sure

Sasha Turnos, Keys to Freedom, LLC (Keystofreedom19@yahoo.com)

Ms. Turnos introduced Keys to Freedom, a new entity that will be producing a newsletter that will highlight services, programs, eligibility requirements, highlight successes, and share stories, artwork, and creative expressions of people currently and formerly incarcerated. Ms. Turnos covered some of content of the first newsletter that will be published in April; there is an interest in collecting content and stories, so please feel free to reach out if you are interested in contributing.

Jonathan Pistotnik, Reentry Coalition

Mr. Pistotnik told the meeting members about an upcoming training that was geared towards helping front-line staff help understand and navigate the social security process, on behalf of clients that are formerly incarcerated or otherwise involved in the justice system. The training is free and scheduled for May 17 from 10-11:30am.

[Registration link: https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0tcuypqTlrHtW_2WVPydINTkjQbj71LqMt]

**Next Meeting
TBD**