

**Anchorage Reentry Coalition**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**3/11/21**  
**Hosted online via Zoom**

**Representatives in attendance included those from the following organizations/groups:** Alaska Department of Corrections (Reentry; medical services; Anchorage Probation; institution); Southcentral Foundation; Partners Reentry Center; Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development; Alaska Native Justice Center; Supporting Our Loved Ones Group; Anchorage Public Library; NeighborWorks Alaska; Public Defender Agency; Running Free Alaska; Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center; GEO Group (Parkview, Cordova); Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness; Arc of Anchorage; Catholic Social Services; Alaska Housing Finance Corporation; Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Alaska; Turyia of Alaska; Henry House; Anchorage FACT; Alaska VA; Staff to Rep. Claman; Akeela Inc.; Choosing Our Roots; Queers and Allies; Black and Pink Massachusetts; Ladies First Program, Dept. of Health and Social Services; OSMAP, Dept. of Health and Social Services; Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living/Fairbanks Reentry Coalition

Estimated Total Attendees: 58

1. *Introduction: Jonathan Pistotnik, Coalition Coordinator, Anchorage Reentry Coalition*  
([jpistotnik@nwalska.org](mailto:jpistotnik@nwalska.org))

Mr. Pistotnik introduced the agenda and the speakers for the coalition meeting. Mr. Pistotnik stated that the Anchorage Reentry Coalition has existed since 2006, and that there has been a great deal of work to enhance and build reentry services in Anchorage over that time. He stated that his work in this community has been limited in comparison, having only engaged in this role for a little over 2.5 years. During that time he stated that he had not been privy to any substantive conversations regarding the criminal justice system, reentry, and the LGBTQ community. Mr. Pistotnik read a statement from the Prison Policy Initiative substantiating overrepresentation of LGBTQ individuals within the justice system. Mr. Pistotnik expressed his thoughts that in order to most effectively reach and engage with justice involved people that sensitivity and responsiveness to gender and sexual identity should also be a part of the work. Mr. Pistotnik proceeded to introduce and read introductory bios for Michael Cox and Tammie Willis.

2. *Presentation: Michael Cox, Executive Director, Black and Pink Massachusetts*  
([michael@BlackAndPinkMA.org](mailto:michael@BlackAndPinkMA.org))

Black and Pink Massachusetts is a prison abolitionist organization that works with the LGBTQ community and folks living with HIV; there is also an effort to engage with trans individuals and people of color. Mr. Cox briefly described his background, growing up in a poor and violent neighborhood; he stated that he understands a great deal of community work must be completed before prisons and jails can be abolished. Black and Pink Massachusetts is staffed with volunteers, with the exception of Mr. Cox. It was stated that Black and Pink has a national office with chapters around the country, and that the hallmark of the organization is the pen pal program which helps to break down some communication barriers and provides a degree of interaction with the outside world; getting mail while incarcerated can be a very positive thing.

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Mr. Cox went on to explain why there may be overrepresentation of LGBTQ people in the justice system: family life and dynamics; marginalization within structures (e.g. family, school); homelessness; survival economics (e.g. drug sales, sex work, drug use); arrest and justice system engagement; and compounding identities that do not fit in existing systems. Mr. Cox explained that in 2015 Black & Pink National conducted the Coming Out of the Concrete Closets Survey and found that pre-trial detention was a major issue among members that were surveyed (prosecutors can use this as a tool to seek plea agreements); engagement in survival economies was prevalent; and being subject to solitary confinement was reported by 85% of respondents.

Mr. Cox reported that Black and Pink Massachusetts has a weekly drop-in to engage with the community (currently virtual); court support; bail support; policy work; and low-barrier mutual-aid. Mr. Cox also described his involvement with the Special Commission to Study the Health and Safety of LGBTQIA Prisoners, which includes looking at safer housing, transgender healthcare, and sexual health. Mr. Cox described advocacy efforts that he and his organization engaged in regarding the issue of criminalization of LGBTQ people and efforts to have a trans woman placed in a women's facility.

Mr. Cox discussed making coalition spaces more inviting for the LGBTQ community. This includes the importance of pronouns: people may not use the pronoun you assume they would use, they can also serve as a signal for a safe space or ally in this movement. Mr. Cox also pointed out that advocacy for LGBTQ people can take place even if an LGBTQ person is not present; focusing on inclusivity in this work is vital.

Mr. Cox mentioned that for people that are interested in learning more about sexual violence inside facilities, there are resources online. It was stated that while there is reported data these figures are underreported.

- Website: <https://www.blackandpinkma.org/>
- Twitter: @blackandpinkma
- Facebook: /BlackAndPinkMA
- Webinars we've done with directly impacted members:  
<https://www.blackandpinkma.org/resources/webinars-video-resources>
- Personal website with a collection of articles that raise up lived experiences and data about LGBTQ people and the criminal legal system: <https://www.michaelcoxjr.com/new-page-2>

3. *Presentation: Tammie Willis, Queers and Allies (queersandalliesak@gmail.com)*

Ms. Willis explained that there isn't much information and statistics pertaining to the LGBTQ community as it pertains to DOC, such as number of transgender individuals being housed inside a DOC facility.

Ms. Willis explained that when discussing adult reentry it is also important to consider how youth fit into the situation, and went on to explain that while the LGBTQ community is estimated to make up 3%-7% of the entire population, about 30% of the homeless youth population identify as part of the LGBTQ

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community. It was stated that youth that are homeless are at further risk for exploitation and sex trafficking, at-risk for drug use and drug dealing, and other situations that may introduce them to the criminal justice system; once they are engaged in the criminal justice system it can be difficult to extricate oneself from that cyclical process.

Ms. Willis explained further that when these individual engage with services and service providers in the reentry community after being incarcerated they are likely to have experienced trauma and that in many instances crimes they have committed may be rooted in survival. Ms. Willis explained that the incarceration experience can lead to experiencing further traumas and violence, and the sum of which cannot be ignored.

Ms. Willis explained that service providers and people that desire to help those in the LGBTQ community have some things they can do to be impactful in this work. It was explained that one should not make assumptions about who is in the LGBTQ community and who is not (it may be that someone has not come out publically yet). Also, using pronouns and asking about what pronouns others feel comfortable with is good practice; while being respectful of others, this can serve as a signal that you have an openness towards learning about and engaging with people from the LGBTQ community. Displaying certain symbols (e.g. pride flag) may serve to identify safe spaces for LGBTQ people which can be very important for people that may have experienced some severe trauma. Ms. Willis explained that it only takes one person to save someone's life and possibly prevent suicide, and that creating a safe environment can be impactful.

Ms. Willis spoke about an experience relayed from someone who had engaged with Choosing Our Roots, a local organization that strives to pair up LGBTQ homeless youth with safe places to live; that individual explained that Alaska is a physically cold place, so there is an added danger and some added hopelessness to that experience. Ms. Willis explained that while there are some supportive programs for youth that may be houseless/homeless (Choosing Our Roots, Covenant House) there is a lack of supportive programming in this space for adults who may be reentering the community. Ms. Willis explained that there are resources for adults, but for people that identify as part of the LGBTQ community there are barriers for maintaining access, especially for those that identify as transgender.

Ms. Willis stated that when working with folks from the LGBTQ community that are also reentering from incarceration, it is important to keep in mind previous traumas and also be aware of the concurrent barriers that may inhibit people from engaging with services. Ending cycles of trauma is key to this work. Ms. Willis explained it is important that as reentry service providers that you are informed of the resources so that appropriate referrals can be made for clients or individuals seeking assistance. Some LGBTQ-specific resources that were mentioned in Anchorage include: Choosing Our Roots, Covenant House, AWAIC, Identity Inc. & Spectrum, and Planned Parenthood.

Ms. Willis explained that when engaging with the LGBTQ community one is likely to make some mistakes but that you should afford yourself some grace; one should not be afraid to make these mistakes, one should continue to engage with people from the LGBTQ community, and use your experiences to learn and improve. Ms. Willis invited the meeting attendees to continue these conversations and to expand upon this work surrounding LGBTQ issues and reentry in Alaska, of which there is virtually none.

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During the discussion after the presentation, there was some further discussion regarding the historical criminalization of LGBTQ people.

4. *Updates: Janice Weiss, Reentry Program Manager DOC Reentry Unit (janice.weiss@alaska.gov)*

Ms. Weiss introduced herself, explaining that this is her third year in this position and that prior to this position she was the Coordinator for the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition. Ms. Weiss proceeded to introduce the reentry unit and the staff that are on-board in the Reentry Unit, including Joanna Wiita (Grant Manager), Michael Clark (Criminal Justice Planner for Education & Vocational Training), Billy Blixt (Education Specialist), Stacie Williamson (Program Coordinator), Ina Lewis (Criminal Justice Technician II), There is currently an open position for a Protective Services Specialist (social worker); there will be openings in the future for another Program Coordinator and a career counselor position

Ms. Weiss explained that reentry coalition meetings and others like it are really important for helping to inform the work of DOC and the Reentry Unit; understanding where the needs and opportunities from the perspective of the community are important vital. Ms. Weiss explained that a diversity of programs are critical for meeting the needs of people inside DOC and that the community is important for helping to shape the response. It was stated that it is important to remember that people return to communities around the state, not just Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks and the larger communities, and so the Reentry Unit will be working to work with communities statewide. Ms. Weiss explained that existing reentry stakeholders and resources will be engaged as more things develop.

Ms. Weiss stated that staff based out of the institutions are able to enter the facilities, however, staff that are not based in an institution are still unable to enter those facilities at this time. Those staff that do work in the institutions, such as Education Coordinators, have been able to acquire some resources and bring them to the inmates and engage with inmates on a one-on-one basis. It was stated that there were efforts to ensure each institution had a dedicated closed circuit TV channel that was able to air educational content, and it was suggested by a meeting participant that this could be an opportunity for showing some faith-based programming as well. It was also suggested that the Reentry Unit could serve as an advocate and liaison between community-based reentry stakeholders and the DOC institutional staff that sometimes are a degree removed from the day-to-day reentry work taking place in the community.

5. *Updates: Jonathan Pistotnik, Coalition Coordinator*

Mr. Pistotnik explained that HB 118 is a two-part bill that may be of particular interest in that it intends to have individuals that have been incarcerated for a certain amount of time leave a DOC facilities with an ID or driver's license in hand, and it aims to enhance access to computers and technology for people that are incarcerated. Visit the AK State Legislature website for more details about the bill: <http://www.akleg.gov/basis/Bill/Detail/32?Root=HB%20118>

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**Next meeting TBD**

Other Online Resources Shared During the Meeting

- Annual PREA Reports - <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dij/Pages/GeneralInfo/PREAAnnualReports.aspx>
  
- Alaska DOC PREA Page - <https://doc.alaska.gov/prison-rape-elimination-act>
  
- Stephanie Covington Book - <https://www.stephaniecovington.com/books/bookstore/becoming-trauma-informed/>
  
- “Court Says Idaho Must Provide Gender Confirmation Surgery To Transgender Inmate” NPR Article: <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/23/753788697/court-says-idaho-must-provide-gender-confirmation-surgery-to-transgender-inmate>
  
- Trauma Training for Criminal Justice Professionals, SAMHSA - <https://www.samhsa.gov/gains-center/trauma-training-criminal-justice-professionals>
  
- Just Detention International Website - <https://justdetention.org/>