

# **BERKS COUNTY PRISON BOARD MINUTES**

## **MAY 9, 2018**

The Berks County Prison Board met in a regular session on Wednesday, May 9, 2018 at 9:00 A.M. in the Commissioners' Board Room on the 13th Floor of the Berks County Services Center, pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

### **CALL TO ORDER:**

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt called the meeting to order at 9:09 A.M.

The following members were in attendance:

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt  
Commissioner Christian Leinbach  
Controller Sandy Graffius  
Sheriff Eric Weaknecht  
Judge Scott Lash  
District Attorney John Adams

The following members were absent:

Commissioner Mark Scott

The following County staff also attended:

Solicitor Christine Sadler  
Human Resources Director Jessica Weaknecht  
Chief Administrative Officer Ronald Seaman

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The March 14, 2018 meeting minutes were approved as presented. The meeting scheduled for April 11, 2018 was cancelled per motion made on March 14, 2018.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

### **JAIL SENIOR STAFF REPORTS**

Commissioner Barnhardt spoke about the events planned this month for public outreach and public awareness. It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the National Association of Counties (NACo) Stepping Up, an initiative to divert those with mental illnesses out of the criminal justice system. This initiative included Commissioner Barnhardt and representatives from the Courts, Adult Probation, IT and the Jail. The Forensic Diversion Unit diverted 400 individuals out of the criminal justice system, educated and trained police officers in Berks County, and trained all 222 correctional officers on mental health first aid.

Commissioner Barnhardt spoke about the Behavioral Health Task Force, a collaboration of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), Department of Human Services (DHS) and Court of Corrections (COC). He explained that the Task Force focuses on helping individuals with different types of difficulties such as autism, drug and alcohol issues, and mental health, and helps divert them from the criminal justice system. One of the hallmarks of the Task Force is to suspend instead of terminate medical assistance when a person becomes incarcerated.

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The Task Force pushed the State to expand their forensic beds in Norristown State Hospital and Torrance State Hospital. The State surveyed counties for additional space in buildings and/or jails to house some severely mental ill inmates with reimbursement for treatment and program services from the State. The Task Force wants to push the State to include reimbursement for the increase of correctional officers needed to keep a unit operating. Commissioner Barnhardt noted that there was a good response from rural areas and expects real success. He foresees a partnership forming with the State regarding severely mentally ill inmates in the criminal justice system. Commissioner Barnhardt stated that Berks County had all of the treatment courts that were recommended by the State and the Criminal Justice Advisory Boards (CJAB).

Commissioner Barnhardt spoke about the Data Driven Justice efforts to gather data on cost of services and identify individuals who have potential to be high utilizers of the system then treat them prior to incarceration. He introduced Warden Janine Quigley who presented a PowerPoint about the efforts within the Jail. She explained that that Data Driven Justice effort is a great opportunity for Berks to quantify issues. She demonstrated the increase of the need for mental health treatment by comparing multiple statistics: inmate use of psychotropic medication in 2000 increased 37% by 2017, and licensed psychological and psychiatric staff had a sharp increase between 2009 and 2016. The Warden spoke about the increase of contact and demand and gave the example of 3 correctional officers observing inmates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. She added that this need for observation had become normal compared to an occasional issue in the past. She spoke about the increase in assault and emergency transportation to the hospital.

The Warden displayed a breakdown of the mental health stability roster provided by the Department of Corrections (DOC): Out of 1109 inmates, 120 had mental illness in their life but were not actively being treated, 60 were treated in the last 5 years, 638 were actively being treated, and 91 additional inmates were considered seriously mentally ill. Commissioner Leinbach pointed out that nearly 9% of the inmate population was severely mentally ill and 66% were on the mental illness roster. He added that this ratio is consistent across the country. The Warden explained that quantifying this information will help identify the needs and describe why there should be changes in the system.

The Warden spoke about the secure interactive chairs that are used by the seriously mentally ill inmates in segregated status. The goal is for these inmates to be outside of their cell at least 20 hours per week. The Warden reported a positive impact on the inmates as well as the staff. The Warden spoke about the increase of staffing and forensic staff through PrimeCare. Commissioner Leinbach noted that this was the primary cost to the County that increased the tax this year and stated it had to be done. The Warden added that the staffing increase was necessary for the safety of the inmates and staff.

The Warden talked about the importance of the initiatives that raise awareness about the need for change in the system, on statewide and national levels. She stated the DHS philosophy was to have people out in the community and not locked up in forensic hospitals long term. The Warden communicated the fact that some individuals with serious mental illness are better served in a facility instead of the community but end up sitting in a county jail, the most restrictive place for anyone. She stated there has to be capacity increase somewhere in between, which was the message of the initiatives across the state.

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The Warden organized a mental health initiative committee through the Pennsylvania County Corrections Association (PCCA) with Wardens across the state. The plan for the eleven county jails participating is to take combined data, ideas and suggestions, and submit them to the State.

The Warden spoke about the monthly meeting where she meets with PrimeCare, SAM and a lieutenant from the Jail to review the cases of each seriously mentally ill inmate. They work through management issues or contact the District Attorney's office or Public Defender's office to see if the case can be accelerated. The Warden thanked John Adams, District Attorney for his support.

The Warden stated Data Driven Justice is a great opportunity for Berks County to start diverting high utilizers by using the systems in Berks County from the ER, Police and Jail. She gave an example of an inmate that was found not guilty because of insanity: the man was in jail for a total of 871 days and was still waiting for treatment at Wernersville State Hospital. The Warden presented a report that compared the average length of stay of inmates with different levels of mental illness. The report showed that on average, seriously mentally ill inmates stayed in jail 96 days longer than mentally stable inmates.

Chief Deputy Warden Jeffrey Smith reported that the inmate population was 1,106. Of the population reported, 50 inmates were technical parole violators from the State.

Chief Deputy Smith updated the Board on the status of the staffing. There was 1 sergeant vacancy and 1 correctional officer vacancy. Three cadets were in the academy and expected to graduate on July 11, 2018. Nine potential candidates were on a waiting list for testing.

Deputy Warden Kyle Russell reported the progress of the Guardian RFID project, a system inside the facility that tracks when officers interact with inmates. The system was launched successfully on March 28, 2018. Commissioner Barnhardt noted that this was a CCAP initiative.

Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith spoke about an audit of the technical parole violators done on May 1, 2018 through the Department of Corrections. She reported that the exit interview went very well and was looking forward to positive results on the audit.

Deputy Smith also stated the Jail partnered with the Berks Counseling Center to apply to participate in a criminal justice and behavior health collaboration through the National Council of Behavioral Health. The collaboration is for training and technical assistance for individuals re-entering society and to ensure they are receiving good screening tools, good intervention and overall good treatment.

**SOLICITOR'S REPORT**

Solicitor Sadler had two items for Executive session regarding personnel and arbitration. No action needed.

**COMMENTS FROM THE JAIL BOARD**

None.

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The Warden presented the National Correctional Officer and Employee Week video. She planned to award two medals of valor to correctional officers that were attacked by an inmate in the mental health unit, later that day.

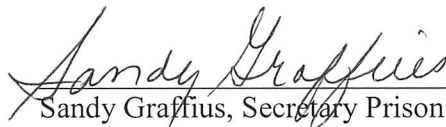
The Warden announced the memorial service for all fallen correctional officers including Sgt. Baserman, who was killed in the Department of Corrections in February, 2018. The service will be held May 10, 2018 at 2:30pm at the Jail.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Board moved into Executive session at 9:48 A.M., which adjourned at 9:54 A.M.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The next Prison Board meeting will be held June 13, 2018 in the Special Operations Center at the Berks County Jail.

  
Sandy Graffius, Secretary Prison Board