

BERKS COUNTY PRISON BOARD MINUTES

MARCH 14, 2018

The Berks County Prison Board met in a regular session on Wednesday, March 14, 2018 at 9:00 A.M. in the Special Operations Center at the Berks County Jail, pursuant to due notice to Board members and the public.

CALL TO ORDER:

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M.

The following members were in attendance:

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt
Commissioner Christian Leinbach
Controller Sandy Graffius
Sheriff Eric Weaknecht

The following members were absent:

Commissioner Mark Scott
District Attorney John Adams
Judge Scott Lash

The following County staff also attended:

Solicitor Christine Sadler
Chief Administrative Officer Ronald Seaman

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The January 10, 2018 meeting minutes were approved as presented. The meeting scheduled February 14, 2018 was cancelled for want of a quorum.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

JAIL SENIOR STAFF REPORTS

Warden Janine Quigley stated the inmate population was 1,054. Of the population reported, 96 inmates were residing at the Community Reentry Center, 9 inmates were being held for Schuylkill County and 46 inmates were technical parole violators from the State. The mental health inmate population was 587, with 92 being considered seriously mentally ill.

Commissioner Leinbach described the stunned reactions of Senator Bob Casey Jr. and a staffer from Senator Pat Toomey's office when he shared the Berks County Jail's mental health inmate population numbers the previous week. A discussion took place about the level of public awareness and the potential of large scale education.

The Warden mentioned that as of January, Norristown State Hospital opened 50 new beds for mental health patients; however there were still 139 people on the waiting list. Commissioner Barnhardt spoke about a productive meeting with the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) regarding potential regional facilities to treat the mentally ill, starting with smaller counties. DHS agreed to pay for the treatment component once a facility is found.

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Chief Deputy Warden Jeffrey Smith updated the Board on the status of the staffing. There was 1 sergeant vacancy and 3 correctional officer vacancies. Twelve applicants were on a waiting list for testing in April, 2018.

Deputy Warden Kyle Russell reported the progress of the Guardian RFID project. The staff members had been fully trained and were working through the system to determine if any changes will be needed. The system was expected to be launched March 28, 2018.

Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith spoke about the Berks Opioid Task Force plans to add signage and give out pamphlets about the Council of Chemical Abuse resources for released inmates and visitors.

SOLICITOR'S REPORT

Solicitor Sadler had a litigation update for Executive session. No action needed.

COMMENTS FROM THE JAIL BOARD

Commissioner Leinbach requested a discussion to reschedule the April Prison Board meeting.

1. A motion was made by Commissioner Leinbach, seconded by Controller Graffius, and all voted unanimously to cancel the April 11, 2018 Prison Board meeting. Motion carried.

Commissioner Barnhardt spoke about the meetings held by Nicolle Schnovel of the Berks Connections Pretrial Services with the new Magisterial District Judges to get assessments done prior to setting bail. This will divert low risk defendants from being held in jail because of high bail amounts. The Warden explained the two keys to the risk assessment: (1) will the offender be likely to show up to their trial and (2) will the offender be likely to re-offend within the community. Commissioner Leinbach added that bail should be about risk, not money. Sheriff Weaknecht noted that he had witnessed the extreme opposite and gave examples of high risk defendants getting low bail amounts.


Commissioner Barnhardt reported he will be attending and speaking at the Villanova School of Law on March 16, 2018, about the challenges counties face with mental health illness. Commissioner Barnhardt mentioned the NACO Stepping up Initiative event that that will be held by Berks County on May 16, 2018. The event was still in the planning stage.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board adjourned into Executive session at 9:20 A.M. for litigation reasons, which adjourned at 9:30 A.M.

ADJOURNMENT

The next Prison Board meeting will be held May 9, 2018 in the Commissioners' Board Room on the 13th Floor of the Berks County Services Center.


Sandy Graffius, Secretary Prison Board