



## DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION AND REHABILITATION

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### PRRS Community Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting Thursday, December 5, 2013 @7:30am

## Minutes

Co-Chairs Dr. Diane Scott-Jones and Thomas DeGonia II, Esquire convened the meeting at 7:35am. A total of 29 individuals were present at the meeting include: PRRS Residents; PRRS Staff; local community residents; representatives from Montgomery College; State Attorney Office; County's Health and Human Services Department; Montgomery County Drug Court; HHS' Outreach Workers and Youth Violence Prevention Efforts; County's Housing Department; County Executive's Innovations Office; County Council Staff Representatives; Faith-based Reentry organizations; Montgomery Works; Countystat; University of Maryland, College Park; and Bethesda Cares.

After all attendees introduced themselves, Division Chief Stefan LoBuglio provided a summary of a six-page Chief's Report that details programmatic, security, personnel, and facility changes and improvements that have occurred in the PRRS program since the last CAC meeting in September. The report also provides performance statistics. He specifically mentioned the program's new efforts to track recidivism and reported that the latest data showed that under 10% of individuals released from PRRS were convicted of a crime within one-year, and for three-years, the rate was 28.8%. Reentry Services Manager Tina Michaels was recognized for her 12-year commitment to the Pre-Release program and her countless contributions to improve the program. She has been promoted to serve as Diversion Manager at the DOCR Pre-Trial Division, and this was her last meeting as a PRRS staff member. The report is attached to these minutes.

Co-Chair Scott-Jones explained that in 2013, the PRRS Community Advisory Committee adopted the theme of "Transforming the Pipeline to Prison → Pathways to Employment for its four quarterly meetings. In March, the CAC met to discuss the challenges that individuals with criminal histories face in "Securing Employment" in today's labor market, and some dissection of what has proved so successful at PRRS to assist Residents with initial job placement. In June, the meeting focused on "Succeeding on the Job, and the efforts made to help clients develop the soft and hard skills needed to survive challenging and fast-paced entry level jobs. At the September meeting, attendees discussed the critical need for individuals with criminal histories to "Build Career Ladders," and to approach each job and promotion as part of a step-wise ascent to longer-term career goals (see attached minutes and materials from the September meeting). And she, added, that this fourth and final meeting focused on the topic of "Entrepreneurship." In the wide-ranging discussion that followed, the following points were made:

- PRRS staff shared that the program supports Residents who want to return to their own businesses after verifying that the businesses are legitimate and properly established. For Residents with entrepreneurial ambitions, staff members assist them obtain entry level work in that field of interest. Alternatively, staff members may recommend placement in a job that provides Residents with flexibility in work hours that would allow them to take an education and training program that would prepare them for their desired field of interest.
- One Resident spoke of how PRC helped him define his longer-term goals. Like many Residents who first enter the building, he indicated his desire to earn his CDL trucking license. Staff then explained that many individuals with criminal histories gravitate towards the occupation of truck driving given the perception that is it a cash business and that criminal history is usually not a

barrier for these jobs. However, when this Resident met his Work Release Coordinator, he actually indicated that he was interested in food service and expressed his interest in someday opening up a place of his own. Given this, the Work Release Coordinator steered the Resident towards a food services job and also to a training program called Servsafe. Recently, he passed the certification test, has his managerial Servsafe certificate, and is working in food services. He did share his gratitude to PRC for helping him address his “demons” with alcohol and for really changing into a person who believes in himself and his future. In addition to the Certificate, he indicated his pride in having a resume, cover letters, letter of explanation for his criminal history, and is looking to enter a food services training program in the near future. He reflected on how easy it is to feel “stuck” in a job and his plan to keep advancing towards his longer-term goals.

- Another Resident spoke about his interest in auto mechanics and someday running his own shop. He shared that he initially wanted to take a job with a sanitation disposal company, but his Work Release Coordinator rejected the idea given his greater potential. He had earned his GED in jail with one of the highest scores and is now a scholarship candidate with Montgomery College. The decision was to place him in a job in a grocery store that provides him with flexible hours while he participates in a college preparatory program called Future Link at Montgomery College. He will graduate from that program next week, and has been linked up with mentors in the field of auto mechanics. In the winter, he will enroll in courses at the college in auto mechanics. Poignantly, he shared a reflection that “I would never have thought that I would be doing the things that I am doing today.”
- A third Resident shared her excitement that she is pursuing her long term goals in event planning and someday running her own company. She earned her GED at MCCF and is now working at an entry level job for a company that hosts events for children and corporations where she is gaining experience in the business. On reflection of the benefits of the program, she praised PRRS staff members who have helped her immensely and she articulated how she has matured. One change, she noted, was her ability now to avoid individuals that might get her into trouble. She also pointed out that the peer culture is very helpful at PRRS where she finds so many individuals like her having criminal backgrounds are really focused on turning their lives around.
- A fourth Resident noted that he served 21 years incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and has been in the program for only three weeks. With emotion, he shared some of his struggles and fears as he has been adjusting to a program so different from federal prison. There, he indicated, individuals had to be aggressive to survive, and he is finding it challenging to adjust to a new environment where staff members are so respectful and helpful. In the community, he noted that so much has changed.
- Representatives from Montgomery College shared their commitment to provide educational opportunities for all County Residents – including those at the Pre-Release Center – to advance themselves in existing or new careers. They indicated that the College offers courses in event planning, automotive mechanics, food services, entrepreneurship, home improvements, personal trainer and others. These classes are offered at the college’s five campuses and some of these are credit classes that can lead to an associate degree and others are non-credit but can lead to certification and licensure. The representatives also indicated that scholarship funds are available for some of these classes, and the application closing date is December 11.
- Some discussion occurred concerning what licensures would exclude individuals with criminal histories, and the College representative and PRRS staff member indicated that the state’s Department of Labor and Licensing provides this information on their website (<http://www.dlrl.state.md.us/license/>). A representative from a faith-based support program shared his efforts in Annapolis to advocate for better shielding and disclosure laws and requirements for individuals with criminal histories.
- An emeritus Professor from the University of Maryland College Park who is teaching an Introduction to Business class at PRC shared that many Residents underestimate the effort and

risk of entrepreneurship. He recommends to them that they mentor with older individuals in the field to learn the “business.” He stressed the value of entry level jobs at building trust, reliability, discipline, and a host of soft skills that are valued greatly in the employer community. A member of the local community who retired from a career in government also chimed in that entrepreneurship is not for everyone, and that valuing stability and security are important when considering careers options.

- The County’s Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator discussed the need for many young people, particularly of color, to find their passion and interests and to receive longer term goals. He mentioned the importance of encouraging their interest in STEM and recognizing that their inherent interest in technology such as video gaming, tablets, and phone can lead to excellent careers.
- A Minister from a faith-based Reentry program added that many of the clients at PRC and others with criminal histories actually have marketable skills that can support a long-term interest in entrepreneurial ventures.
- The discussion concluded with positive comments from a County Council representative and the County’s Chief Innovation Officer who indicated strong support for entrepreneurial ventures by county government. One specific idea under consideration involves the County setting up an incubator commercial kitchen that could serve to jumpstart entrepreneurs interested in new food service ventures that is modeled on a similar program in DC called Union Kitchen.

Co-Chair Diane Scott-Jones thanked the Residents and all participants for the lively and engaging conversation, and as is custom, asked if there were any final comments particularly from those who were quiet during the conversation. Many participants used the time to thank the Residents for sharing their stories.

Before concluding, Ms. Scott-Jones indicated that the Community Advisory Committee will focus its quarterly meetings on the topic of “Healthy Recovery” in 2014. The schedule is

Thursday, March 6, 2014:	Accessing Health Care
Thursday, June 5, 2014:	Physical/Mental Health Treatment
Thursday, September 11, 2014:	Healthy Relationships
Thursday, December 4, 2014:	Spiritual/Emotional Health

The meeting adjourned at 9:05am.