

Sept 25 Gathering of the Coalition for Rehabilitation and Reentry

Brian Fischer, Felix Rosa, Thomas Slater, Continued from page 4

Higher education: If I could have a legacy, it would be to add more college programs to New York State prisons. I don't think anyone disagrees; anyone with more education is less likely to have a problem in the community. We used to have TAP funds. I can speak up for it but we need voice.

At a facility, I saw the clothing that we give inmates when they leave: a pair of dungarees no one would want to be caught dead in, and a sweatshirt, in the middle of the summer. So I am moving to eliminate that, and inmates will all get a khaki pair of pants and a white shirt, or white blouse for ladies, so those inmates have at least that to wear when they are going on their first job interview.

We have created a Women's Task Force to look at the issues for women in prison. They are significantly different than men's issues. Maybe we need to do some of our programming at the front end rather than the back end, like aggression therapy. I'm just trying to say we have some more of creativity; we are looking into and trying new things.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PAROLE, FELIX ROSA:

On behalf of Chairman Alexander, I want to thank CURE-NY for inviting us to present at this important conference.



We at the Division of Parole, led by Chairman Alexander, are trying to change the culture of our agency. We found that our agency had shifted its primary focus over the last few years to that of a law enforcement agency,

but that is not our sole mission. Parole Officers also serve to a large extent as social workers and often find themselves in the middle of those two roles. One day a parole officer may wake up and have to perform the duties of a marriage or job counselor. The next day, he or she may have to take on the role of prosecutor and testify at a hearing. And yes, parole officers also carry guns and handcuffs.

Chairman Alexander has been personally engaged in our effort to focus on reentry and is making sure the reentry message is delivered not just to our peace officer staff, but also to every member of the Division of Parole, including our clerical employees and support staff. We want everyone to understand that our agency is reentry. We are the people charged with trying to ensure the successful reentry of persons released from correctional facilities. We stand as full partners in this goal with DOCS, which as Commissioner

Fischer points out, is also engaged in transitioning inmates from prison to society.

To this end, we understand not every program that's out there works. We have to evaluate the programs available to us, to find out which work and use them effectively.

Our philosophy also focuses on graduated sanctions. We should not be too quick to issue a warrant when another route might be successful. We need to consider alternatives to incarceration. What else can we do to make sure that a person does not end up back in state prison? Issuing a warrant is the easy thing to do. The hard thing is saying, "I'm not going to issue that warrant today. I am going to give the parolee a chance and I am going to refer them to a program that is going to keep them out of state prison."

EXECUTIVE DEPUTY DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF PROBATION & CORRECTIONAL ALTERNATIVES (DPCA) THOMAS SLATER:

The DPCA website, <http://www.dpca.state.ny.us>, has valuable information on certificates of relief and information on voting rights. The major goal of DPCA is to reduce recidivism. Rehabilitation is an effective way to reduce recidivism and thereby enhance public safety. Not only does rehabilitation reduce recidivism, it will also improve the quality of life for the individuals rehabilitated and their families.

The best strategy for reentry is to make sure individuals do not go to prison in the first place. That is what probation and alternatives to incarceration are all about. NYS currently has about 200 alternatives to incarceration programs funded by DPCA. Recently, these programs have been moved to performance based contracting. This type of contracting insures that the programs focus on measurable outcomes and in so doing provide effective services to rehabilitate offenders.

Another program DPCA is really excited about is Pathways to Employment, and information is available on our web site about this program. It is comprised of three components: Employment Matters is a seven hour training offered to probation officers to equip them with specific information that they can use to direct and help motivate individuals they supervise who need assistance with employment.



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Ready Set Work! is a twenty hour curriculum delivered to groups of probationers by trained probation officers to prepare probationers for employment. Retention Counts is a group for graduates of Ready Set Work! to assist them with problems and issues they encounter in searching for employment and once they have obtained employment. Model Resource Centers exist in several counties and DPCA is working with New York City Probation to develop one there. To be designated a Model Resource Center counties must operate all three components of the Pathways to Employment Model. DPCA also currently has a collaborative initiative with the National Institute of Corrections to develop the capacity within New York State to train Offender Workforce Development Specialists.

Another major initiative of DPCA is the development of the capacity for probation departments to assess risk and needs of offenders through the COMPASS instrument. Assessment of risk and need is the cornerstone of evidence-based practice. Proper assessment determines what criminogenic needs should be addressed and then identifies the offender at medium and high risk of recidivism for which evidence based programs should be provided. This process also addresses cultural and gender based competency, helping to ensure that offenders are responsive to the programs offered. Finally, risk and need assessment provides the framework for the evaluation of the effectiveness of programs and services provided to offenders. We should strive to continually improve our efforts at rehabilitation.

Q & A:

Rima Vesely Flad: What happens when someone is accruing child support arrears while they are incarcerated? We are told they are incurring 9% interest while they are incarcerated and 60% can be removed from their salary after they are released. What is being done to change this policy?

Felix Rosa: One thing we can do is try to change the law. It is the law that requires the accumulation of child support arrears. We can also lower the barriers that keep people from being employed. Parole is considering issuing certificates of release at parole board interviews. Why wait until they are on parole and having trouble finding work?

Unidentified participant: Is there an effort regarding clarity as to what parole readiness is; and is there programming designed to work with a person, from the beginning, to get them to be parole ready, so the possibility increases, and they don't have to guess what it is they need to do to get released by the board?

Brian Fischer: Let's not consider this as automatic. Just

because we identify a need and provide that service, doesn't mean that individual is ready for release. Just because we provide education doesn't mean the individual who goes through that program goes through any changes. I agree with what you are saying, we all know what you mean, but it is not as simple as that. The Governor talks about transparency, and I agree with that. The inmate should know what he needs to do. But if he's been a you know what kind of guy in prison, he can go through all the programs and parole is not going to let him out. It is an individual situation.

Susan Wright: What are we doing program wise for the ten times denied parole inmate?

Felix Rosa: The law currently allows each individual member to assign the weight that the board member personally feels should be assigned to different factors. So it is possible board members are looking at a particular case and assign more weight to one particular factor or another.

Organizations Attending Sept. 25

33 select organizations have completed the initial work of developing a common platform, now available via www.bestweb.net/~cureny/Co_plea.htm That platform will continue to evolve. A next phase in the development of the Coalition will be to broaden the Coalition still further. Other organizations interested in joining the Coalition should examine the current platform and contact CURE-NY

Attendees included members of the following organizations:

ARISE	NAACP, Sullivan County
Binghamton S. Justice Project	NYS Alternatives to Violence
Black & Latino Democratic Committee, Sullivan County	NYS Catholic Conference
Center for Constitutional Rights	NYS Coal. Families of Lifers
Center for Law and Justice	NYS Defender s Assoc.
Center for NuLeadership	NYS Society of Friends
Citizens Against Recidivism	Peter Young Housing Industry Treatment
Citizens for Restorative Justice	Prison Action Network
Coalition for Parole Restoration	Prison Families of New York
College Initiative Program	Prisoners are People Too
Correctional Assoc of New York	Reentry Net / Bronx Defenders
CURE-NY	Rehabilitation Through the Arts Restoration Committee
Dioc. Restorative Justice Comm	
ICARE	Survivors of Violence
Interfaith Alliance	Trees Without Roots
Interfaith Impact of NYS	Union Organizing
Kingston Unitarian Church	

the Restorative Platform of the Coalition for Rehabilitation and Reentry

to foster reentry with incentives, rehabilitation plans, health and employability

Find full descriptions via www.bestweb.net/~cureny/Co_plea.htm

Indigent Protection; for early diagnosis:

1. EXPANDED PRE-TRIAL SERVICES

- Available to all indigent offenders.
- Identify needs and possible remedies in collaboration with counsel.

2. PUBLIC DEFENSE COMMISSION

- Insure wise indigent defense and plans.

Knowledge; for economic self-sufficiency:

3. JOB-ORIENTED EDUCATION

- Vocational training.
- Job-oriented post secondary education.
- Job preparation/placement-assistance.

Health; in body, mind and spirit:

4. DRUG LAW REFORM

- Judicial discretion re treatment of addictions.

5. TREATMENT / TRANSFORMATION

- Better funding for addiction & mental health.
- Evaluate and replicate transformative programs:
 - AA and NA, Network,
 - Merle Cooper Program,
 - Rehabilitation Through the Arts,
 - Alternatives to Violence Project,
 - Veteran's Residential Therapeutic Program.
 - Victim Awareness Panels,
 - Victim-Offender Mediation
 - Victim Restitution/Compensation Programs

6. PRISON HEALTH SERVICES

- Oversight by NYS Dept. of Health.
- Policies re HIV, AIDS, and Hepatitis.
- Early release for qualified old and ill incarcerated persons.

Rehabilitation Incentives:

7. MERIT TIME

- Incentive-based rehabilitation plan for a reentry-process that begins at conviction.
- Available to most incarcerated persons.
- Conditioned on rehabilitation fulfillment.
- Vested in six month intervals.

Transitional Services:

8. PAROLE

- Full compliance with Executive Law 259-i.
- Establish statutory guidelines for recognition of rehabilitation.
- Develop and use modern risk assessment technology.
- Establish County Parole Advisory Councils to aid reentry.
- Strengthen referrals and counseling for reentry.
- Restore Division of Parole latitude in merit termination of parole.

9. WORK RELEASE

- Expanded work release facilities.
- Available to most incarcerated persons.

10. REENTRY SUPPORT

- Mentoring guidelines, training, and reimbursements.
- Additional half-way houses.
- Funding for community-based reentry assistance.
- County-based reentry resource and referral centers.

11. FAMILY SERVICES

- Improved visiting services.
- Educational sessions on families, corrections, and community assistance.
- Family reunion programs at all major facilities.
- Family-connection programs.

12. LONG-TERMERS, LIFERS PROGRAMS

- Late career development. education programs.
- Canadian LifeLine Program for NYS Lifers on parole assisting other lifers during and after incarceration.
- Partnerships with community agencies to aid re-integration.

Supporting the Platform

At the Sept. 25 meeting, there were few requests for additions to the proposed platform. The twelve current sub platforms, each including a Summary, Coalition Position, and Rationale, are all on the web via: www.bestweb.net/~cureny/Co_plea.htm

At that same website, you'll also find "support" links to sample letters of support for each of the twelve sub-platforms, and email addresses for key NYS legislators.

Coordinated Waves of Support

While supporting emails, letters, fax, and legislative visits for any of the twelve sub-platforms are strongly encouraged anytime, an occasional synchronization of such efforts can be quite effective.

Therefore, at selected times, we will ask all advocacy organizations, and others, to invite all their members, friends and relatives, to go to www.bestweb.net/~cureny/Co_plea_now.htm.

There, at that website, we will seek synchronized action on only one of the twelve sub-platforms. Again, an "info" link to a description of the selected sub-platform and a "support" link to a sample letter for that sub-platform will be available.

We urge all advocacy organizations, and others, to resolve to join with us in these synchronized waves of actions during the coming months.

It was also agreed, at the Sept. 25 Coalition Meeting, that the websites and newsletters of organizations will contain (1) links to the above [Co_plea.htm](http://www.bestweb.net/~cureny/Co_plea.htm) website for information and sample letters on the twelve sub-platforms, and (2) announcements of each new "wave process."

Support a New Era

It's clear, from a review of the previous presentations, from the Sept. 25 gathering, that we have entered a new era of criminal justice in New York State. It is an era characterized by a common understanding, by many advocacy groups and NYS administration, that crime and cost can both be reduced significantly by changes in NYS criminal justice policy and practice. It is a recognition that a shift can now be made from a too-heavy emphasis on punishment and suppression, to an investment in social development. Already, significant progress has been made under the new administration in Albany. The Coalition platform, outlined on page 7 and more fully available via www.bestweb.net/~cureny/Co_plea.htm provides a further road map for the future.

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This newsletter will track developments in the pursuit of the platform objectives, as well as keeping an eye on the still broader State and National justice scene.

You are needed in this process! We suggest that you first peruse the platform via www.bestweb.net/~cureny/Co_plea.htm and then try your hand at tailoring one of the "support" sample letters for an issue you are very interested in.

If you're not already a member, or if your membership has expired (see the expiration date on the addressing label), take a minute now to join (or rejoin) CURE-NY.

Please fill in and mail this membership application to:

CURE-NY, PO Box 102, Katonah, NY 10536

Your Name _____
Address _____
City State & Zip Code _____
Phone _____ email _____
Fax _____

Please check type of membership and Annual Dues

<input type="checkbox"/> Prisoner	\$ 2.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$ 50.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Basic	\$ 10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Life	\$100.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$ 20.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$500.00

And, please send us your email address, so you can receive the CURE-NY Newsletter by email! It saves us expense.

P.S. The gathering of 33 advocacy organizations on Sept. 25 cost us over \$2300, and we're still in the red for over \$1000. And, we're planning further brochures, etc. So if you can, please consider an extra shot in the arm for CURE-NY and the Coalition.