

Mayor's Commission on Reentry Minutes
October 18, 2021 at 1:00pm

In attendance: Kristin Barker, Pat Frey, Stacy Rivera, Bridget Downs, Monica Spencer, Baki Muhammad, Gamaliel Torres, John House, John Wade, Chelsea Baker, Sabrina Leonard, Rebecca Covington, and Waleisah Wilson

The minutes from the September Commission meeting were reviewed. Pat Frey motioned to approve. Baki Muhammad seconded that motion, and the minutes were approved.

Pat Frey updated the group on progress that has been made on data sharing. We met with the City Attorney's office to make sure we are all on the same page when it comes to data sharing. Lucy Sheftall suggested the most important thing we share is an agreement that clients sign to address sharing their information either prior to discharge or immediately following discharge from the facility. We can use the sharing agreement that Home for Good uses as a baseline since these have already been vetted. Kristin added that we also need a separate MOU for partners who will receive this information and one for Commission partners who will be sharing information.

Once we have the started documents for each of these MOU's, we need to convene a meeting with appropriate representatives from the MCSD Sheriff's Dept, the Georgia Department of Corrections, and the Department of Community Supervision. Lucy will be available to review any agreements for the city as we are going through this process.

Pat will email the Home for Good agreements and add points in the email that explain Commission expectations that describe our goals. This can be sent to the legal department within each organization for review. We may want to have a general agreement that is standard and add addendums as needed for each organization.

Kristin suggested we also want to invite Cure Violence to join the data conversation. We will also invite some people who have been working on communication for the Commission to the next data meeting.

Pat also informed the Commission that the Columbus Housing Authority may include a new initiative in the plan they submit to HUD in February of 2022. If approved, this plan would designate 10 housing vouchers per year for people reentering the community from incarceration. Carla Godwin at the Housing Authority is currently heading the effort to get this approved by their board. It would be helpful if Carla could join us to ask her questions and answer our questions about the vouchers.

Home for Good has a landlord engagement focus and has been fortunate to include many landlords who are background friendly. They have been able to successfully house sex offenders although it is a slow process. They have emergency housing vouchers available now and these do not have the same restrictions as other Housing Authority vouchers. Home for Good is also focused on helping people who receive these vouchers successfully reintegrate into our community.

Sabrina asked if these vouchers are sponsored by HUD. Pat explained that they are and added that the newly proposed vouchers (if approved) will be specifically designated for individuals who are returning from incarceration.

Sabrina also asked if Pat can share a list of landlords who are background friendly and if she knows of a landlord who is in this category, how can she get them officially added to that list. Pat will need to get one of her case managers to create that written list and share it. Send an email to Pat to have a landlord added to the Home for Good list. Waleisah also shared a list that she has available.

Kristin shared that the employment subcommittee continues to work toward hosting focus groups with employers to gather information that will allow up to effectively communicate the need for and value of second chances hiring as well as educate to address roadblocks. We have not received the funding to support this yet, and this is slowing us down.

Kristin met with Rosa Evans, Director of Transportation for the City of Columbus, to better understand the challenges faced by METRA that were raised by our transportation survey earlier this year. Following that conversation, METRA may be willing to allow private donors to purchase bus shelters. It will depend on the stop in question, and METRA is looking at specific requirements that will need to be met in these situations. METRA also shared a new app that can be used to see real time bus schedules and plan bus transportation more easily. Please check this out and share feedback. We are interested in whether this helps reduce employment issues related to tardiness, no shows, and call outs due to transportation challenges. John House has suggested that Robert Scott with Community Reinvestment is a good partner and has ideas on how to solve some of the transportation challenges. Kristin reached out to him and has not heard back.

Monica shared that the Faith Subcommittee sent a survey and has not received much response from the faith community. The EMI had a luncheon in Atlanta for stakeholders across the state. A breakfast or other similar event is being planned locally to bring pastors together and begin a process of education. John Wade recently hosted a prayer breakfast and is planning to host a similar event quarterly to connect and education the faith community. He can help when the EMI begins planning for this event.

The Commission needs someone to take the lead on updating our online presence. Bridget asked for a job description to post asking for student help. This could be a student internship or simply asking for student volunteers. We can submit a general description to get started and see where the interest lies. Pat will share a job description that we can revise for our purposes. Gamaliel volunteered to oversee communication and related coordination for the Commission.

Waleisah shared housing opportunities for felons. She sends out resources twice a week and invited Commission members to sign up to receive this information if they don't already.

The City has asked the Commission to submit a report on progress by November 1. This will be included in the City Manager's Annual Report. John House agreed to consult with Kristin on this.

Clean Slate is the expungement effort being offered by Goodwill in partnership with Jennifer Dunlap. The hope is to begin offering this service on an ongoing basis through Goodwill. Kristin is meeting with Jennifer to discuss if and how the Commission can support this work. John Wade shared that the Sheriff's Department was pleased to be able to wave fees for background checks for participants in the current Clean Slate effort.

The BETTER WORK Network is partnering with churches and other organizations to establish Jobs for Life training sites in Columbus and Phenix City. The first site will be in Oakland Park, and you should have an invitation to one of our kick-off events. Please attend if you are able to.

Keith was able to join and shared that he has been recently appointed as the educational director for his statewide denomination. He is no longer in the position to maintain a leadership role with the Commission and is effectively stepping down as chair at the end of 2021. He would like to continue helping the Commission with the faith based work.

The meeting was dismissed at 1:58pm.

Our next meeting will be on November 15, 2021. We will meet virtually on zoom.