

Mayor's Commission on Reentry Minutes  
March 15, 2021 at 1:00pm

*In attendance: Keith Mitchell, Kristin Barker, John House, Shereatha Sims, Waleisah Wilson, Gamaliel Torres, Rev. Monica Spencer, Michael Forte, and Pat Frey*

Keith Mitchell welcomed everyone and Gamaliel opened the meeting in prayer.

There was no correspondence. Gamaliel motioned to approve the Commission minutes from February. Waleisah seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

The Commission needs to position ourselves to connect those returning from incarceration with needed resources. This should be a primary focus for us as well as eliminating any barriers that exist.

John shared information on the Cure Violence program and its mission to integrate all elements of society to try and reduce violence. They will perform an assessment to look holistically at which programs the city should support. John will connect Keith and Kristin with the Cure Violence team and recommend that we meet with them to get additional information.

The Housing Subcommittee reported that Pat Frey and Shereatha Sims have been working together to develop a plan for addressing the housing issue, and they are beginning to make some excellent progress.

The Employment Subcommittee did not meet in March due to the Community of Practice meetings. Kristin is working on getting expense information from Media, Marketing, and More for to manage the Ban the Box campaign, and we will complete the Crime Prevention Grant application in partnership with the Urban League to submit it by the March 31<sup>st</sup> deadline.

Waleisah is looking for someone with cooking experience to fill a position that pays \$12/hr, and would like help sharing the information about the available position with someone who needs work.

The Faith Subcommittee is working with Rev. Spencer to survey churches in Columbus. We are getting feedback that some churches are not open to receiving individuals with a background into their congregations. We need to find out if this is happening in Columbus and make sure that we are not referring people to churches that will turn them away.

We may need to ask the people (about getting turned away) instead of asking churches in order to get more accurate information. Waleisah recommended that we push out a survey to the people because churches won't admit to something like this. She has herself been turned away from churches in Columbus. The subcommittee needs to develop a plan of action for addressing this.

Michael has not had recent contact with Love in Action and will reach back out to the organization. Pat suggested that we take another approach and highlight churches that are really embracing prison ministry to influence other churches to follow suit.

We are focused on Ban the Box as a major activity and can identify other activities and events

Kristin, Keith, Michael, and Monica met with our local 211 manager, Candace Muncy, discuss using 211 to share resources for returning citizens. We can work with 211, and they can add a search term for returning citizen to the database. They may also be able to add an icon to their home page to make it easier for people to search for resources and easier for us to direct people to the resources.

Once we identify a new resource, they will be able to reach out directly to Candace Muncy to be added. We want to make the process of connecting to resources as easy and streamlined as possible. Connecting people directly into the 211 system may make this possible with a few of the changes they are looking at making. 211 also has a fully staffed call center, and this will give us access to some reporting on how many returning citizens are seeking resources by calling in.

Keith asked how we communicate properly help people to be comfortable with reaching out for help from these resources. There have been efforts to create a database listing of churches online, but no one has managed to crystalize how that would work.

Keith suggested we need a dedicated communication partner to manage how we are communicating with the community at large. This would help us as we continue to develop out our strategy. We will have more conversation on this later.

Cathy Robinson shared information from the Regional Community Collaborative about a meeting on community resources. Kristin will forward the email from Cathy on

Shereatha has been working with a private landlord who has been trying to get a home approved for housing ex-offenders. Because Columbus is not following federal zoning laws, he has been unable to get this done. She would like to know who they can talk to. John says there is a local ordinance that was passed years ago and applies to transitional homes. It does not allow them in residential areas. The landowner has tried to have the home classified as a personal care home.

The best person in the city to talk to about zoning and restrictions is Will Johnson. Keith asked if we can invite him to the next Commission meeting to educate us on zoning. The DCS is trying to do something once a month for community stakeholders on reentry. Shereatha has emailed this information to the Commission.

Some highlights shared from the Community of Practice (CoP): It was awesome and dynamic. It was good to hear what other states are doing for reentry. We need a holistic approach in the way that we're approaching reentry. Community education is really important. The Commission needs to be educated in order to educate.

Next steps with the Cop will be to review notes from the opening sessions once they are released. There will also be in-depth sessions with expert speakers.

Our next meeting will be on April 19th. We will meet virtually on zoom.