

Mayor's Commission on Reentry Minutes
September 16, 2019

In attendance: John House, Andrea Reese, Jeanette James, Michael Forté, Keith W. Mitchell, Kristin Barker, Baki Muhammad, and Dr. Nathaniel Dunlap

The meeting was held in the Elections and Registration office, Citizens Services Center, 2nd Floor at 1:30 pm. Dr. Forté opened the meeting in prayer.

At this time, the commission reviewed the minutes from our August 19, 2019 meeting. Keith reminded the group that we discussed creating a subcommittee for housing, Baki Mohammad was referred by Pop Barnes and is interested in becoming a member of the commission, and there will be some changes to the Reentry Program for Community Supervision. Andrea Reese can provide information on these changes. Jeanette will make corrections to the minutes. Dr. Forte made a motion to accept the minutes. Kristin seconded that motion, and the minutes were accepted with corrections by unanimous vote.

Introductions were made and Dr. Nathaniel Dunlap explained his initiative to the commission. Dr. Dunlap runs the PRF Institute and is working with Rutledge State Prison and the Transitional Center on a pre-release financial initiative. This is an effort to reduce recidivism by educating and helping former inmates with credit and debt challenges while also addressing identity theft. The PRF is currently offering a 3-6 month program called Credit and Debt are First Cousins. The PRF services will help ex-offenders prepare to secure housing post release.

Dr. Forté asked how this program filters down to the local level. Dr. Dunlap explained he is currently trying to connect with opportunities in Muscogee County. He has been directed to Mr. King as a contact but has been unable to meet connect with him yet. The challenge with partnering with the local jail is that inmates are in jail for only a short-term and the program needs to be long term to see results. Dr. Forté suggested it is needed in the local jails and asked to take this into consideration. If the courts got involved, this could be a better option. The program could be offered as alternative sentencing or conditional release. Andrea offered to connect Dr. Dunlap with Dana Solomon at the Muscogee County Adult Drug Court to discuss this.

The main barrier at the jail is the time restriction. The main barrier at the prison level is a current agreement with a preferred vendor who is providing similar financial training. Andrea suggested that Dr. Dunlap could provide financial education during commission sponsored events in the future as we don't have a financial training partner.

Keith Mitchell addressed old business with the commission including adoption of a commission logo. Andrea expressed that she would prefer to contract with a designer to create a logo. Baki offered to take the lead and talk with a designer about generating logo options for the commission.

Keith asked Waleisah about the current status of the Reentry Summit. Waleisah explained that the Summit is planned for July of 2020 since it is Reentry Awareness Month. It will be a 1-day reentry conference with breakout sessions, one guest speaker, and a few panel sessions. A gala event the

evening before is also being planned to raise funds to support the event. The compound is being considered as a venue for the gala. Waleisah is currently looking at venues for the summit. Target groups for this event will be elected officials, employers, philanthropists, and community advocates. The goal will be to educate and generate community buy-in. Kristin asked if there may be opportunity to schedule an expungement training session for NPO's either the day before or the day following the summit. The Georgia Justice Project has expressed an interest in performing this training in Columbus.

Waleisah also noted that she has met with Ann Colton at the Georgia Justice Project about offering an expungement summit, but we will need to have all of the key players in the room for this to be effective. This 2-3 hour event may take more time to pull together as we will need judges, clerks, DCS representatives, and prosecutors in the room during the event. Andrea mentioned that any requests for DCS to be present must be sent to Andrea early to give them time to get everyone on board and get everything approved before the event.

John asked what the gala funds will be used for. The gala will raise money to cover event costs such as venue and the cost of housing speakers. The commission does not have a budget and is not set up to manage funds, so the group discussed where the money will come from to front the summit. The money could be run through a non-profit like the Homeless Resource Network. We would need to be sure this is not perceived as support for specific groups. Keith asked if anyone at the commission level has been funded to do anything from the city.

As long as NewLife-Second Chance Outreach and/or other NPO's are hosting the event, the commission can simply partner and provide support for the event. We couldn't touch the money or there would be a conflict of interest. Keith asked John to find out what the rules are for a commission and managing funds under the Mayor's office. Andrea asked if Georgia Justice Project will charge. They may, but many times they do not charge as courtesy to Waleisah. Keith asked for confirmation that NewLife is the sponsoring organization for the event, so the commission will not need to handle any money. Waleisah confirmed that this is true. The commission can help by generating sponsorships through existing partnerships with the faith based community.

We know that housing is a critical piece of the reentry puzzle. We need to form a housing subcommittee to gather information so we know who the right players are and what opportunities are out there. Keith has identified Carolina Rodriguez, Cathy Robinson, and Pastor Andrea Franklin as interested in serving on this subcommittee and shared their contact information. Baki also expressed an interest in serving here. John will find out if we can add links to external organizations the city web site. Keith will send an email to those mentioned above with dates for an initial housing subcommittee meeting.

At this time, Keith asked the group to consider adding Rev. Juan Carlos Diaz and Baki Mohammad as new members of the commission. There was a question as to whether Rev. Diaz is interested in formally joining the commission. Keith will follow-up with him to find out. Baki was present during the meeting. Andrea asked Baki if he represents the interests of the Nation of Islam in Columbus. Baki is the captain of the training of the men, and as such, sees the challenges these men face when reentering society. He would like to join the commission representing himself and the interests of

these members of Islam. The commission voted to accept Baki Mohammad as an official member of the Mayor's Commission on reentry.

Keith is not planning to host an On the Table discussion on October 22, 2019 as he will participate in one at his church. SafeHouse will be hosting a public table on recidivism that evening. Anyone interested can RSVP for this table online. Kristin also volunteered to host a table to discuss housing and reentry. Kristin will plan this and Andrea is available to assist. Potential members of the housing subcommittee will also be invited to join this table.

Metra needs mechanics and is very open to hiring individuals with felonies. They hire depending on the charges, but these individuals do have to go before a council on a case by case basis before they are hired. The city auditor suggested that the city talk to the Reentry Commission for help with this. John will find out how many positions are available and send this information to Andrea, so she can pass it along to her officers. The commission also asked whether the city is looking for mechanics who are already trained or whether they will provide training? Also, how do we channel those who are getting the training in prison into positions like this?

Keith also shared information regarding a certified chef who is putting a structure in place through a partnership with SafeHouse to provide culinary training and certification for individuals coming out of prison. The training will be available at SafeHouse in their industrial kitchen. This was shared at the faith based meeting by Rev. Flakes. Keith will get more information on this to share with the commission.