

Mayor's Commission on Reentry Minutes  
July 20, 2020

*In attendance: Kristin Barker, John House, Dr. Michael Forte, Jack Warden, Pat Frey, Keith Mitchell, Cathy Robinson, Gamaliel Torrez, Jeanette James, Lakesa Russel, Tabetha Getz, and Dr. David White.*

Kristin Barker opened the meeting and explained that Keith Mitchell would be joining the meeting a little late. The group shared some quick introductions. Minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed. Dr. Forte moved to accept the minutes with any needed changes and Jeanette seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Under correspondence, Kristin shared that a request had been made to begin future meetings at 1pm. The commission agreed to the request and future meetings will begin at this new time.

Kristin explained that the commission has three subcommittee groups. One is focused on housing, one is focused on employment, and one is focused on connecting with efforts in the faith based community. Kristin reported that the employment subcommittee met on July 14 and discussed who should be at the table to allow this subcommittee to provide necessary influence and begin to shape the landscape to benefit returning citizens. The subcommittee also discussed the necessary constraints that exist and the real opportunities that exist directly related to employment.

The opportunities that were presented included developing a process for identifying and sharing out information with the community and identifying funding streams that may be utilized by partner organizations who are doing the work. The commissions role would be to endorse those partner organizations and to share funding opportunities. The subcommittee also explored whether there is a way to organize a local effort around existing campaign to support reentry. One example of this is Ban the Box. The group also discussed a general outline around how we will work.

John House mentioned that the city has a Crime Prevention program and any 501c3 can apply for a Crime Prevention grant in the spring for award in the summer. The city typically distributes \$750,000-\$800,000 thousand dollars annually. The commission can encourage or endorse someone to apply for this funding. The city has no other organized programs in process. The commission was organized to help the city identify ways it can support and develop such efforts. In respect to organizing Public/private partnerships may be a helpful approach to consider. Seth Brown with Crime Prevention is an advisor to the commission.

Dr. Forte shared that churches are very focused on the safety of their congregations because of COVID. He shared that he has struggled with how to recruit churches because due to the current climate we are in and suggested that having a good contact list would allow him to approach churches and recruit a more diverse group to be involved. Kristin may have a list to share. He has not shared the Nationwide Day of Second Chances information with his small network of churches because of the dialogue within the commission. Pat may also be able to help by sending a contact list for churches as well. He also requested that the commission help him put together an introductory letter. He will put together a draft and send it to the group for feedback.

Keith Mitchell explained that the Housing Subcommittee is still in the process of getting reestablished. Kristin suggested that 90% of the work that needs to be done around housing is likely being done by Home for Good and believes that connecting Home for Good into the Housing Subcommittee somehow would be the best approach to take.

Keith asked if there has been any progress on the Expungement Summit. Kristin has been unable to set up a follow-up meeting with Danielle Forte, Julia Slater, and Suzanne Goddard. Danielle Forte has suggested that their availability is extremely limited right now because of current fluctuation in the city budget. We are likely looking at reconnecting at a later date and setting some new goals for our event timeline.

Jeanette has not yet added information to commission page on the Mayor's website. Some information has been shared on Facebook.

Subcommittees were development for the general purpose of assembling individuals in the community who have a deep concern for reentry so they can strategize and come up with ways to address housing gaps, employment gaps and other resource gaps in our community. Kristin mentioned that it may be important to educate churches working with the Faith Based Subcommittee on how to best utilize the 211 system for accessing existing community resources.

Keith opened up the floor for others to ask clarifying questions. Pat asked what the overall vision and purpose is for the Housing Subcommittee. Is it to connect returning citizens with housing providers? Is it to connect like organizations with housing providers? Keith responded that the purpose covers both of these areas to address and help to eliminate gaps.

Kristin asked if Pat saw a way for Home for Good to connect in support of the reentry mission. Pat explained the continuum of care model and suggested that it seems like Home for Good is aligned with what the Housing Subcommittee wants to accomplish. At first glance, including Home for Good as a partner organization seems like a natural extension for the commission.

Dr. David White asked how the commission gets information on returning citizens in the area who need help. Keith explained that Andrea Reese with the Department of Community Supervision has served on the commission and was able to provide this information. Andrea has recently left this position, and the commission has yet to identify someone in the department to replace her. She was our tie in to the department of supervision and parole.

He also asked, "Do you have a sense of how large the reentry population is in Muscogee County?" Kristin explained that the last numbers she had received for those under supervision was on average around 2,400. Pat added that there are many more who are not under supervision and estimates this is an even larger number of individuals.

Dr. Forte suggested that so much of what we need to do is reliant on support from whomever is in office, and this changes over time. He asked if there is a way to strengthen our connections so we have a direct link to felons who are coming into the Columbus community. Pat added that the Department

used to have a program called InReach, and this seemed to be an effective program for preparing felons prior to their release.

Jack Warden asked when we would typically hear about an individual. Keith explained we would know about the supervised population prior to release. We don't have a way of knowing about the unsupervised until they reach out for assistance. Keith suggested this is a good question for the commission to consider.

Kristin will send information on jail based American Job Centers to Jack Warden to see if an operation can be identified that is doing an outstanding job serving returning citizens in their community.

Dr. White asked if this was the first Columbus city effort that is focused on helping returning citizens. John House explained that it is.

Keith thanked the group and dismissed the meeting. Our next meeting will be held on August 17 at 1:00pm. We will meet virtually in August.