



STATE OF WASHINGTON

SEX OFFENDER POLICY BOARD

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MINUTES

Sex Offender in the Community Committee Meeting

Office of the Attorney General

800- 5th Ave. 20th FL, Seattle, WA 98104

Thursday, July 16, 2009

11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Committee Members Present:

Mary Ellen Stone
Maureen Saylor
Brooke Burbank
Amy Pearson
Jeri Costa
Dianne Ashlock
Kecia Rongen
Andrew Neiditz
Brad Meryhew
Lindsay Palmer

Staff:

Shoshana Kehoe-Ehlers
Shannon Hinchcliffe
Andi May

Others Present:

Kyra Kester, WSU-Social and Economic Sciences Research Center, Shani Bauer, Counsel for Senate and Human Services Committee; and Sharon Harris, WATSA.

I. Call to Order

Chair Mary Ellen Stone called the meeting to order at 11:40 a.m.

II. Introductions

III. Revise and Adopt Agenda

Removed item VII, it will be addressed at the full board meeting later today (Yakima Forum debriefing).

IV. Approval of Minutes - Action (item not addressed, no action taken)

This approval of the June 18, 2009 minutes was not addressed.

V. WSU Literature Review Report

Kyra Kester, from the WSU Social and Economic Sciences Research Center, presented the findings of her literature review on sex offender housing options in Washington State and across the country. She provided attendees a handout at the meeting.

Ms. Kester opened her presentation by stating that the assignment ended up being pretty narrow. It is hard to say as a researcher what the most effective practices are because there is not enough research to make that determination. Because jobs and housing are so integrated for these offenders, it is hard to separate them out for purposes of evidence.

There are a number of programs that focus on intense staff contact with offenders being treated and the data looks positive (in some respects.) These programs are cost-effective compared to incarceration. However, they are still cost-intensive. Despite the fact that these programs appeared successful, they will not be successful for a particular community if they are unable to get a foothold into that community.

Ms. Kester agreed that the model is inherently prohibitive of serving a large population. She added that these models exist only in urban communities. She found none in rural areas.

Ms. Kester discussed the **“Iowa appeal.”** She explained that Iowa is famous because it was one of the first states to impose residency restrictions. Other states studied the effectiveness of the Iowa policy and said they would not adopt it. Despite the fact that there has been much litigation over Iowa’s residency restrictions, they remain in place. The state legislature has made some minor revisions to the restriction law to relax the requirement for most minor sex offenses.

Members asked Ms. Kester to describe her observations about the California housing and homelessness report. She reported that California's approach was a very broad-based effort to bring people together to talk about the issues. However, they too have not abandoned their restrictive residency policies.

Through her research, Ms. Kester commented on how to increase housing options (in response to members' questions.)

- Looking at local housing policy decisions might be the first place to start. (There is an analysis of some federal programs in the report.)
- Second, in Oregon they brought the federal program and local housing people to work out an agreement and mechanism to talk about individual cases.
- Third, state housing programs that worked with landlords in smaller complexes (e.g. New York) have had success, but they have a much more variable set of restrictions.

Ms. Kester cautioned the committee that the report was written specifically for this Committee, it does not describe all of the background to sex offense housing issues so readers not familiar with this committee might be confused.

Members posed a couple questions to Ms. Kester :

Question #1: Based on your research and experience in creating this report, what policy ideas would you recommend to the Governor?

- First, Washington needs a public information campaign, getting the public to understand the real sexual offense recidivism rate is one of the most important issues. Public perception of sex offenders is distorted. Clearing this up is necessary to convince landlords to house sex offenders. She recommended not using a banner headline campaign because there will be a lot of pushback. However, a consistent message could resonate with the general public.
- Second, need to work with landlords and try to figure out how to make the transition work.
- Third, need to improve the affordability of the transition process.

Colorado is a good model for a state that has a broad policy and many different ways to support a diverse range of needs. There was also discussion about shared sex offender housing arrangements and how that can be an effective arrangement (based on the evidence.)

The Stevenson Apartments still rent to sex offenders and work closely with two Community Corrections Officers (CCOs). The Boylston will take sex offenders. Pierce County has a difficult time finding housing in the community. The offender pre-release plan is fundamental for the programs that are successful. The pre-release programs and tools applied to the transition process are also successful.

Question #2: When does “transition” turn into permanent?

The length of the transition period is what constitutes a successful transition. You must look at emergency, transition and then more long-term. There is not one offender with one type of housing problem. It is a complicated question that demands a complicated response.

VI. Committee Members Report on Housing Best Practices from their Networks

Chair Stone opened this agenda item and invited members to share any information they have discovered regarding this topic.

Ms. Palmer offered that several years ago there use to be a group called Partnership for Community Safety, a state-wide organization that looks at the transition of high risk offenders (this included sex offenders). She emphasized two points: 1) you have to do some work to convince landlords, and 2) consider the impact on the community and their needs. You cannot have a successful program without community participation and knowledge.

Members agreed that community participation and involvement in the process is important. The Committee discussed how to accomplish public education (with very limited resources.) Members collectively responded that the programs need substantial money over time; we have many models to look to, such as a public health model.

There is a tendency to hear about the horrible crimes resulting in successful programs being overlooked and not receiving much publicity. It was noted that the term “sex offender” lumps in a wide range of behavior, and sometimes does not appropriately decipher the behavior that is an actual threat to the public. It was noted that the public health model is about prevention, which should be used for sex offenses.

Chair Stone commented that Washington State has been a leader in victim’s services and the prevention world. State may consider hiring a professional public relations firm to perform a sustained media campaign in communities. Prevention is about people changing their behaviors. Members suggested bringing in education staff for outreach programs. Members discussed the cost potential and how to assess that.

It was stressed that the one-on-one relationship is important and must be individualized to each community. The public education message has to be adapted to individual communities and presented with credibility.

Members discussed the idea of an education component being delivered apart from the scared environment of a community notification meeting. What if each of the county advocacy offices had an “offender” liaison? How do you change community attitudes on the ground? The members expressed wanting to provide recommendations regarding this for the upcoming legislative report (due in December 2009.)

Ms. Palmer explained that the community notification workgroup of the Registration and Notification committee stands on this idea of education. Mr. Neiditz offered that Next month’s meeting will include a presentation on the city’s crime-free housing program from Lakewood.

What is missing in the general discussion about successful transition of sex offenders into the community is looking at the Department of Corrections people doing creative things in the community. Can we include that in the discussion to give the organization credit for doing these things? Need to publicize the informal structures that are being used.

The Committee discussed whether it is possible for a few people to draft the common elements of the other committees? Members identified the elements:

- Focus on high risk offenders; accept a risk-based principle.
- Without public education none of the efforts will succeed.
- Community safety is accomplished with successful reintegration into the public.

Chair Stone proposed that an informal draft of the common elements be written in September then presented to the Full Board.

VII. Discuss Plan for this Committee’s August 27th Meeting in Lakewood, WA.

Members addressed this item out of order. Next month’s Committee meeting will take place on August 27, 2009 at Lakewood City Hall in Lakewood Towne Center from 2:00 to 4:00. It will include the crime-free housing presentation for 30-45 minutes at the beginning of the meeting.

VII. Yakima Forum De-Briefing

This was removed from the agenda because it will be discussed at the Full Board later today.

VIII. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

IX. Adjournment

Chair Mary Ellen Stone adjourned the meeting 12:50 p.m.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED BY THE SEX OFFENDER IN THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE.

Mary Ellen Stone, Chair

Date

Shoshana K. Kehoe

Date