

Proposal to Allow DOC Chaplains and Volunteers Post Release Contact with Former Inmates

I am writing this letter in support of the "Proposal to Allow Post-Release Contact" between current Department of Correction Chaplains as well as current Volunteers. As the former Acting Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC), I believe that both Chaplains and Volunteers can play a critical role in assisting former inmates in their reentry into the community.

I can understand and support the department's concern that contact with former inmates by staff members may lead to security issues within the correctional facility. But I believe that the institutional chaplains play a unique role with the inmate that is different from other staff members. As a spiritual advisor they oftentimes have established a strong relationship with the inmate over years of incarceration that can be instrumental in assisting in their successful reintegration to the community. I believe that the Rules and Regulations Governing All Employees of the Massachusetts Department of Correction (commonly referred to as the Blue Book) should be changed to allow this contact.

A volunteer also has a unique role that they can play in assisting an inmate on his/her release to the community. Preventing a volunteer from working with a released inmate removes a valuable resource in successful reentry planning. Although there are security concerns that need to be taken into account I have full confidence in the ability of the DOC to work through these issues. I believe that the benefits are too great to ignore. I encourage that the 103 DOC 485 Volunteer policy be amended to allow for this contact.

I believe that a work group consisting of DOC personnel and volunteers be convened to work through the security concerns and to write the appropriate language to add to these two documents.

If I can be of assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,


James R. Bender

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