

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

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June 21, 2022

Commissioner Carol Gladstone
Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance
One Ashburton Place, Room 1411
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Independent Report of the Ripples Group

Dear Commissioner Gladstone:

The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) and the Department of Correction is pleased to see that The Ripples Group's report providing the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) with a strategic plan to improve the experience of incarcerated women recognizes that Massachusetts is already among the small number of states leading the way in implementing changes to their incarceration policies and programming to ensure that a rehabilitative experience is the guiding principle.

Notably, The Ripples Group did so while recognizing that the Department's efforts with respect to improving women's access to a rehabilitative experience are necessarily limited by the current challenges with respect to the physical space MCI-Framingham. The Ripples Group found that MCI-Framingham is unable to fully meet the needs of women not only due to the facility's physical condition but also a layout that is not conducive to a rehabilitative environment. The Department agrees with this assessment.

In spite of these challenges, The Ripples Group observes, "DOC heroically manages to keep the campus' facilities functioning." The Department's leadership in reforming the delivery of criminal justice is exemplified by The Ripples Group's following findings:

- "The DOC has long instituted gender-specific policies and practices, including female offender training for all staff assigned to MCI-Framingham, a universal precaution approach as it relates to trauma, a needs assessment unique to the female offender, and quarterly multidiscipline meetings with DOC leadership to discuss policy and practices that affect the female offenders. Many of these practices have been in place for nearly a decade."

- “MCI-Framingham’s adoption of the National Resource Center for Justice Involved Women’s trauma-informed corrections practice has in fact been highlighted as a best practice by The US Commission on Civil Rights, ‘Women in Prison: Seeking Justice Behind Bars’ (2020) for its positive impact on reducing prison violence.”
- Women are “recommended and encouraged to participate in a primary Pathway Program designed to address their core issues from trauma to addiction. . . . The Pathways Model is an integrated approach to managing and providing treatment services. Per recent data, participation in Pathway programming is very high (practically all eligible women participating, 2% refusal rate).”
- “MCI-Framingham offers a full array of medical and mental health services. Treatment for substance use, including Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT), resulting from the Cares Act, are available on site. In cases where in-patient mental hospitalization is needed, the patient is sent to a psychiatric hospital under the Department of Mental Health. All these services are heavily used.” (The Ripples Group found that “[m]ental health issues affect the overwhelming majority of women at MCI-Framingham with 70% having open mental health cases.”)
- “Massachusetts has implemented evidence-based trauma programs . . . in accordance with guidance from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA).”
- “The college education available through a partnership with Boston University stands out among the various educational options. The women can get adult basic education, high school equivalency and up to college degrees.”
- “MCI-Framingham offers a broad variety of programming options . . . [T]he women run a lunch cafe, train dogs for the disabled, attend Boston University programs and more. A volunteer-supported greenhouse provides the women the opportunity to learn horticultural skills while beautifying the grounds with seasonal gardens.”
- “MCI-Framingham has a large visitation area, open three days¹ of the week, with a special room for children. Prior to the pandemic a “mom and me” event was hosted annually. Visitations of course have slowed down due to the pandemic.”

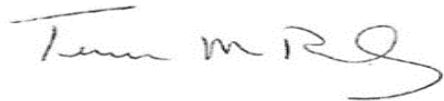
As evidenced by the programs highlighted in the report, the Department indisputably strives to provide the best opportunities for women to achieve an improved sense of self, and skills that support recovery and self-efficacy. The Department continuously reviews and improves its policies and practices to align with evolving 21st century correctional sensibilities and we are proud of the many innovations implemented by the Department. These innovations extend beyond those programs referenced above. The Department has also changed operational practices. In November of 2019, the Department collaborated with the County Sheriffs to utilize their minimum and pre-release beds to keep women out of state prison if at all possible, ensuring that women can remain in their respective communities. And for both men and women, the Department arranges for incarcerated individuals to be enrolled in MassHealth before release to provide a seamless access to health benefits, medical and psychiatric appointments, recovery support navigators and other community supports.

¹ In October 2021 the Department increased the days the visitation area is open to four (4) days of the week.

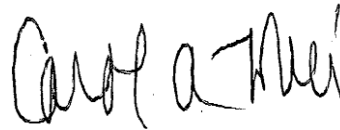
Of course, there is always room for improvement and recognizing the Department's progress does not mean the Department has achieved its goal. For instance, the Department is on-track to provide all inmates with programming tablets before the end of 2022. This will allow for additional remote learning opportunities. The Department will also be expanding its vocational training programs to include coding and building trades. Moreover, the Department agrees that the Pathways program could be improved by providing a greater diversity of programming so that women who have completed the existing curriculum have available alternatives. The Department also agrees that, while the Mommy & Me program will be resuming, there is a need to provide greater opportunities and space for women to visit with their children.

In sum, EOPSS and the Department appreciate The Ripples Group's acknowledgement of all that the Department has done to improve the ability of women to have a rehabilitative experience while incarcerated and the recognition that these efforts have been made notwithstanding the tremendous challenges presented by the design of the facility and the condition of the physical plant. At the same time, the Department welcomes a robust and continuous dialogue with DCAMM and other stakeholders as this process advances to the next phase.

Sincerely,



Terrence M. Reidy, Secretary
Executive Office of Public Safety



Carol A. Mici, Commissioner
Department of Correction