Justice-Involved Women Panel

February 24, 2020

Meeting Minutes

1. **Update on Transfer of Norfolk, Plymouth, and Essex Women to Suffolk County H/C**

Chairwoman Hallett introduced Special Sheriff Yolanda Smith who was invited to present to the Panel about the transfer of the Norfolk, Plymouth and Essex County Women to the Suffolk County H/C. Special Sheriff Smith has been with the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department for 25 years and was promoted to Superintendent in 2013. She informed the Panel that there are 256 women at the Suffolk County H/C from Essex, Plymouth, and Norfolk Counties, 182 of whom are pretrial. They have two women who are pregnant and one who is postpartum and 84 women currently on MAT. She spoke about the Orientation, Assessment and Programming processes to include individual services plans, gender specific programs, education programs, family services and reentry planning. She mentioned the over 90 community partners who come into the facility to provide services. The Sheriff and his staff are working very hard to make this transition as seamless as possible. Special Sheriff Smith asked the Panel if there were any questions. Senator Friedman asked who represents the rest of the population. Special Sheriff Smith responded that all women, both pretrial and sentenced are engaged in programming. Senator Friedman also asked what the increase was in the population at Suffolk H/C. Special Sheriff Smith responded that prior to the transfer, there were about 100 women and 150 transferred from MCI Framingham. Patty asked about the MAT program. Yolanda responded that they have Spectrum and their medical vendor and that it has been going well. Andrea asked how the capacity is and where they are housed. Yolanda responded that they are campus-limited and their count is around 800. The women are in tower building one on floors 6-11. They house detainees and sentenced women separately but they attend programs together. Senator Friedman asked if the MAT program covers all three drugs, Vivitrol, methadone, etc. She asked who was the provider and Yolanda said she has two providers right across the street from the facility. There were no other questions from the Panel.

1. **Review/Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes from December 30, 2019**

There was a motion from Nancy Connelly to approve the minutes and a second from Patty Murphy. Senator Friedman abstained from the approval of the minutes since she was unable to come to the last meeting.

1. **Report Review/Vote**

Andrea asked about focusing not just on pre-conviction but on post-conviction as well on page 8. As well as post-conviction alternatives and services. Andrea suggested reviewing and implement “the primary caretaker act”. Patty made a motion to accept the report with the edit and Andrea seconded it. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

1. Assistant Superintendent Patty Murphy – Housing County Women/Visitation

She fielded a number of questions regarding housing and visitation after the meeting so she wanted to clarify a few things. All the Sheriffs have regular visitation hours that are similar in terms of the allotted time for personal visits. A number of Sheriffs also have visits for women and their children and engage in special activities with their mothers separate from personal visitation. Another point was that some children are not visiting their mothers as much as was expected. In some cases, the court may restrict visitation and have a DCF caseworker present whether it is a personal or activity-engaged visit. All the Sheriffs work with DCF to hold those visits and if children have school, DCF will have them excused from school to hold those meetings. In those cases, some children might not be able to visit according to the court and DCF guidelines outside regular visit hours. Andrea asked if it would be possible to get a breakdown of what those visits look like. Generally most county sheriffs have two personal visits and in some counties there can also be one or two hour mother/child visit in addition to personal visits depending on the county. The DCF visits are separate from all of those. Andrea mentioned revisiting the mandate of this panel and she said family visitation policies are something this Panel is mandated to look at. In addition to the data and some that we need to gather that is missing, when they go into review – they have the information to look at how to improve visitation policies. Patty said for her facility 40% of mom’s with children under 18 are under court visitation. Andrea said while looking at visits, we also need to be aware of other things going on at the DOC to make better choices in the context of the Panel. Chairwoman Hallett said she in preparation of these meetings can reach out to MCI-Framingham and South Middlesex and Patty can do that with the MSA and incorporate those into the agenda going forward.

1. **Changes to Panel Meeting Locations**

Allison said she is changing the meeting locations to alternate between Boston and Milford in an effort to help with quorum issues.

1. **Panel Membership and Responsibilities pursuant to Chapter 69 of the Acts of 2018, Section 223 (a)**

Chairwoman Hallett mentioned that she will to open the meeting up to allow for public comment at the end of the meetings and talked about trying to better organize this by having a list for members of the public who wish to speak to put their names on at the beginning of the meeting. Arielle outlined how the process typically works with other boards and commissions. Senator Friedman said that public participation makes sense and signing up makes sense but wanted to make sure it would work for everyone. Andrea said we should always make sure we know what the agenda is and move through it and provide for public comment time because it is important for the Panel to hear from folks who have direct experience, their input is valuable. Andrea said a sign-up is helpful. Michelle Wetherbee proposed having those with important and valuable input email Allison or Arielle ahead of the meeting so that we build in time for them to speak. Patty asked what the average public comment time is. It was noted 10-15 minutes for public comment is typical. Andrea said this is not the only forum, she feels that this is a short block of time once a month and there are other opportunities to get this information out that is not going to be discussed in this space. Andrea said she would just like there to be some time allocated at the end of the meeting and she is fine with sign-up sheets to make it more valuable. She also suggested holding a public comment meeting every so often. Senator Friedman said she is very sensitive to having a public voice to get the full information she needs. She gave the example of visitation; she would like to hear what the policies are as well as what the experience is. Andrea commented that the people who experience visitation is very different from the policy. Andrea said that the Panelists should have a say in who comes in to speak on the different issues they plan to address.

1. **Focus of Panel moving forward for 2020**

Chairwoman Hallett said she thought it would be helpful to the panel members if she read the Panel’s mandate at each meeting going forward. She then read the mandate per the enabling statute establishing the Panel. Some Panel members were questioning what the power of the Panel was and she reiterated that the Panel has the authority to make recommendations. Sarah Ruiz mentioned the need for pre-trial diversion. Allison said she believes that the Panel’s mandate includes pre-trial diversion. Chairwoman Hallett informed the Panel members that she spoke with Commissioner Mici and that the Commissioner was interested in having the Panel do some research to find best practices for the interior design of female facilities and then submit recommendations to her for a gender informed interior design for the Bay State Correctional Center facility once the redesign RFP moves forward. Andrea voiced her objections to the Panel being used in that manner. She was part of the reason that the RFP process was stalled and she will not use her energy or be part of building a prison. Allison said that not every Panelist is going to be able to have the ability to help with every Panel issue and project or participate in every correctional facility tour. Senator Friedman said the Panel needs to decide what they are looking at. She said she is very uncomfortable picking the design of a prison but is happy to look at how to best deliver correctional services. Patty mentioned that she had been on two facility design committees and she agrees with Senator Friedman that we need to look at how to best deliver correctional services. She added that if you have a good architectural firm they will want feedback from groups like ours. Patty also said this facility is going to be built because Framingham’s infrastructure is in disrepair, it would be in our best interest to look at best practices. Patty said this is not going away and we need to compromise and participate on the process. Nancy said the Panel is going to continue to run into this issue because we have the micro issue with what is going on at facilities and macro issue which are the systematic changes the Panel is advocating for. Andrea asked if we could move forward on where we are with the data collection. Senator Friedman moved that we put the Commissioner’s request aside and Andrea seconded. All voted in favor. The motion carried. Allison Hallett reminded the panel that Senator Brownsberger had requested that the Panel take a look at the Dignity Act and that our charge is to review criminal justice reform and its impact on the females. Senator Friedman said we should gather all the data. Andrea asked about the status of the DA and Police Departments data and asked what the process would be for getting that information. Corinn said she can speak to her research team and see what data they can pull together. Senator Friedman suggested getting a list of what we would like to pull from police departments and DAs offices. Andrea suggested pulling that list of data previously to send out to everyone. Andrea said she has a report coming out that is very informative and is from the women. Andrea said regarding visitation, if we were to ask incarcerated women if they wanted to see their children more then of course they will say yes. Andrea said we cannot take that narrative and say this Panel is in support of building this new prison. Andrea said her organization is working with architecture firms on options for housing women out in the community outside of prisons. Allison suggested potentially creating a survey or questionnaire for the women to complete when we conduct site visits. Allison said we need to figure out what the visits should consist of. Arielle gave an overview of how the site visits work. Sarah Ruiz suggested perhaps modifying the language of the Panel to include other stakeholders and wanted to look at creating programming outside of correctional facilities. She said DPH can help fund the opportunity for diversion but needs the whole system and all people to sign onto diverting people to these different areas. Allison said we should start with the impact of CJRA and the current membership that we have. Andrea said she is involved in long term work and looking at entities that make up these vast systems because they are deeply affecting the lives of the women. Andrea mentioned shifting money for other purposes. Patty asked that we re-send out the Dignity Act. The next meeting will be March 16th in Boston from 11am-1pm.

1. **Public Comment**

Public comment began with someone who spoke from her experience at MCI-Framingham. She said women who are pre-trial are not able to do programs. She said when the rules are set, you need to be disciplinary free or have only so much time left to be eligible to participate. She said that those who have a lot of D-reports need the programming more. She said that there is always something that restricts you from getting programming. She said program is treated like a privilege and that has been her experience. She said women are not going to get the services they need, unless the staff is trained more on how to deal with the women; the incarceration will exacerbate more trauma. Another public member said she heard the phrase trauma-informed spoken about and that trauma-informed involves a culture change and honoring the survivors and looking at what your life was like before you got caught up in the system. She said the whole point is to move away from what is wrong and celebrate what is right. She wanted to educate the women about things they did right in their lives and help them acknowledge what will sustain them and that this trauma-informed approach will help everything we do. Ronicia spoke as a previously incarcerated women. She spent a few years in the towers at Suffolk and they do have certain programs. She said the towers are operated through elevators and if the elevators are broken they cannot move and are locked in their cells. She spoke about visiting her father at state prison and that is was a negative vibe for a child. She said that we all need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable to make change in this room.

Motion from Andrea to adjourn at 11:59 and seconded by Michelle. Meeting adjourned at 1pm.