



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security  
One Ashburton Place, Room 2133  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Tel: (617) 727-7775  
TTY Tel: (617) 727-6618  
Fax: (617) 727-4764  
[www.mass.gov/eops](http://www.mass.gov/eops)

CHARLES D. BAKER  
Governor

KARYN E. POLITO  
Lt. Governor

THOMAS A. TURCO, III  
Secretary

**Restrictive Housing Oversight Committee  
Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** February 19, 2020  
**Time:** 11:00AM-1:00PM  
**Place:** Department of Correction  
Classroom #2  
50 Maple St.  
Milford, MA

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**Review/Vote on Meeting Minutes**

Chair Peck called the meeting to order at 11:01AM. It was decided that the Committee would vote on the previous meeting minutes next month so members could have more time to review them before voting.

**Formerly Incarcerated Speaker: Tyler Brown**

Tyler Brown was just recently released after serving six years in Department of Correction custody. He did three years in the Disciplinary Detention Unit (DDU), not including time in the Special Management Unit (SMU) awaiting DDU. His experience was that there is a disconnect between what people think restrictive housing is doing for the population and what actually happens. Mr. Brown said the Committee needs to look at the culture at DOC. Mr. Brown asked if putting an inmate in restrictive housing mitigating the threat this individual may pose and helping them or making the situation worse. He asked Committee members to look at it through the lens of having neighbors as former inmates. He said he was mistakenly put in Souza for a non-violent offense and Commissioner Mici fixed the mis-classification. He said that in medium security prisons, the DOC does not separate rival gangs. He discussed the point system used to assess the security level an inmate should go to. He spoke about reentry and classification. Mr. Brown asked that the Committee explore the uses of restrictive housing and remember that there is a human toll and that it has an effect on the community when these inmates come home. He spoke about his adjustment after isolation being difficult and that anyone could wind up in his situation. Chris Fallon said that a decade ago, Souza's count was 1600 and now it is 650. He said the total count is 8200 and asked why the inmates at all medium security prisons are those that earn their bachelors or work in the kitchen, and why Mr. Brown was not able to do that. Mr. Brown said the culture of those other facilities play into how well the inmates do. He spoke about going before the classification board and how he was denied twice until he finally was able to go to Concord. He said he started at Nashua St. Jail and then went to Concord where he got

into a fight and was sent to Souza. Bonnie asked if he could break down the culture at Souza that lead to the overuse of solitary confinement. Bonnie asked for what would make for a more rehabilitative environment. Mr. Brown said in the DOC in general, there are a lot of punitive sanctions. He said if there were more tangible ways to reduce your custody, more inmates would be on board. Mr. Brown said that in Souza, a lot of folks see their situation as hopeless. He said that inmates prefer isolation to general population since they are safer. He said if the DOC could find a way to incentivize behavior, they would be better. Mr. Brown said the DOC has to be aggressive and open up dialogue to get these people to speak to each other. He said the gang members are not bad people. Chris said he has to verify all conflicts but wants to keep people safe. He signs off on every DDU sanction. Chris said he understands the culture change and he experienced that himself as a correctional officer at Old Colony Correctional Center and MCI-Cedar Junction. Chris asked if Mr. Brown would have been amenable to changing his behavior if he wasn't so close to release but had perhaps 10 more years. Mr. Brown said even with 10 years, he would have tried to better himself. Kevin asked how an inmate avoids the violence. Kevin said 3.5 years in DDU is a significant amount of time to serve. Mr. Brown said he was a pre-trial detainee and housed in Souza. He said DDU was supposed to be a deterrent but it was not. Bonnie asked what effect DDU sentences have and wanted to touch on deterrents. Bonnie said you can get up to 10 years per offense and people can be separately criminally charged for those acts of violence. Bonnie said when the CJRA was passed, people were hoping these long sentences would go away. Bonnie asked if we need to hold onto these long sentences and they will have more frequent reviews. Mr. Brown said the DOC should re-think the sentence structure. He said that he was in DDU with someone that got 14 months in DDU for a non-violent offense. Chris explained sometimes it is a suspended sanction and they get out and a get a D-report for what happened. Mr. Brown said that culture had a lot to do with why he wound up in DDU. Bonnie asked about what the experience to actually be in RH felt like. He said every time he left the cell, he was stripped. He said he didn't go outside because he chose not to take recreation for three years. He said he had nothing to look forward to. Marlene asked what could be put in place as a security net for the transition to the community. Mr. Brown said that he needs to be able to work his way to a minimum or pre-release. He said there should be greater access to programming as well.

**RHU Correctional Officer Speaker: Lt. James Allain**

Lt. Allain started at the Charles Street Jail and transferred to MCI-Shirley in 1991 and served 22 years in that facility and then at Gardner and now at Souza since 2014. He said in the 1990s, Boston crime was out of control. He spoke about Kennedy's working group and the crackdown on crime in the 1990s in Boston. Within twelve months, youth homicides dropped by 70%. Lt. Allain said if you can pull gang members away from others, they do not have the same commitment to violence. As a 23-year old officer, his female partner was raped for hours on the 11am-7pm shift and dragged away like a piece of trash. He spoke about the January incident at Souza-Baranowski. He spoke about two February incidents that prompted a lockdown of the facility due to unprovoked incidents perpetrated by inmates. There has been more than 300 assaults by prisoners in the past year and 240 cases of self-injurious behavior. He wanted to highlight the lives that correctional officers save on a yearly basis instead of focusing on inmate completed suicides. There are over four hundred cameras in Souza. He said the officers that work at Souza are nothing short of professional. He said the use of force incidents were very low during the transfer from one area of the prison to the other. His job is the care, custody, and

control of the inmate population. He said the atmosphere is extremely violent there is no place with higher security at SBCC in the facility than the RHU. He said many of his staff have needed to go on the “cocktail” to potentially stave off AIDS, Hepatitis B., and other diseases. It causes severe stomach pain and nausea for weeks on end. The officers are being harassed daily and told they will do horrible things to his family. He said that he works one of the most dangerous jobs outside a combat veteran because he needs to worry about assaults every day. He spoke about mental health issues that correctional officers have and said he is open to things that would improve the wellbeing of inmates as well. He said expanded good time credits being incentivized is wrong and has caused more out of cell time that inmates have used to perpetrate more attacks. He believes these individuals are going to end up in our neighborhoods and the incentives should be toward a less violent behavior to get down to a lower security prison for more opportunities to work. He said Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are the types of programs you should have at maximum security. He read another statement from another correctional officer at MCI-Cedar Junction and spoke about the historical background with Governor Deval Patrick and the reason behind the name change of the facility. He said that while the violence at Walpole has gone down, it has reared its head at Souza. Bonnie remarked that both Lt. Allain and Mr. Brown were in agreement that it is a culture problem but they are in disagreement as to the common denominator. Bonnie said she has heard too many accounts of inmates on the receiving end of anger from correctional officers. Bonnie said the CJRA has not been a source of any assaults on staff. She said she objects to the CJRA being stated as the cause of the violence. Bonnie asked if the answer to this violence is to keep people in restrictive conditions and said she would like to see a more rehabilitative environment.

### **Public Comment**

Cassandra read a statement from an officer who asked to call Senator Eldridge and other legislators to show the difficult jobs that correctional officers have. Mary said that we should all be working for a culture change and that other states have changed the culture with good results. Another public member said the Governor has put out his budget and is giving more money to the DOC but cutting the money on programming and food and raising the number of employees. A correctional officer from MCI-Concord said that nine years ago, they used the RHU to deter inmates but now, inmates do not lose anything and they get phone calls, write letters, use tablets, have headphones, and get a Walkman. Michael Gray, a former inmate, spoke about how he works mainly with drug addicted people and mentioned issues around the use of drugs in prisons and suggested tightening up the drug testing for correctional officers. Jurrell Laronal, a formerly incarcerated member of the public, said that staff can be very unprofessional and handed out a letter that he composed with signatures from family members.

There was a motion to adjourn by Marlene S. and seconded by Kevin F.

The meeting adjourned at 12:57pm.