

**SAFETY AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, February 8, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. via WebEx

Committee Members Present:

Dawn Meyers, Chair  
John Donnelly  
Rick Dunn  
Russell Gabriel  
Deborah Gonzalez  
B.A. Hart  
Kamau Hull  
Danny Malec  
Katie McFarland  
Gwen O'Looney  
Terris Thomas

Committee Members Absent:

David Beck  
Adam Lassila

Ex Officio Members:

Blaine Williams  
T.J. Bement  
Ray Covington  
Elisa Zarate  
William Hood

Staff:

Sarah George, Recorder  
Charles Mason, Corrections  
Daniel Young, Corrections

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Chair Dawn Meyers called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

Terris Thomas made a motion to approve the January 11, 2022 meeting. Deborah Gonzalez seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Dawn Meyers explained that the Committee had previously expressed interest in initially focusing on the graceful return for returning residents.

Warden Ray Covington and Superintendent Daniel Young shared a presentation with the Committee on the Athens-Clarke County Department of Corrections Transition Center Program. They explained their purpose is to be the conduit to expanding educational opportunities, developing new work skills, and receiving of counseling and social work services. Superintendent Young provided a history of the Diversion Center, which opened in May 2012, and explained that it was originally built to reduce the burden on the local jail and provide work release for individuals whose sentences did not need traditional confinement. Superintendent Young also described programming available for residents of the Transition Center, including GED, Reentry Skills Building, Welding to Work, and on-the-job training. Once in the Transition Center, returning residents are partnered with a Case Worker, given a through risk/needs assessment, and a case plan to use their time in the Transition Center proactively. The risk/needs assessment consideration includes the following areas of risk:

- Substance use;
- Financial;
- Employment;
- Residential;
- Family, relationships, and community; and
- Emotional, personal, and interpersonal.

B.A. Hart requested clarification on whether or not women were included in the Transition Center. Warden Covington clarified that the Transition Center is male only. They have inquired about a female facility; however, it would require a separate facility and staff. He shared that they could consider

options for that; however, they would have to review it to determine cost-effectiveness. B. A. Hart also requested clarification on what other counseling residents receive beyond addiction counseling and how many counselors they have per inmate. Warden Covington explained that they have one counselor, and the counselor has a caseload of 80 men. The rest of the residents are split between case workers.

DA Gonzalez expressed concern that there is not an equivalent facility for women. She shared that she believes there is a really big area of potential to help female returning residents and family unification, because we know that it is also a generational cycle. She expressed interest in evaluating how we would look at having a Transition Center for females as well.

Gwen O'Looney inquired as to whether or not returning residents were working on county projects or for county departments. Warden Covington confirmed some were. Gwen O'Looney also asked if those returning residents were being paid for that, and Warden Covington explained that they were not. Manager Blaine Williams explained that it is important to distinguish between the different programs that Corrections is running, which includes programming for the general population, Transition Center, and Diversion Center. He shared that staff has had multiple conversations with the Department of Corrections, and there is a need for them to keep some continuity across the state on how they treat returning residents. He explained that the Mayor and Commission has pushed staff multiple times to try and pay returning residents; however, they have not been able to find a successful solution that is equitable across the state. Once they move from the general population into the Transition Center, staff is able to help returning residents obtain employment. He also shared that there has been conversation recently about perhaps hiring some of the returning residents in the Transition Center for full-time work with ACCGov, and this discussion is continuing internally. Superintendent Young also noted that the time that the general population works with ACCGov is logged with the Department of Corrections, and they receive experience related to the role they are performing. The Department of Corrections will then partner with a central Georgia technical college and give them certifications or certificates for that time.

Gwen O'Looney also asked about recidivism rates for males, females, and the difference in recidivism rates of people that have completed programs. Warden Covington explained that the recidivism rates for males and females would have to be obtained from the state Department of Corrections website. Superintendent Young also noted that they are not equipped to track people post-release unless they want to stay involved with them.

B.A. Hart inquired about how the Diversion Center or Transition Center evaluates the effectiveness of the programming, given the difficulty in determining recidivism rates. Superintendent Young explained they measure success by successful releases, including how many were released employed, how many were released to a home residence, and by determining how successful programs and the specific targeted interventions appeared to be at the time of release. He also shared that they are hoping to have a part-time social worker hired before the end of the fiscal year, and that person will help develop and implement a system and process for post-release tracking. Superintendent Young also explained that defining recidivism will be critical, since there are varying definitions depending on the jurisdiction.

Rick Dunn inquired about what we can do as a community to help strengthen the program. Warden Covington explained that they are always looking for more and better opportunities to up-skill their returning residents, as well as employment opportunities.

Gwen O'Looney made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Judge Kamau Hull seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:21 a.m.