

**Reentry Advisory Council (RAC)**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2020 Meeting Minutes**  
**Via Zoom**  
**Thursday, October 15, 2020**

**Attendees Present:**

James Le Blanc, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections  
Alfreda Tillman Bester, Designee for Marketa Garner Walters, Department of Children and Family Services  
Dr. Emily Campbell, Designee for Dr. Monty Sullivan, Louisiana Community and Technical College System  
Rhett Covington, Dept. of Public Safety and Corrections  
Julie LaFleur, Designee for Judge Jules D. Edwards, III, 15th Judicial District Court  
Stacye Falgout, Designee for Dr. John Morrison, Department of Public Safety and Corrections  
Karissa Page, Designee for Jennifer Katzman, Department of Health  
Winona Connor, Louisiana Housing Corporation  
Robert D. Hanser, University of Louisiana at Monroe  
Lindsay Jeffery, Designee for Judge Arthur L. Hunter Jr., Orleans Criminal District Court  
Joseph Prejean, Big Poppas Fitness Gym  
Joseph Ardoin, Jr., LA State Building and Construction Trades Council  
Dennis Grimes, Louisiana Sheriff's Association  
Taravas Walker, Designee for Ava Dejoie, LA Workforce Commission  
Justin Lacour, Designee for Bridget Dinvaut, Louisiana District Attorney's Association  
Danielle Labbe, Designee for Kathleen Carpenter, AL Association of Builders and Contractors  
Sheryl Ranatza, Committee on Parole

**Absent:**

Courtney L. Baker, Louisiana Association of Business and Industry  
Rémy Voisin Starns, Louisiana Public Defender Board  
Reverend Paul R. Murray, Elayn Hunt Correctional Center  
Troy Carter, LA Senate  
Tony Bacala, LA House of Representatives  
Chairman Louis Reine, LA-AFL-CIO

**Other:**

Leslie Chambers, Governor's Office	Lynn Stevens
Nicole Miller, Community Coordinator - Calcasieu Parish	Julie Bass
Jessica Strange, Community Coordinator - Orleans Parish	Twanda Laurant
Kristin Parsons, Community Coordinator – Caddo-Bossier Parish	Renard Thomas
Julie LaFleur, Community Coordinator - Lafayette Parish	Vanessa Spinazola
Cheron Holland, Community Coordinator – Rapides Parish	Alexandria Van
Brittany Herron, Community Coordinator – St. Tammany Parish	Quanda Charles
Heather Bunn, Community Coordinator – Terrebonne/Lafourche	A. Carter COC
Nathan Nelson, Community Coordinator – Ouachita Parish	Vonnie Hawkins
Kenny Lynch	Debra
Christy Guzman	Tenisha
River Parish C.	Adrienne Wheeler
Kosman	Kiksha Martin
Sonya Williams	485-XX28
Maghen Gagnard	342-XX40

**Dept. of Public Safety & Corrections Staff:**

Malcolm Myer, DPSC	Bradley Noland, Probation and Parole
Steven Lassalle, Probation and Parole	Stephanie Webb, Probation and Parole
Rochelle Ambeau, Office of Offender Reentry	Carmen Coutee, Probation and Parole
Robin Milligan, Office of Offender Reentry	Phillip Adkins, Probation and Parole

Nicole George, DPSC  
Hester Serrano, Probation and Parole  
Robert Vehock, Office of Offender Reentry  
Kelsey Pearce, Office of Offender Reentry  
Heather Watson, Office of Offender Reentry  
Melissa Young, Probation and Parole  
Hannah Walker, DPSC

Denice Boudreaux, Probation and Parole  
Angela Whittaker, DPSC  
Andrea Warren, DPSC  
Kewana Ceasor, Probation and Parole  
Stephanie Moore, Probation and Parole  
Jodie Mallet, DPSC

### **Call to Order**

- Chairman Louis Reine was not present for the meeting
- The meeting was called to order by Assistant Secretary Rhett Covington at 9:33 am.

### **Roll Call**

- Roll was called and a quorum was established. 17 of 22 present

### **Approval of the January 2020 Meeting Minutes**

- Assistant Secretary Covington asked for a motion to adopt the July 2020 minutes. A motion to accept the minutes was put forward by Joseph Ardoin and seconded by Joseph Prejean. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

### **Welcome and Introductions, Assistant Secretary Rhett Covington**

- Assistant Secretary Covington welcomed everyone.
- Assistant Secretary Covington sent out his thoughts and prayers to everyone who affected by the recent Hurricanes Laura and Delta and expressed his appreciation to individuals attending the meeting from those areas.

### **Opening Remarks, Secretary James Le Blanc**

- Secretary Le Blanc expressed his appreciation of everyone especially during these trying times.
- Secretary Le Blanc gave Covid-19 updates for DOC staff/offenders.
- Secretary Le Blanc shared the department successfully evacuated approximately 5000 offenders due to Hurricanes Laura and Delta. He commended everyone's hard work.
- Secretary Le Blanc stated he is focused on recruitment and retention of correctional officers because it is becoming a real issue in our prison system. He assigned a committee to review how the department can improve the morale, job environment, training and pay.
- Secretary Le Blanc shared since the development of the departments restrictive housing regulation the department is down to 4.8% of our prison population in segregation. He stated the department is focusing on this population who struggles during incarceration to eliminate problems after release.

### **Remarks from the Governor's Office, Leslie Chambers**

- Mrs. Chambers commented everyone for their hard work and expressed the Governor's appreciation of Secretary Leblanc leadership who recognizes that gainful employment is a necessity in successful reentry.

### **Employer Advisory Committee (EAC), Rhett Covington, Assistant Secretary**

- Assistant Secretary Covington stated EAC subcommittee is comprised of employers in the community that focus on employing ex-offenders.
- Assistant Secretary Covington stated EAC has a twofold purpose tasked with reviewing the departments programs and telling us how we can improve them, and helping us overcome barriers with employing our population.

### **New Beginnings, Jodi Cain-Mallett, Program Director**

- Assistant Secretary Covington explained that "New Beginnings" is a federal grant program for co-occurring substance use disorders for pre and post release offenders.

- Jodie Mallet stated there were 40 enrolled (17 pre-releases, 17 post release and the remainder has been removed due to various reasons).
- Mrs. Mallet stated they are operating in two locations EHCC and LCIW. She is hopeful the in-person group meeting will be starting up again soon.

#### **ARES Grant, Kelsey Pearce, DPS&C**

- Kelsey Pearce reminded the group that the ARES mission is to identify, analyze and to respond to gaps in employment services that prevent successful reentry.
- Ms. Pearce shared the gaps identified are: getting employers to the table to talk, employers willing to take facility tours and ultimately hiring the formerly incarcerated.
- Ms. Pearce updated that the ARES grant was awarded funds for implantation and although specifics have not been received due to the grant system changing at BJA she is hopeful to have the details in the coming weeks.
- Ms. Pearce stated as she mentioned at the last RAC meeting the public information campaign project should fill these gaps by providing employers with information on hiring post release as well as dispelling any myths.
- Assistant Secretary Covington discussed the reentry workforce portal and how it will function much like monster.com in the way of posting resumes, search for jobs with employers who have posted inside the portal. The portal will be secured to prevent misuse by the incarcerated user.
- Assistant Secretary Covington expressed the need to get the word out to have employers register in the workforce portal and give us feedback. Once the employers are registered they can post jobs and search for applicants. He stated that Rayburn Correctional Center has been a pilot for workforce portal.

#### **BJA OBC Recovery Housing Grant, Robert Vehock, DPS&C**

- Robert Vehock stated that the LA Department of Corrections was awarded a grant BJA Second Chance Act pay for Success initiative. He stated the department is one of 6 awards stating he is very proud of the team that submitted this application.
- Mr. Vehock stated this grant is to facilitate an “outcome-based contract” to lower recidivism and homelessness and to address substance use disorders. He stated he believes this project has a big potential to impact the state.
- Mr. Vehock proposed for RAC to be the executive oversight board for the BJA OBC Recovery Housing grant. Assistant Secretary Covington entertained a motion to adopt the BJA OBC Recovery Housing grant. A motion to accept was put forward by Joseph Ardoin Jr. and second by, Alfreda Tillman Bester and Co-Occurring subcommittee was unanimously adopted.

#### **LA-PRI Implementation Steering Team, Robert Vehock, DPS&C**

- Robert Vehock stated the Community Coordinators continued work was approved through JRI funding. His staff is in the process of getting new contracts in place.
- Mr. Vehock stated the IST Subcommittees were designed to be responsive of issues at the state level as well as the local level. He stated this year there has been a lot of growth and progress made.
- Mr. Vehock spoke about the need in creating treatment pathways for supervision or a best solution to address needs with this population and point people in the right direction.
- Assistant Secretary Covington shared the department is reaching out to formerly incarcerated persons to join the Subcommittees to bring a different perspective. He stated if anyone knows of anyone please submit their name to Heather Watson at [Heather.Watson@La.Gov](mailto:Heather.Watson@La.Gov).

#### **RAC Strategic Plan**

- Assistant Secretary Covington stated we are in the middle of our strategic plan that was set for five years. He stated his staff is currently going over the strategic plan line by line and he will hand relevant sections for feedback and action plans so we can have a more useful plan. He is hopeful to have a revised plan for our next meeting.

**Other Business**

- Robert Vehock recognized Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office on an awarded they received to look at swift certain and fair innovation to supervision and also Goodwill of Southeast La who was awarded an innovation to reentry initiatives.

**Adjournment**

- Joseph Ardoin entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:49 AM. Alfreda Tillman-Bester adopted the motion and the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting will be held on February 18, 2021 at 9:30 AM the location is TBD.