

Correction Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 23, 2024

7:00 PM via Zoom and [YouTube Live](#)

The following committee members were present:

Tadhg Dooley, Chair
Marisol Garcia, Chair
Ben Howell
Melvin Medina
Daryl McGraw

The following committee members were absent:

John Bowen
Kyisha Velazquez
Andrew Giering
Scott Semple
Reena Kapoor

I. CONVENE MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 7:11 PM by Chair Dooley.

II. ADOPTION OF AUGUST MEETING MINUTES

There was no vote on the August minutes as there was not a quorum.

III. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

Dr. Howell reported for the Visioning Subcommittee that he met with Andrew Clark and Brittany Lemar who are working on landscape review for the ombuds position in other states and systems. He said that there wasn't much to report but would like to share their knowledge in regards to the hiring process for the permanent Ombuds position.

IV. UPDATE ON APPLICATION FOR PERMANENT POSITION

Chairman Dooley stressed the importance of a last push for applications for the permanent position. The applications will close on September 30. There are currently six applications submitted. He would like to set a meeting to discuss the applications during the first week of October.

V. INTRODUCTION OF INTERIM OMBUDS

Chairman Dooley introduced the Interim Ombuds Attorney DeVaughn Ward, whose position took effect on September 23. Interim Ombuds Ward thanked the Committee for including him in the meeting and the Governor for appointing him. He briefly explained his background and his work in criminal defense and civil rights litigation as well as lobbying. He also has personal experience as his brother had previously been incarcerated.

He also described his vision for his role. Ombuds Ward is hoping to get a staff and will work during the session to get a budget for the position so that he may be more effective. He is also looking to visit MacDougall-Walker CI and address the hunger strike that is currently going on.

Chairman Dooley thanked him for his time and acknowledging the crisis at MacDougall. He is hopeful that the Committee and the Ombuds can work together to share ideas on raising funds and getting a budget.

Dr. Howell asked the Ombuds asked about his office location which he shared is 55 Farmington Avenue in Hartford. He also asked about the reporting structure for his position. Ombuds Ward said that he reports directly to the governor and that he currently has a biweekly meeting scheduled with the governor and his chief of staff. He also spoke to the Commissioner of DOC and he said that he plans to get the Ombuds a liaison to each correctional facility. Ombuds Ward also noted that he reports to the Committee.

Mr. Medina is excited about Ombuds Ward beginning his term as interim Ombuds and looks forward to his work. He offered the Committee's support as he makes decisions about what the role and its budget will look like. He asked about the MacDougall hunger strike and how he plans to manage expectations as far as handling that crisis and getting the office off the ground.

Ombuds Ward asked for patience from the public as he begins this process and stressed that he is reachable by email, encouraging people to reach out.

Cindy Prizio, a member of the public, asked Ombuds Ward about medication being taken away from inmates upon incarceration, including antidepressants and hearing aides. She offered her assistance in advocacy on this issue. She also said that she did not like that he had to schedule facility visits as she believes he should have the ability to visit at any point without a chance for facilities to prepare.

Ombuds Ward was appreciative of her comments and understood her frustration. He noted the importance of the ability of the Ombuds office to use subpoenas and litigate any issues. There are questions about where suits would be filed so he is hoping the legislature will address them during legislative session but in the meantime, he will use the powers he is granted under current statutes to address issues that arise.

Mr. McGraw then discussed his experience as both an inmate and advocate and offered his support to Ombuds Ward and family members of incarcerated folks who are listening. Ombuds Ward and Mr. McGraw agreed to meet offline to go over that support. Mr. McGraw also asked about how Ombuds Ward's advocacy work can continue in his new role, specifically as he can no longer file personal suits. Ombuds Ward talked about educating people who would like to pursue legal access and an emphasis on transparency, and his network of interested attorneys who may also be able to help.

Chairman Garcia spoke about the long-term strategy of the Ombuds office and building a relationship with the Commissioner of Corrections to the betterment of those currently incarcerated. She stressed making information readily available and digestible for them and their families.

Colleen Ward, member of the public, wanted to express her hope that those incarcerated receive proper medical care (specifically related to mental health) while in custody based on her own experiences with her son who died while in custody, and suggested CIT training for corrections officers. She offered her help in advocacy and any way she could provide.

Cindy Prizio, member of the public, also wanted to note that the portion of the Ombuds role regarding parole was also important and wanted to hear what Ombuds Ward had to say about this part of the role. He agreed that it was part of the statutory charge and will work towards assisting those in special parole (halfway houses) as well.

Chairman Dooley thanked Ombuds Ward for agreeing to take this role and for applying for the permanent position. He stressed that the Commission will be available to assist as he works towards the broad mission of the office, including working towards creating a budget for the office. Chairman Garcia echoed this sentiment.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comment was included in the introduction of the Interim Ombuds.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was formally adjourned at 8:28 PM.