

Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force
Steering Committee
Meeting Summary for April 8, 2021

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1. Call to Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m. The meeting was held remotely via Zoom Webinar.

Members Present: Barry Buchanan, Anne Deacon, Arlene Feld, Stephen Gockley, Dan Hammill, Jack Hovenier, Raylene King

Members Absent: Caleb Erickson, Mike Parker, Tyler Schroeder

2. [Items for next Task Force agenda \(00:01:36\)](#)

The committee members agreed to schedule the following items on the April 2021 agenda for the full Task Force:

- Blake Decision updates on legislative changes: invite bill sponsors to the meeting
- Active bills in the State legislature that are relevant to the work of the Task Force, presented by Dan Hammill, Barry Buchanan, and/or Anne Deacon
- COVID Recovery Assessment, America Rescue Plan Act, and other State funding: What funding is coming into the county and can the IPRTF make funding recommendations? Covid Recovery Assessment is a recovery needs assessment conducted by the Health Dept. at the direction of the federal government. Focus on 3 issues: youth mental health, housing stability for families and children, and business recovery.
- Crisis Stabilization Center update from Anne Deacon

Future agenda items can include:

- Update on Behavioral Health Crisis Response program at the May joint meeting of the Legal & Justice Systems and Behavioral Health committees and the May 17 IPRTF meeting
- Inpatient pregnant and parenting women's treatment program at the Behavioral Health committee meeting. Presented by Byron Manering, Dan Hammill, and/or Mike Parker.
- Reentry, especially due to the Blake Decision and Covid restrictions at the May joint meeting of the Legal & Justice Systems and Behavioral Health committees
- Overarching strategic plan to ensure they have a clear strategic plan and set of priorities, at the May Steering Committee
- Revisit the VERA Report on the elimination of low-level bail, for the Legal & Justice Systems Committee, time and date undetermined.
- Funding for the Pretrial Services Unit, including additional staff to ramp up pretrial risk assessment and monitoring, and any other programs that could make a big difference in reducing or prevention incarceration for a relatively small funding commitment.

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3. [Communications Strategy \(00:32:40\)](#)

Barry reported on the Council resolution to review and enhance opportunities for public participation in Whatcom county.

Deacon reported that the County and City of Bellingham agreed to fund communications around the homeless housing issue. They also hired someone to do communications for the Ground-level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE) and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs and the behavioral health crisis response expansion. She is working with the County Finance Division on an open request for proposals (RFQ) to develop a communications roster that the County staff can pull from without going through a contracting process. Once on the qualifications roster, the County staff can choose someone to work with. They have identified the process and identified the qualifications required, and are now seeking people to respond.

The Committee members discussed the possibility of using the Western Washington University (WWU) journalism department professors, how to engage those on the roster, encouraging people to apply for the roster, developing a document with qualifications and areas of focus specific to the task force; whether a consultant would develop a plan and set up the process, or carry out a plan; Task Force co-chairs developing op-ed pieces for the local media, and not focusing on one issue, but include things that all the committees are doing.

Next steps are to reach out to folks who might be interested in doing this work for the IPRTF and ask them apply to the general roster and create a job description specific to the IPRTF. Keep media content focused on specific issues relevant in the community at the time.

4. [Annual Report to County Council & Executive \(00:48:10\)](#)

Jill Nixon, County Council Office, reported on the structure of the annual report, timeline, and potential content.

Committee members discussed potential content, including: the opening of the Crisis Stabilization Center, housing needs for people who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system, the impact of the Task Force on other community groups, agencies, and efforts by focusing on reducing incarceration, the broader impact the Task Force has had on community betterment initiatives that have taken root in the past few years, the Pretrial Process Workgroup, new monies coming into the county, framing accomplishments around issues identified in the Vera Report, and jail incarceration rates. Draft committee reports are due the end of April.

5. [Other Business \(01:18:47\)](#)

Deacon reported on the crisis stabilization center announcement.

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6. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.