

Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force

Meeting Summary for February 14, 2022

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1. Call to Order

Committee Chair Jack Hovenier called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. The meeting was held via remote-only Zoom Webinar.

Members Present: Barry Buchanan, Heather Flaherty, Seth Fleetwood, David Freeman, Stephen Gockley, Daniel Hammill, Deborah Hawley, Mike Hilley, Jack Hovenier, Raylene King, Scott Korthuis, Jenn Lockwood, Rhyan Lopez, Jason McGill, Perry Mowery, Mike Parker (proxy for Greg Winter), Eric Petersen, Darlene Peterson, Satpal Sidhu, Flo Simon, Donnell Tanksley, Bruce Van Glubt, Maialisa Vanyo

Members Absent: Bill Elfo, Arlene Feld, Dave Reynolds, Eric Richey, Greg Winter

Gockley welcomed new members, Lopez and Lockwood. Each of them introduced themselves and said a bit about who they are and why they joined the Task Force.

2. [Confirm 2022 committee sign-up \(04:23\)](#)

Jill Nixon, Legislative Coordinator, reminded committee members to send her any changes they want to make to their committee memberships.

3. [State Legislative Session \(07:33\)](#)

Gockley asked committee members to give an update on the bills they are tracking.

Hovenier read e-mailed comments from Sheriff Bill Elfo with his thoughts on current legislation. Elfo's e-mail expressed support for proposed amendments to last year's police reform bills and went into detail about each amendment.

Vanyo added that her office is in support of bills ending solitary confinement and preventing juvenile dispositions from being counted in adult felony court.

Caleb Erikson, Sheriff's Office Lieutenant and chair of the Information Needs and Data Exchange (INDEX) Committee, reported that the INDEX Committee had discussed a bill that would change which individuals are charged in juvenile court.

Mowery gave a report on bills related to behavioral health issues:

- House Bill (HB) 1735 would change last year's HB 1310 regarding use of force.
- HB 1865 establishes certified peer specialists and trainees as a new profession to address the workforce gap in the behavioral health field.
- HB 2040 streamlines licensing requirements for social workers.
- Senate Bill (SB) 5644 establishes standards and training programs for co-responder teams.
- SB 5655 requires state hospitals to establish the capacity for short term detention and civil commitment services for people who cannot be admitted to community facilities.
- SB 5884 requires the Department of Health to create a certification for behavioral health support specialists.

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Hammill stated the Task Force needs to be more strategic when it comes to lobbying efforts at the State level. He would like to see the Task Force formally recognize legislative priorities for the next session.

4. Justice Project Needs Assessment (24:00)

Hovenier announced that Buchanan is the new chair of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC). Buchanan gave an overview of what led to the SAC being formed, the objectives of the Committee, and the work they have done so far this year. Buchanan went on to say that the next steps are to figure out how to integrate SAC topics and members into the Task Force. He went over a few options of how to achieve that. He also said that the next SAC meeting would focus on data needs and the third meeting would focus on behavioral health.

Hammill stated that one member of the SAC had published a letter to the editor and that he believes the public messaging should be more controlled. He added that he thinks the SAC members need to be attending IPRTF committees in order for them to get caught up and expand their knowledge base.

King said that she is concerned with the expense of the construction of the new facilities considering the current prices of materials and the inflation rate. She expressed concern with the County's ability to afford this or the taxpayers' willingness to take it on. Korthuis agreed it will be expensive and stated that it's not going to be any cheaper in the future. He stressed the importance of building the facility and not delaying any longer.

5. GRACE and LEAD transition to Health Department (41:00)

Mowery said that steps are being taken to move the Ground Level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE) and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs to a new division within the County Health Department, currently being called the Response Systems Division. He stated that the Council has approved funding for management of the new division and that Malora Christensen has been selected for that role. He anticipates that all GRACE and LEAD employees will transfer to the new division by mid-March.

Gockley asked for confirmation that current employees under the Sea Mar contract would become County employees. Mowery said that was correct and explained the spoke and wheel framework for services.

Gockley asked Mowery to speak to how co-responder systems might integrate with the new division, given a recent request for proposals sent out to create such a system. Mowery replied that the intent of the division was to house various related services in as close proximity to each other as possible. He said that, though nothing has been finalized yet, other systems might be integrated into the division in the future. He added that they had been in contact with Behavioral Health Administrative Services Organization (BHASO) about the possibility of the division responding to the RFP.

Hammill said that he believes this is the right direction for those programs. He added that he believes that the Alternate Response Team (ART) also needs to go to the County in some form as well.

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6. County implementation of its GARE membership (55:46)

Before starting on this agenda item, Gockley introduced McGill, who had just joined the meeting. McGill told the committee members about himself and why he joined the Task Force.

Jed Holmes, Community Outreach Facilitator for Whatcom County, gave background on why the County joined The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and what it is. He explained that the County government structure presents challenges in terms of how to implement the GARE framework, since it is made up of many departments with different cultures. They have established a roadmap for implementation and Holmes said that they have not gotten far enough in the process to know how the Task Force can help. He went on to describe the next steps in the process of implementation.

Gockley asked if the Racial Equity Toolkit from GARE would be adopted by any departments in the near future. Holmes said that they are looking at that, but the investment of time and effort has not been made to broadly adopt the toolkit.

Gockley asked if the Task Force could take advantage of the resources from GARE. Holmes said that County employees could access the online resources, but it is not available at this time to non-County employee Task Force members

Hammill expressed frustration that he is not seeing the GARE framework being used on the Task Force or at the County level. He said he sees the adoption of GARE as lip service because it is not actually being implemented.

Gockley agreed that the Task Force has not implemented GARE in any meaningful way and suggested that this be on the agenda for the next Steering Committee agenda.

7. Task Force Communications (added as Other Business) (1:07:57)

Nixon said that the RFP for a communications consultant will be advertised on Wednesday, February 16th and asked members to send her names of any vendors they would like to receive the RFP. She also asked them to contact her if they wanted to be a part of the group that would review the submissions.

8. Committee Updates (1:09:49)

- Steering Committee: Buchanan said that most of what they discussed in Steering had already been reviewed during agenda item four.
- Crisis Stabilization Center Committee: Mowery said that their last meeting was focused on census at the facility, proviso funding updates, and the mural project. He gave an overview of the services provided by the Crisis Stabilization Facility for the new members. He summarized the Committee's discussion during their most recent meeting, as well as the meetings he has been having outside the Committee to streamline the process of drop off and admission to the facility. Mowery also spoke about establishing a process that will allow 12-hour law enforcement holds.
 - Tanksley asked if there had been any discussion of the fire department being able to drop off individuals at the crisis stabilization facility. He also brought up the possibility of

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the facility being able to house domestic violence victims. Mowery responded that there have been significant steps made to facilitate fire and EMS drop offs. The main challenge is the admission process and the need for the responder making the drop off to stay at the facility in case the individual is not able to be admitted and needs to be transported to a hospital. In regards to domestic violence victims, he said that he will reach out to the staff about it.

- Hilley said that Mowery had accurately described the challenges related to diverting from EMS. He said that he feels like they are getting closer and anticipates more solutions in the coming weeks.
- Hammill asked if a person had a mental health illness and a substance use issue, how it would be determined which part of the facility they would be admitted to. Mowery said that the staff do have the ability to transfer patients based on the best fit determination made by staff at the point of admission. That way the individual does not have to decide for themselves which side to be admitted to.
- Lopez asked what the volume of patients has been like at the facility and how to acquire data gathered from the facility. Mowery encouraged Lopez to e-mail him for data requests. He cautioned against managing from a spreadsheet and encouraged using it as a tool for asking further questions.
- Behavioral Health: Hammill said that the committee had discussed methamphetamines, carfentanil, and benzodiazepines for almost the whole meeting. He described the new drugs they are seeing on the streets and the effects they are having. He said that they also discussed co-responder models, LEAD, GRACE, and the impact on drug court of the Blake decision. He said that re-entry will be discussed at the joint meeting with the Legal and Justice Systems Committee.
- Legal and Justice Systems Committee: King said that the committee discussed current jail use, booking restrictions, and competency and restoration issues. Wendy Jones reported to the committee that there are a high number of pre-trial felony offenders and that certain offenders aren't being housed because of booking restrictions and issues with the facility. Jackie Mitchell reported that there is a higher level of mental health issues among those who are incarcerated than has been seen in the past. She reported that they also talked about reentry services and noted that there are mental health professionals working in the jail currently, though there are still roles that are unfilled. The committee also discussed competency and restoration – these topics will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting, which is a joint meeting with the Behavioral Health Committee.
- INDEX Committee: Erickson said that the Committee reviewed the work that they have done so far. Erickson summarized that discussion and also provided more information on INDEX for the new members. He described the types of questions they are trying to answer, including types of calls for service, information on warrants and effectiveness of diversions, and demographic information of those in custody.

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- Peterson thanked Erickson for all his work. She highlighted that the jail website is much more useful now and displays a lot more information, which has been helpful for the public and has greatly reduced calls to her office.
- King added an item from her committee that she had forgotten. She said that they had also discussed Senate Bill 5664 and its potential to result in more mentally ill people in custody. Committee members briefly discussed this bill and its implications.

9. Other Business

Task Force communications was discussed before the committee updates agenda item. There was no other business besides this item.

10. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

11. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:53 A.M.