

MINUTES

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS

DATE: December 4, 2019

Representative Albert called the subcommittee meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

Roll was taken: Present – Representatives Albert, Slagh, VanSingel, Lightner, Maddock, Pagan, Sabo, Anthony, and Kennedy
Absent – None

I. Approval of Minutes from Previous Subcommittee Meeting

A motion was moved by Representative Slagh to approve the minutes from the subcommittee meeting held on November 6, 2019. The motion prevailed, a majority of the members voting in the affirmative.

II. PTSD Study

Caterina Spinaris, Ph.D., LPC, Executive Director, Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, appeared before the subcommittee to discuss results of the comprehensive study conducted of the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological issues among correctional officers. Outcome variables consisted of social health, work health, mental health, physical health, and family health. The most important outcome variables were determined to be work health and social health.

Over 3,000 MDOC employees were surveyed. Data showed that one in six Corrections employees met the criteria for major depressive disorder. One in four were custody employees working at male correctional facilities. Of all MDOC staff screened, 16% screened positive for depression, 47% for anxiety, 22% for PTSD, 19% for alcohol abuse, and 9% had suicidal ideation. The numbers were even higher for custody staff working at male correctional facilities - 24% for depression, 60% for anxiety, 41% for PTSD, 26% for alcohol abuse, and 12% had suicidal ideation. About half of all Corrections employees met the criteria for medium to high generalized anxiety, which is 16 times the national average and almost 10 times the rate for all military personnel.

Staff comments reveal that relationships with coworkers and supervisors are characterized by mistrust, anger, and fear; leadership styles are perceived as punitive and retaliatory; investigative and disciplinary practices of staff are perceived as “heavy-handed”, causing more anxiety and fear; the increasing loss of benefits equates to a loss of incentive and desire to work for MDOC; there is a perception of not being valued by the state or by the department; mandatory overtime is causing exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and family life disruption; and prison closures are causing family life disruption.

Data suggests there are serious levels of mental health difficulties among most MDOC workers in comparison to national data for the general population, the military, and first responders. Custody staff are the most severely affected and in need of the most help. Work and social health are in dire need of improvement. Programming designed to improve both work and social health is an essential and vital starting point.

Recommendations include: specialized staff trainings and programs, focusing on leadership skills, management skills, interpersonal skills, and self-care/wellness skills; implementation of policies, employment benefits, incentives, and resources that impact the workforce culture and increase staff work engagement; implementation of participatory methods that continually incorporate employee feedback; and maintenance of long-term, system-wide staff wellness efforts.

Discussion ensued (questions and answers).

III. Department of Corrections – Employee Wellness Unit

Lynn Gorski, Manager, MDOC Wellness Unit, and Kyle Kaminski, Legislative Liaison, appeared before the subcommittee to discuss efforts to address employee wellness programming needs in the department. A new employee wellness unit was established in the department as recently as six months ago. The new unit is dedicated to providing support to staff, teaching staff self-care, and alerting staff that there is a mechanism in place for either self-reporting or reporting for other workers who are in need of help. The primary measure is to be able to respond quickly and proactively to employees in crisis. Mental health professionals are made available to help assist staff. A multidisciplinary team of MDOC staff, including frontline workers, has created a new MDOC-specific Wellness Initiative targeted specifically at MDOC staff, retirees, and their families. The new program includes a peer support program, which provides specially trained peer supports throughout the state on all shifts to confidentially listen to and assist staff that are struggling with correctional fatigue and/or other challenges.

Staff wellness/suicide prevention training has been added for all MDOC employees. Training helps staff identify the specific challenges that result from working in Corrections and provides assistance with various wellness strategies. The department has a wellness EPIC team, made up of staff from every level of the department. The EPIC team is charged with continuing to find effective ways to promote employee wellness. Steps have been taken, in conjunction with partners such as the Michigan Corrections Organization (MCO), to reduce the incidence of trauma within the department.

Discussion ensued (questions and answers).

IV. Testimony from Corrections Officer

Cary Johnson, representing the MCO, and a Corrections Officer at the G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson, appeared before the subcommittee to discuss employee wellness programming from an officer's perspective. She described stressful and traumatic incidences she has experienced at the facility, and indicated how employee wellness was not always a priority of the department in their response to the incidences. She expressed that employees have higher hopes now because of the work of Ms. Gorski and the recently established Wellness Unit. She conveyed the importance of assistance not only for officers involved in high stress situations with prisoners, but also for officers witnessing high stress situations occurring with other officers.

Discussion ensued (questions and answers).

V. Work Project Accounts

Kyle Kaminski, Legislative Liaison, Department of Corrections, appeared before the subcommittee to discuss the recent request, submitted to the legislature by the State Budget Office, to designate certain unexpended FY 2019 appropriations as work project accounts. There are four new work project appropriations for Corrections that have not yet been authorized by the legislature. They include the following: \$49.5 million for physical plant projects at various correctional facilities, \$250,000 for providers of programming for offenders once they are released from incarceration, \$4.0 million to expand education programming at the facilities, and \$4.6 million to develop and implement a Medication Assisted Treatment program to provide evidence-based treatment for reduction of recidivism among opioid using offenders.

Discussion ensued (questions and answers).

VI. Adjourn

Representative Albert adjourned the subcommittee meeting at 12:05 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Robin R. Risko, House Fiscal Agency