

**BERKS COUNTY PRISON BOARD MINUTES
DECEMBER 15, 2021**

The Berks County Prison Board met in a regular session on Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 9:00 A.M. in a Microsoft Teams Meeting.

CALL TO ORDER:

Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.

The following members were in attendance:

Commissioner Christian Leinbach
Commissioner Michael Rivera
Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt
District Attorney John Adams
Judge Scott Lash
Secretary Sandra Graffius

The following members were absent:

Sheriff Eric J Weaknecht

The following County staff also attended:

Executive Assistant Jessica Blausler
Solicitor Christine Sadler
Deputy Warden-Custody Jeffrey Schearer
Warden Jeffrey Smith
Chief Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made to approve the November 17, 2021 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

JAIL SENIOR STAFF REPORTS

INMATE POPULATION: Warden Jeffrey Smith stated the inmate population was 757. There are 2 juveniles being held in Lehigh County. There are 5 veterans in custody. Fifty-five inmates sentenced to SCI. Forty-seven are scheduled to leave by December 28, 2021. Three are waiting for a transport date. Five are not ready to be issued a transfer date.

FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE PROJECTS: Warden Jeffrey Smith updated on the outstanding project.

NVR Project- The IS team is working closely with the security vendor to determine the statement of work, establish timelines for implementing the new system, and still seeking answers to questions that they have regarding quotes from the vendors.

CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE JAIL: Due to the increases of COVID cases at the jail. As a result, the following precautions are taking place:

- The jail is on lockdown to restrict inmate movement
- Temporarily suspended friend and family visitation
- Enhanced screening measures
- Increased cleaning efforts
- Changed feeding procedures

PROGRAMS: Chief Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith updated the Board regarding the SOP process. On December 1st, the process is now available in electronic format on the Relias system. All Policies are now available in a digital platform for the staff to access.

Chief Deputy Warden Smith had a preliminary meeting with Robert Reed from the PA Attorney General's office. Mr. Reed met with CJAB to discuss trauma informed care initiative that is going on with the state with the criminal justice departments. The conversation was looking to move toward a more trauma informed model in the jail system. There will be a follow up from the meeting as well as a discussion with CJAB on what other counties are doing.

STAFFING: Deputy Warden-Custody Jeffrey Schearer updated the Board on the status of the staffing; there were 29 Correctional Officer vacancies. On December 7th officer testing was conducted. Five candidates are scheduled for interviews on December 30th. The next officer testing is scheduled for January 5, 2022. The next tentative academy start date is February 23 and that will be a combination of the successful candidates for the December 7th and January 5th testing.

SOLICITOR'S REPORT

Solicitor Sadler has been working together with Warden Jeffrey Smith and John Adams on some changes in federal law that will take effect next week. There are two juveniles that the Warden reported are currently being housed in Lehigh County. The new rules require that the county has to find a place for those individuals. They cannot be housed in the same facility as adult offenders. The existing relationship with Chester County and Lehigh County is not going to work. Juvenile Probation is trying to get the issue resolved by trying to find a home for them by next Monday. Effective next Monday the county will not be able to accept any juveniles that have direct file charges at the jail alternative arrangements will need to be made.

That something that is going to have to be looked at in planning of the new facility to see if it will be feasible to have a separate wing or what are the legislative requirements of this particular act.

There is a need for executive session to discuss contract negotiations with no action items.

PRISON BOARD COMMENTS: The county has been moving forward with plans to develop a new Berks County Correctional Facility. The county will gauge information from corrections professionals as well as information from the community. The county will engage with partners in this which is obviously the Board of Commissioners, the Prison Board, Criminal Justice Advisory Board which really covers each and every aspect of the criminal justice system in Berks County. Also, it is intended to do significant amount of focus groups in the community to gauge their thoughts about what will be a very significant infrastructure build for the county as well as something that's going to last for generations. Commissioner Barnhardt wants to be sure to get it right from the beginning. Warden Smith discussed with CGL about pulling together a mission statement moving forward so the groups and the community have a focus on where the corrections center is heading. The draft of this mission statement is as follows:

It is the ethical and legal obligation of Berks County Correctional Facility to provide appropriately secure safe and humane confinement to the legally incarcerated. This will be accomplished by providing cost efficient services focusing on rehabilitation for recidivism reduction and social restoration. The offenders will be provided opportunities and education and self-improvement in order to assist them in reentering the community as productive citizens.

The statement will be sent out to the board to critique. In January significant meetings with the steering committee and with Prison Board will be scheduled. More frequent Prison Board meetings may also be scheduled. There will be more planning at the front end to make sure it right and to start laying that foundation to serve the needs of the community for many years to come.

District Attorney John Adams spoke about the new federal legislation and mandates. There is a shortage on detention beds throughout entire state of Pennsylvania. It is a very significant problem that is faced with the new legislation that is going to be more of a problem especially dealing with file cases. The law was enacted in 2018 but not put into full force till this year. But despite that, the real problem is a lack of potential beds. Even with available buildings to house the juveniles, the county will still face the problem with staffing. Lehigh County and Lancaster County are also faced with staffing issues. It is one thing to have a facility but to find enough staff to cover a 24/7 operation is would be a challenge. This will certainly be a focus moving forward.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Commissioner Barnhardt to adjourn at 9:15 A.M. The next Prison Board meeting will be held on January 12, 2022.

Sandy Graffius

Sandy Graffius, Prison Board Secretary