

BERKS COUNTY PRISON BOARD MINUTES

MARCH 9, 2022

The Berks County Prison Board met in a regular session on Wednesday, March 9, 2022, 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
Secretary Sandra Graffius
Judge Scott Lash
Sheriff Eric J. Weaknecht

The following County staff also attended:

Executive Assistant Jessica Blausen
First Assistant County Solicitor Cody Kauffman
Deputy Warden-Custody Jeffrey Schearer
Warden Jeffrey Smith
Chief Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith
Todd Haskins- Primecare

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made to approve the February 9, 2022, meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

JAIL SENIOR STAFF REPORTS

INMATE POPULATION: Warden Jeffrey Smith stated the inmate population was 702. One juvenile in Lehigh County. Twenty- three inmates sentenced to SCI. Thirteen are scheduled to leave by March 15, 2022. Six inmates are waiting for a transport. Four are not ready due to other circumstances.

CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE JAIL: On February 28, 2022, the Governor announced that all employees under his jurisdiction are not required to wear masks. The DOC falls under this jurisdiction. However, Berks County Jail has decided to continue to follow the mask mandate. The situation will be monitored and looked at again in a few weeks.

On Monday March 14, 2022, in person visits will resume. Inmates will be offered (1) 30-minute visit per month and (2) 15-minute video sessions a week.

PROGRAMS: Chief Deputy Warden Stephanie Smith updated the Board that the jail started the Narcan program with partnership with Primecare and COCA. Approximately 8 to 6 kits a week are given out to interested inmates at release along with education from Primecare.

Last week Chief Deputy Smith had a meeting with Berks Connections Pretrial Services regarding the reentry program. There is an opportunity to expand and enhance services they provide within this same budget. The board will be updated with details and a projected start date.

Commissioner Leinbach and Deputy Smith met with Schuylkill Valley School District, board members and Superintendent on Monday. Schuylkill Valley is the school district the jail falls within and under the state regulations they're required to financial support the high school diploma program for eligible inmates in the jail. The meeting was to talk about their concerns and what the plan is moving forward with the IU for the coming school year. The school district was questioning these polices. The district plans on lobbying with the state and review what the system is and who's responsible for payment. Commissioner Leinbach suggested the Superintendent draft the letter explaining the situation and the changes that they would like to see that would be shared at a larger venue. The district is required to provide the services, but they like to see a change where the IU becomes the entity that's required to provide those programs. The county is not fiscally responsible but will provide support as they can in the changes that they're looking for. This has become a problem because if they have 19 or more students, the program pays for itself because of the formula. When that number drops below 19 the school district starts coming up short financially. The contract and the policy are not in the counties hands the contract between the school district and the IU and the policies at the Commonwealth level.

STAFFING: Deputy Warden-Custody Jeffrey Schearer updated the Board on the status of the staffing; there are 32 Correctional Officer vacancies. There are 3 cadets in the academy that are scheduled to graduate on April 11, 2022. There are 10 candidates that are scheduled for interviews this week. That is a result of the new hire testing from last week. The next CO testing is on April 6, 2022.

SOLICITOR'S REPORT

First Assistant County Solicitor Cody Kauffman has no items to report and no items for executive session.

PRESENTATION: Todd Haskins from Primecare Medical. Primecare provides medical care to inmates at the Berks County Jail. Primecare is currently responsible for 26,000 lives throughout 70 sites and five states focusing on jails and juvenile facilities. Mr. Haskins spoke about the extensive intake and screening process which covers medical, addiction and mental health issues that the incoming inmates undergo.

STEERING COMMITTEE: Commissioner Barnhardt updated the board on the Steering Committee. The kickoff meeting was held with CGL on February 23, 2022. Stakeholder interviews should be completed by next week. By the end of March there should be data and information will be brought to the Steering Committee to help with the size and scope of the project. The public outreach will take about 6-9 months to complete. The public is invited to the meetings that are held in the board room every Thursday. A website should be going live by the middle of May.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Commissioner Barnhardt to adjourn at 9:31 A.M. The next Prison Board meeting will be held on April 13, 2022.

Sandy Graffius

Sandy Graffius, Prison Board Secretary