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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

PRESENTATIONS BY

Discussion including presentations by:

Lieutenant Ernie Booker, Community Transition Unit (CTU), Sheriff's Department

Ms. Paula Cohen, Esq., Staff Attorney, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles

Dr. Marvin Southard, Director, Department of Mental Health

Topic: The Impact of Domestic Violence on the Homelessness of Children and Families

June 1, 2006

Chair Hill introduced the panel topic of "The Impact of Domestic Violence on the Homelessness of Children and Families" for the presentation this month. Chair Hill then introduced Lt. Ernie Booker, and welcomed him to the Commission.

**Lieutenant Ernie Booker
Community Transition Unit (CTU), Sheriff's Department**

Mission of the Community Transition Unit

As the head of the Community Transition Unit (CTU) Lt. Booker explained that the program is designed to reduce both inmate recidivism and substance abuse relapse. The job of the CTU custody agents is to triage inmates and conduct substance abuse and mental health interventions, as needed. While incarcerated, inmates participating in the CTU program can attend job training classes to prepare for entering the workplace. In addition to developing their interviewing skills, they also receive life skills training. Prior to the release of an inmate, CTU custody agents contact various community organizations to arrange aftercare referrals.

Serving Homeless Inmates

Lt. Booker reported that the Board of Supervisors has allotted over \$100 million in its annual budget for programs that serve the homeless. At the same time, Sheriff Baca has been taking steps to expand the service element of the Corrections System by offering additional resources to its large population of homeless inmates. Many of these inmates are incarcerated for "quality of life" crimes such as vagrancy or public intoxication, crimes that are far less likely to occur if they had housing. A significant number of homeless inmates have a mental health or substance abuse problem, or both. Homeless inmates tend to lack the support of friends or family, and often cycle between prison and the streets without receiving treatment. Lt. Booker stated that CTU leads the initiative to provide more inmate services by developing programs that recast corrections as a care provider of last resort.

Program Information

CTU operates on a \$2 million annual budget, which the Inmate Welfare Commission appropriates from the Inmate Welfare Fund. Lt. Booker noted that he reports directly to Sheriff Baca, who established the CTU in 2001. The program staff includes both civilian and sworn custody agents. Lt. Booker finds that although most inmates participating in CTU improve gradually and many return to prison, CTU has cut recidivism by both connecting inmates with supportive services and by teaching them important life skills.

Questions and Comments

Commissioner Tortorice asked how CTU conducts performance measures of inmates processed through the program. Lt. Booker replied that progress of inmates is documented on an electronic database, which is presently being overhauled to include a comprehensive demographic profile on each inmate's record.

Chair Hill thanked Lt. Booker for his informative presentation. She then introduced Ms. Paula Cohen, Esq. and welcomed her to the Commission.

Ms. Paula Cohen, Esq.
Staff Attorney
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles

Domestic Violence Clinic

As the head of the Domestic Violence Clinic located at the Long Beach Superior Courthouse, Ms. Cohen explained that a large part of her job is to assist low-income victims of domestic violence with securing restraining orders against their batterers. Nationally, the Legal Aid Foundation handles about 1,800 domestic violence cases each year, and assists over 1,200 clients in filing requests for restraining orders with the court. A person can seek a restraining order against anyone with whom they have had an intimate relationship and who subsequently threatens them. A victim can also seek a restraining order against any family members that are within two degrees of relation to the aggressor. In order to restrain family members separated by more than two degrees of relation from the aggressor, the complainant must seek a civil harassment order.

Restraining Orders

Ms. Cohen explained that a temporary restraining order lasts only three weeks. During that time, the complainant must return to court to request a "permanent" restraining order, which may last up to five years. Only 55% of domestic violence victims who secure an initial order through Legal Aid go on to request a permanent order, of which about 89% actually secure one. The disproportionately high percent of permanent orders secured suggests that most cases, whether or not the victim applied, are serious enough to warrant a permanent order. Ms. Cohen pointed out that many victims choose not to file for permanent orders because they fear retaliation, hope their batterers will change, or simply miss the required hearing. The Long Beach City Prosecutor employs a victims advocate who reminds them of their hearing date and, if necessary, arranges childcare and transportation for their court date.

Victims and Batterers

Ms. Cohen said that many victims cannot pay their rent or support their children without the financial resources of an abusive partner. A significant number of domestic violence victims are first-generation immigrants, as are many homeless women. Most batterers are men who feel that they are not only entitled to do as they please, but also are able to dictate every aspect of how their partner lives. It is not unusual for some victims to file multiple restraining orders against the same batterer or against various batterers in the same family/social circle. Occasionally, Ms. Cohen sees various clients abused by the same batterer, or both mother and daughter battered by their partners.

Questions and Comments

Chair Hill opened the floor up to questions. Commissioner Petak observed that ingrained culture is very difficult to change, and suggested that schools might teach students more about personal independence and how and when to leave an abusive relationship. Ms. Cohen agreed, and said Legal Aid prepared a domestic violence prevention program, but that schools were unwilling to broach the topic with students.

Chair Hill thanked Ms. Cohen for her informative presentation. She then introduced Dr. Marvin Southard and welcomed him to the Commission.

Dr. Marvin J. Southard, D.S.W.
Director
Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

Domestic Violence and Mental Illness

Dr. Southard has run an outreach program for homeless shelters to help victims with the post traumatic stress disorder that often follows domestic violence. Some shelter managers objected to these outreach efforts out of concern that the victims in their shelter would be associated with the social stigmas surrounding mental illness. They contended that the batterers were more appropriate candidates for psychiatric treatment. Nevertheless, a study of CalWORKs participants showed that women failing to enter the workforce tend to experience domestic violence, mental illness, or substance abuse, and may need treatment for one or some combination of these conditions. Dr. Southard explained that many female substance abusers turn to drugs to cope with domestic violence or mental illness. Although the Department of Mental Health (DMH) does not receive funding for domestic violence programs, Dr. Southard has found that domestic violence, if left untreated, tends to cause or exacerbate problems in other areas of treatment.

How Witnessing Violence Affects Children

DMH has conducted studies on children from five middle schools to explore how witnessing violence has affected them. The study included various forms of violence, such as shootings, fights, child abuse, and domestic violence. Social workers screened children and administered a ten-week Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma (CBIT) to those most likely to be exposed to serious violence. Treated children were compared with a control group waitlisted for the CBIT. The treated children had higher grades, cooperated more with parents, and had a lower incidence of substance abuse and depression. In addition, Dr. Southard noted that postponing substance abuse in teens greatly improves life outcomes, because the earlier substance abuse occurs, the more it affects brain development. The Health Services Act funds early intervention initiatives, and Dr. Southard hopes to make the CBIT program available to schools and children in the probation and foster care systems of Los Angeles County.

Century Regional Detention Facility

Dr. Southard closed by discussing the Century Regional Detention Facility (CRDF), a new women's facility in Lynwood. He said mental illness is more common among female inmates than their male counterparts. Several CRDF inmates are both domestic violence victims and mothers of young children. DMH has restructured inmate classes and aftercare programs at CRDF to emphasize domestic violence. In addition, they will use CT scans and computerized neurological tests to check inmates for specific cognitive impairments.

Questions and Comments

Commissioner Petak mentioned that several years ago he helped coordinate a study of inmates that used EEG to graph brainwaves. Commissioner Park added that he has nothing against such testing, but imagines introducing CT scans and computerized neurological tests of inmates could be difficult, because people may feel it compromises inmate rights, or could set easily abused precedents. Dr. Southard replied that tests will be used exclusively to improve treatment, and will not be used in any sentencing decisions.

Chair Hill thanked Dr. Southard for his informative presentation.

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