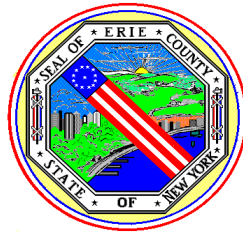


Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board Old County Hall

92 Franklin St., 4th Floor
Buffalo, NY 14202
Switchboard: 716/858-7500



Cindi McEachon, Chair
Keisha Williams, Vice Chair
Members:
Felicia Beard **Dixie Farr**
Michael Deal **Corey McCarthy**
Orlando Dickson **Michael Ranney**
George Baba Eng **Jerome Wright**

MEMORANDUM

Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board

2022 Annual Summary

The Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board (ECSAB) is now ending the second year of existence. The Board was established effective January 1, 2020 by the Erie County Executive and Legislature under local law 3 of 2019.

The purpose of the ECSAB is to provide advice to, and oversight over the Erie County Sheriff Office's Jail Management Division which administers the Erie County Holding Center and the Erie County Correctional Facility. The Advisory Board continues to undertake functions and activities intended to:

- Improve the conditions, systems, policies and practices at the Erie County Holding Center and the Correctional Facility.
- Identify, and recommend programs that utilize restorative justice practices and other programs that help reduce recidivism in Erie County.
- Encourage public comment on the issues related to the Erie County Holding Center and Erie County Correctional Facility.
- Make formal recommendations to the Erie County Legislature, Erie County Executive and the Erie County Sheriff's Office on the programs, funding and services for the Correctional Facilities in Erie County.
- Receive complaints regarding the Erie County Holding Center and the Erie County Correctional Facility from the public, including those complaints sent directly to the Erie County Sheriff's Office; and report significant complaints as determined to the Public Safety Committee of the Legislature.

The first meeting of the Board for 2022 was on January 25, 2022; monthly meetings were held thereafter. Due to concerns related to COVID-19, Board meetings were continued in virtual format, and are held via ZOOM. Notification of meetings is sent to the list serve of the Erie County Legislature as well as local media and newspapers. All issues and matters are discussed with a necessary focus on social injustice and the racial inequities that cause the over representation of Black, Brown and poor White populations in both facilities. There is also the need to increase programming and treatment of individuals with behavioral health challenges who are incarcerated.

- The Subcommittee/workgroup established in early 2020 continued to meet regularly via ZOOM for the purpose of focused assignments and topics to be undertaken and presented to the Board for further input and vote as needed. Subcommittee met the first and third Wednesday of each month beginning in 2022. After early June 2022, subcommittee meetings were held on an as needed basis, contingent on tasks. The Board developed a positive working relationship with the prior administration of the Erie County Sheriff's Office, Jail Management Division and has re-established this relationship with the new administration. All Board members were invited to attend the Swearing in Ceremony for Sheriff Garcia in January 2022. The Board Chair and Secretary attended.

Accomplishments and activities are as follows:

- A. This board continues to support and advocate for program and staff development. While the Board was supportive of the Pre-Release Center proposal put forth in 2021, this morphed into the Erie County Small Business Workforce Support via “Former Detainee to Employee” Action Plan in 2022. The Board was tasked by the Legislature to draft an action plan and accepted the request. The Board also provided a letter of support to the Legislature along with a request for a resolution to be passed to memorialize April as Second Chance Month as well as to formally announce the Action Plan. The Legislature followed through, and the Board was present at the press event which included representation from re-entry organizations and local small businesses willing to employ former incarcerated persons.
 1. The Subcommittee developed and submitted an Action Plan to the Erie County Legislature. The plan encouraged a phased approach that supported establishment of a work group, data collection and accountability reporting and the use of best practice program models. The work group will be led by Chief Diina and include some select members from the Board who work in employment and reentry programming. This was submitted to the Legislature in July 2022 and formally presented September 15, 2022. The Plan was accepted, and the Erie County Sheriff’s Office has responsibility for implementation, maintenance and monitoring. The Legislature expressed their appreciation for the work done by the Board during session and to the media which was present both April and September.
- B. Additionally, the Board continues to support the use of body cameras as well as the purchase of additional cameras in the facilities to reduce/eliminate blind spots. The equipment has been purchased and the additional cameras to reduce blind spots are pending installation in 2023. While the Sheriff’s Office agrees to the use of body cameras, the Teamsters Union does not. They reportedly believe the cameras may be used to punish their union members. Unfortunately, the Teamsters Union and the Sheriff’s Office have not been able to reach an agreement. What this means is that security staff (CSEA Union members) at the Correctional Facility are wearing the cameras, but deputies at the Holding Center are not, except for sergeants. An additional letter (July 26, 2022) was sent to the Legislature requesting an update and urging the Legislature to engage the Teamsters and Sheriff’s Office in discussion with the Public Safety Committee. The Board also supported the use of body cameras by the Erie County Probation Department by way of a support letter (July 26, 2022) to the Legislature. The status of body cameras is a priority agenda item updated by the Sheriff’s Office at monthly Board meetings.
- C. In lieu of the Board Meeting, May 24, 2022, our chairperson challenged members of the Board to volunteer to help support the community affected by the May 14th Top’s Supermarket massacre. Volunteers from the Board and Sheriff’s Office provided outreach to a Jefferson St. apartment complex informing and encouraging residents about services and food distribution available at the Johnnie B. Wiley Community Center. Participation included 5 Board members and 1 Sheriff’s Office administrator.
- D. The Medication Assisted Treatment Program that has been in the making for a very long time began July 25, 2022. The Board has been actively involved and has supported the program since the re-establishment of the Board January 2020. Obstacles that were overcome in the past included resistance by former Sheriff’s Office medical staff and funding. The program is now operational and growing. Regular updates continue and the Board will be given a tour and opportunity to meet with program staff and program participants in early 2023.
- E. The Board was provided the opportunity to attend a demonstration of virtual reality training related to:
 1. Conflict de-escalation in correction and police settings
 2. Domestic violence

3. Use of force
4. Community engagement
5. Mental health
6. Substance use disorders.

Axon provided the demonstration August 16, 2022. The presentation was said to have a positive success rate for retention of content and an efficiency factor since staff can be trained without pulling a large volume of staff from their work posts. Concerns related to cost and ability to meet required state mandates require further investigation. The 5 Board members who were present had a positive impression.

- F. In early 2022 the two year terms of Board officers expired and elections took place. Cindi McEachon was elected as Chair, Keisha Williams, Vice Chair and Michael Ranney, Secretary. The Board welcomed Dixie Farr who filled the vacancy when Heron Simmonds departed late 2021. 2023 will mark three years for the Board and the expiration/renewal of terms for all Board members.
- G. The Board continues to receive complaints and inquiries relative to the Erie County Holding Center and Erie County Correctional Facility. Complaints are discussed during regular meetings with the Board Chair the ECSO Superintendent of the Jail Management Division, Superintendent Phillips and the Chair of the Public Safety Committee, Legislator Howard Johnson. These matters are communicated to the Board either by way of email update or shared during the monthly meeting. Additionally, the Board may learn of incidents through media reports or from relatives, and currently/formerly incarcerated persons directly who feel they have been violated by security staff when incarcerated. Due to the Board's relationship with Chief Diina, those complaints that the Board was aware of have been resolved.

Priorities for 2023:

- A. Maintain a collaborative working relationship with the Erie County Sheriff's Office and their administration.
- B. Monitor the progress of the Detainee to Employee workforce initiative, including membership on the work group/committee.
- C. Continued follow up related to full implementation of body worn cameras at both the Correctional Facility and Holding Center.
- D. Increase public awareness and participation in the Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board.
 - a. Enlist support of the Erie County Legislature
 - i. Update website to include:
 1. Bylaws
 2. Current meeting agendas and minutes
 3. Meeting calendar
 4. Clear instructions for public participation
 - ii. Posting of meetings in community newspapers and libraries to improve community involvement.
 - iii. Notification to media to improve knowledge of Board and activities to the public.
- E. Election of Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary positions as two years terms expire end of 2023.

