

Substitute Senate Bill 6400 Oversight Committee

Sub-Committee Report on Existing Out-of-State Programs for September 18, 2008 Meeting*

Per required tasks of Substitute Senate Bill 6400 (SSB 6400), the sub-committee sought information on 'voluntary, nondenominational moral and character building residential services' that are currently being operated by corrections systems across the United States.

As we quickly realized that it would be almost impossible to survey the overwhelming number of existing character-based programs within a limited time-frame and without extensive resources, we decided to approach our investigation from a faith-based direction. We then focused on multi-faith (i.e. nondenominational) programs that included strong character-based elements. However, we did not exclude situations where it appeared that separately comparable character-based programs were also available.

We found that residential faith-based programs are currently being operated within the Federal Bureau of Prisons, some 17 state corrections systems and two major private prison corporations. These included programs being directly operated by corrections systems (usually with a high degree of volunteer involvement) and others being operated under contract by outside providers. It should also be noted that in some jurisdictions, multiple programs are being operated by various contracted ministries and/or volunteer groups.

The overwhelming majority of these programs are based on a single-faith curriculum and are often limited to one very narrow denominational perspective, so it was relatively easy to eliminate those programs that do not meet the nondenominational requirement of SSB 6400 (and court rulings prohibiting the use of public funds for sectarian purposes). On the other hand, we did not exclude the possibility that some such programs might be able to be restructured into a multi-faith context, and we even went to the extent of asking operators of some notable programs if they were interested in pursuing this. Furthermore, though some of these ostensibly 'voluntary' programs offer legally problematic incentives for participation (e.g. reduction in prison time for participation, better housing conditions and/or more privileges], we did not exclude any on that basis as Washington can set its own rules.

Evidence of effectiveness of such programs was not considered because they have simply not been operating long enough to accumulate enough information on outcomes to produce credible long-term results. That said, several programs are collecting hard data on recidivism rates for program participants/graduates, and anecdotal information does indicate that there is much promise of such programs achieving desired results. Most notably, it has already been established that these types of programs do have a positive effect in reducing in-prison infractions amongst participants and the general inmate population where they are located.

In the end, it was clear that two longer-operating programs (see 'First Tier Programs' following) and two newer programs (see 'Second Tier Programs' following) stood out from the others in meeting all of the following primary criteria elements that our committee has outlined:

1. Voluntary
2. Faith-Based *and* Character-Based
3. Nondenominational
4. Residential
5. Reentry Oriented
6. All Possible Security Levels

If and when needed, the sub-committee can prepare detailed analyses on these programs.

First Tier Programs

Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) 'Life Connections' (and abbreviated 'Threshold' Alternative)
Contacts: Joe Pryor, BOP Director of Chaplaincy @ (202) 353-8636 & Mike Judnick, Vice President of Criminal Justice of The Changes Companies @ (888) 889-8866.

NOTE: Chaplain Pryor has offered BOP assistance and Mr. Judnick is willing to come (at his expense) to a future committee meeting to brief us on these programs.

Horizon Communities in Prisons

Contact: Ike Griffin, Executive Director @ (407) 657-1828

NOTE: Mr. Griffin is willing to come (at his own expense) to a future committee meeting to brief us on this program.

Second Tier Programs

Georgia Department of Corrections 'Faith and Character-Based Initiatives'

Contact: A.J. Sabree, Reentry Director @ (404) 463-6506

Indiana Department of Corrections 'Purposeful Living Units Serve (PLUS)'

Contact: Stephen Hall, Director, Religious Services and Community Involvement @ (317) 233-5236

With the exception of the alternative 'Threshold', all programs are conducted in a residential setting. However, it is possible that they could be employed in a non-residential (i.e. extra-curricular) manner and we recommend that this possibility be considered.

Although the sub-committee is confident that its survey of existing out-of-state programs has been thoroughly conducted and that we have properly highlighted the best of these programs, a much more in-depth investigation would need to be done before recommending that any of these programs be selected for the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC). The committee therefore suggests that our preliminary report to the Legislature in January include a request that funds be allocated to allow for a more extensive review of the operational aspects of those programs being considered.

The sub-committee is also highly impressed with the Oregon Department of Corrections 'Home for Good in Oregon' program, a comprehensive faith-based reentry paradigm that does not employ separate residential programs. Rather, as is described in an email excerpt from Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) Administrator of Religious Services Thomas P. O'Connor, Oregon has chosen to "develop a second level of deeper programs or services across the board...". As Tom O'Connor is certainly the most prolific international researcher on faith-based programs and is considered in corrections circles to be the foremost authority in the prison religious programming realm, it has already been recommended that the committee meet with him to discuss this program, and particularly as to why his department has chosen to go in the direction that they have. From the onset, however, it must be stressed that the Washington DOC would presently be unable to administer such a chaplain dependent program due to our limited number of chaplains. In fact, the Oregon DOC only has the luxury of operating such a demanding program because they have a more than double the ratio of chaplains and religious program staff to inmates than does the Washington DOC.

Gary Friedman, Sub-Committee Chair

*With minor revisions made for submission as attachment to the Substitute Senate Bill 6400
Oversight Committee Interim Report to the Washington State Legislature on Moral Guidance of Incarcerated Persons, January 1, 2009