

From Cell Block to City Block - Strategies for a Successful Re-Entry
November 18, 2008, St. Paul's Cathedral, Boston, MA
transcripts

Part 1

JOANNA MARINOVA: So welcome everyone and thank you for being here with us tonight. I want to thank all the people who have taken their time to come here and provide such valuable information to their representatives and to the DOC. We're here tonight to share truths about successful reentry from the experts, the prisoners, ex-prisoners, and the organizations and people that serve them. We have all seen our share of proposals and I can say that if they're deeply rooted in the community and the people the proposal concerns, it has a much greater chance of success. This is why tonight we have invited those we consider the experts. A proposal utilizing solutions that comes straight from the source would truly be a proposal for the change needed to promote public safety. I just want to bring to your attention that since January and I'm sure this number needs to be updated, but 243 people have been shot in Boston, that's 243 individuals.

Reentry is not an issue of morality of whether the prisoners deserve it or not. It is an issue of public safety, rooted in prevention and cost reduction. Our current policies do not make us safe. They actually contribute to unsafe communities, as you will hear this evening. It is our intention to begin the process of changing these policies so that we can in fact promote true public safety. Tonight is just the beginning. Our hope is to continue a unified push towards solutions that experts know would promote public safety. That's why at the entrance we have a "What's Next" sheet that takes you through who your representatives are, how you can get in contact with them, and how to make your voices heard.

The format of the evening will be as follows. The first hour or so will be spent hearing testimonies from prisoners, ex-prisoners, and organizations serving them. We will hear six consecutive three-minute testimonies at a time in between which we will take questions from the panel.

Once we are done, Commissioner Clarke will speak about his proposal and time permitting, we can take questions from the audience. I will be sitting right in front and I will have the following signs: Green means you have one minute; yellow means you have 30 seconds, and red means stop. So I'm going to ask you to be respectful of everybody's time because we do hope to take some questions from the general audience and thank you for being here. [Audience claps]

KAREN SPENCE: Just to let everyone know if you need to use the rest room, it's right over there, that door right there. Just push the door and it's two flights down. We're

going to begin with testimony from Jorge Zerquera and Nancy Ahmadifar is going to speak for him. He's currently at Norfolk.

NANCY AHMADIFAR: Nancy Ahmadifar, a member of the End the Odds Coalition and I'm going to be reading from Jorge Zerquera, a prisoner at Norfolk and also a very short piece from John Feroli at Old Colony. These are only two of the letters that came in this past week or so. I have about 25 others here, which we can't hear all of them tonight but there is plenty of testimony.

This is from Jorge. When I first arrived at this facility and learned of this inmate government, I have the typical reaction cynically I asked, "Are you kidding? Do these people know where they are?" Then it dawned on me, that's the point. This place is set up to get you out of the "I am prison mode thinking" because in prison, the guards begrudge everything which they have to give you. If you want anything beyond that, you need to employ guile and deception. Prison socializes one to be sneaky, to resent authority and view it as the repressive enemy. Prison makes convicts.

That is not the case here at the prison colony at MCI-Norfolk, less now than in the heyday, the combination of conservative Republican administrations and Howie Carr using the press to press the administration to strip away programs because Carr painted it as coddling inmates. This facility socializes the men here to cooperate with one another. Here, by virtue of this prison government, we learned civic responsibility. These skills are just as practiced as the ones learned in the now closed welding school. If I were forced to pen a mission statement for Norfolk inmate counsel, it would read, "To make citizens out of prisoners by entrusting them with civic responsibilities, reducing the workload of prison staff and the cost to the state." Think of the long-term effects. By reducing recidivism, we halt prison growth, which tends to drain on the state budget. Simultaneously, a man who may have caused the state a fresh set of victims and investigation, arrest, prosecution, etc. is now paying taxes into the coffers instead.

Some cynics in here think the staff wants us to fail but that is so counterintuitive. Two things I think are needed. First, let the staff soften their look. Shed those SWAT team uniforms and go for Dockers and the three-button pullover in pastels, sea foam green and maize. Secondly, more peer to peer training. As an offender, I can better identify with what brought the other offender here. Also, there is no "we-them" barrier to overcome. The staff does not desire us to fail. They just lack the motivation and skill sets to help us to succeed.

If all goes as expected, Mr. Clarke will be here this afternoon at Norfolk at the 18th before he sees you guys. I pray that he endorses our program here. Dialogue is so important and we can do so much to save the state money as we prepare men to return to productive life. If only we could be entrusted with the responsibilities needed to proceed.

The second is a short piece from John Feroli. There are so many critical issues that need to be addressed. How can I pick one or two? However, if I did pick just one issue, it would be this: The most powerful teaching tool compared with which words hardly matter is example. As Justice Brandeis wrote, “The state, whether we like it or not, is “in loco parentis” and serves us as the best moral teacher we have,” Yet, what do our moral teachers teach us in prison? What did their action say? Life goes to the lowest bidder in terms of health and as for the for-profit vendors supplying food, clothes, and appliances, not to mention phone service, sell them garbage and charge exorbitant prices. In other words, when you got someone down or in a position of vulnerability, crush ‘em, take them for all you can. No mercy, no compassion, just make money.

So what have I learned in prison and what will I take home with me? Hatred and anger for those in a position of authority and a belief that it’s OK to abuse anyone weaker than me. Of course, I would never anyone weaker or anyone for that matter. But these people do and that’s why I pray to be relieved of my hatred and anger.

KAREN SPENCE: Next we have Jason Lydon who’s going to speak on personal experience.

JASON LYDON: Good evening. My name is Jason Lydon. I serve as the pastor at the Community Church of Boston. As a Unitarian Universalist I don’t generally quote the bible but since we’re in an Episcopal Church I thought that fitting for this evening. Psalms 146 says to us, “Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in God. Good, excuse me, God who executes justice for the oppressed who gives food to the hungry. God sets the prisoners free.” I’m speaking as someone who serves gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in prison and coming out as well as a formally incarcerated person myself who is actually assaulted by a prison guard. You are likely aware that approximately 25% of individuals in women’s facilities report being sexually assaulted and 20% of those in men’s. Most recent study by the Bureau of Justice statistics reports that 60% of these assaults happen by prison guards.

Survivors of sexual assault respond in a multitude of ways. Any sexual assault advocate can tell you about the different ways rape trauma syndrome manifests. However, because prison and jail is already a traumatic atmosphere, the manifestations of rape trauma syndrome, are more directly tied to complex post traumatic stress disorder.

At this time, there are practically zero resources for survivors of sexual assault coming out of prison and back into their communities. Money and resources need to be made available from programs and agencies outside of the Department of Corrections. The DOC must follow the direction of rape crisis centers and it’s the job of rape crisis centers to be ready for the particular needs of survivors. What you can do as folks in the Department of Corrections and our government is place community members and survivors on the Prison Rape Elimination Act committee, who then can compile, those people can compile and create resources for prisoners who need them as they get out.

If you're unaware, violent sexual assault leads to higher rates of HIV and other STD transmissions and survivors need all resources possible before entering back into their communities.

The Department of Corrections cannot solve this issue on their own. They need to be in partnership with survivors, those of us most affected by the impact through sexual violence in prison and that we are the experts in this. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: Next I want to bring up Fred Smith from St. Francis House.

FRED SMITH: Reminds me of my seminary days. This is creepy. Thank you for coming Mr. Commissioner and listening to all of this testimony. My name is Fred Smith. I'm the director of program development research and evaluation at St. Francis House, a multi-service day shelter located in downtown Boston about a block and a half from here. For 10 years prior to my current position, I had the privilege of developing and directing the Moving Ahead Program, a 14-week residential treatment, life skills, and career development program for individuals with issues of homelessness, addiction, mental health and/or post incarceration. In the course of my work, I have the opportunity of visiting inmates in virtually every prison and jail in the commonwealth including and especially the Massachusetts Treatment Center in Bridgewater. I think the only jail I have not been to is that little one in Nantucket Island. Someday.

As one of the only programs that not only corresponds with inmates, but makes a concerted effort to visit and interview perspective participants for our rehabilitation programs, my staff and I get to hear up close and personal the hopes and dreams of the men and women waiting for a chance. We have learned a great deal in the last two decades about the co-morbidities that lead to felonious behavior. We have studied and developed effective interventions. We know how to nurture and support. The "Moving Ahead Program brochures succinctly and proudly declares its mission to install hope, instill dignity, and inspire change. Hope, dignity, and change: the holy trinity of rehabilitation.

But tonight, I'd like to direct my comments to the notion of hope.

In the past 13 years, we have witnessed the nearly totally erosion of hope for those seeking to put their past behind them and become productive members of their community. In the wake of headline legislation, we got CORI regulations, dashing hope for employment and housing opportunities. In the wake of headline legislation, we got the sex offender registry board, which brings new meaning to the word hopelessness. In the wake of headlines, we also got an increasingly skittish private employment sector that has lawyered up and further has dimmed the light of hope.

Mr. Commissioner, this evening, you will hear many suggestions about how to make reentry work in the commonwealth. I'm sure you and your staff have ideas as well.

Everything from reforming classification and parole eligibility to education and training programs, to housing options, all are important and then my role at St. Francis House and as well as my role as a board member of the Criminal Justice Policy Council, I support many of them. However, I'm here this evening to specifically and enthusiastically support legislation to create a Massachusetts Certificate of Rehabilitation.

I encourage you and the governor to participate in developing and ultimately supporting a strong and innovative certificate program that affords those serving time in your institutions a genuine opportunity to work hard while they are in your caring custody and to work even harder upon release, with the promise that their personal rehabilitation will be recognized and rewarded with access to educational opportunities, jobs, and housing. We need to shift from a post release supervision culture of "Gotcha!" to "Way to go". From punitive to promise, I will suggest you that without the light of hope at the end of the tunnel, there is only darkness, frustration, and despair. Thank you for your willingness to listen and hopefully, your willingness to let us help you empty your cells, keep them empty and keep hope alive. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: OK, I'd like to bring up Gail.

GAIL: In America, 52% of the state inmates and 63% of the federal inmates have parents in prison. That's a little over two million children under the age of 18 that have parents in prison, whose lives are filled with instability and uncertainty. These children are themselves victims of the parent's crimes, members of a neglected segment of our population who are damaged by the stigma and the shame and who are at risk of being pulled into the vicious cycle of future criminality and deviant social behavior. Such children are child prisoners, kids who must learn to understand living and loving through bars.

The biggest challenge in keeping in touch with the family during the incarceration, for me it was very hard. My 14-year-old son before I went to prison, he was doing very well in school. He was on the dean's list three times. After I went to prison, I didn't know that after I was locked up, he would soon turn to drugs in order to cope with his pain of my being gone. His choice of drug was heroin and he was just 14 years old at the time. I never knew about his drug addiction while I was inside. I often wondered why the visits stopped, the letters stopped. And when I couldn't get through on the phone, I worried a lot about him.

He's now 28 years old. He's finally in a treatment center but he's been an addict for 14 years of his life. I know when I was in jail; I wished they had had some kind of education like child behavioral health or something like that to help parents cope with not being around for their children, like how to help kids deal with their emotions, maybe a month-by-month guide to emotional development—negative versus positive behavior,

good consequences versus bad consequences, physical growth, social growth, discipline, and other health issues, diabetes, asthma. It's hard being a parent inside. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: Next, I want to bring up Leslie Walker of MCLS.

LESLIE WALKER: Thank you for allowing me to speak and thank you to the department for coming. I know this is after hours. It's at night and you're going to hear from a lot of people and the courage it takes to listen to your critics is large and I really applaud you all for coming in and listening so intently, so thank you. There are many things the department cannot do to help reentry. They cannot change the mandatory minimum sentencing laws. They could not change the sentencing structures. They cannot change anything about the parole board. They cannot change anything about probation. They cannot change what judges do. So I'm not going to ask you to do things you cannot do but tonight, I am going to ask you to listen yet again for my pleas to help reduce over-classification. I applaud you for the work you have done already.

The new classification system is so much better than the old one. For some of you who had been out a long time, this is all foreign to you but I assure you that the new classification system is truly an improvement over what you had, which was nothing. You were thrown in and sent wherever they wanted you to go. I also applaud the fact that you changed on October 1st of this year, the fact that a prior crime would be truly a prior crime and not a concurrent felony which reduces the points.

But I urge you once again to please consider the bites of the apple the prisoners now have to endure for one disciplinary offense and the escapes charge and I have a very short time. I have written testimony if you would like it. I know it's things that you've seen before. Those things, they change the classification instrument and practices but also to institute a step-down system where people know they're going to a lower security before they're released to the street. I cannot tell you the number of times our phone rings when someone is begging us to help them get to a medium or a minimum before they are released to the streets. Prisoners have said to me the rules inside are the exact opposite of the rules outside. If somebody bumps you in line in prison, you better react. If somebody bumps in line at the CVS, you better *not* react. To be able to feel that sense of normalization before you reenter is critical to the safety of the prisoner, their family, and society at large.

Very briefly, the three strikes of the disciplinary infractions cover three different variables. You get points if you have had one fight. You get points if you have gotten into one beef with one person and the tickets are still handed out all too frequently and subjectively. A prisoner could easily get up to ten points for one incident with a very minor charge of a conduct which interferes with the orderly running of the institution and I could not think of any disciplinary ticket I have ever seen that didn't include conduct which disrupts. I wish it would be eliminated frankly. You can get three points for variable four, two points for variable five and five more for variable 6 just for that

one alone, for a total of 10 points. That makes sure you're not going to be able to go to a minimum. It gets you within two points of a maximum-security prison. While escapes sound like a good thing to know about and they are, a true escape is something the department needs to know about. A late return from a prerelease facility is not an escape that should get you five points for 10 years and keep you at a high security prison.

Therefore, I urge the department to try and adopt some of the positive incentives that the national expert on classification Jim Austin promotes. You have some, I ask you to introduce more. If someone gets in a fight and gets all those points, please allow them to work off those points and not sit where they are for a year. I think it's a total of three or four points you can probably lose if you were in a place where you can get programs. If you're not, you have to just wait which is over classification and expensive and thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: Thank you. We're going to break for a second for some questions if anybody has any questions. We were expecting the legislators to be here so that they could ask questions. We don't think they came. Are there any questions before we continue?

JAMES BENDER: Leslie, in terms of the escape charges, what did you talk about, that last [inaudible] you get five points for a late return to a halfway house?

LESLIE WALKER: You get 5 points if you're [Inaudible Answer]

JAMES BENDER: Right.

LESLIE WALKER: [Inaudible Answer]

JAMES BENDER: But when you said they came back late, I mean if they come back 20 minutes late, you're saying that they're charging them with the escape because I don't think that's happening.

LESLIE WALKER: [Inaudible Answer] I know it's happening now [Inaudible Answer]

JAMES BENDER: OK.

KAREN SPENCE: Thank you. Next I want to bring up Kevin Wayne Thomas of STRIVE.

KEVIN WAYNE THOMAS: Hello once again, I'm grateful and thankful for an opportunity to share some of the powerful feelings I have and STRIVE's strategy for trying to address the issue of recidivism and reentry. This week, I was at a meeting with about 34 Department of Corrections program heads, Chris, several other people who are focused

on the challenge. Excuse me for a minute. Let me get a good breath here. It's a powerful thought.

What I see is mostly important for what we need to be looking at from STRIVE's point of view is there needs to be some way for us to develop our ability to work with the Department of Corrections to begin to impact on recidivism and on reentry on a basis of being able to be involved in the prisoner and the inmate's process from the moment he is incarcerated. Most people are given a certain amount of time when they get to prison but the judge doesn't sentence them to ignorance. He gives them a certain amount of time to do. It's his responsibility or her responsibility to begin the rehabilitation process with what he has in his hands. If an inmate is given lemons, he has to make lemonade. It's not the process that we're fighting. Right now we're fighting against people's desire to make a change in their lives.

That is not the responsibility of the Department of Corrections. I'm not here to support whether they do right or wrong. What I'm telling you is from my own perspective of being someone who has been in that system. There is a way to get out of it but it has to start with a decision to change their lives. The least of their concerns is worrying about whether or not the policies fit or whether a person gets this or whether you got life or whether you got five or 10 years. You can make MCI, MIT. You can choose for yourself whether you want to wear handcuffs or cufflinks. You can either get a nine to five or you're going to get another 5 to nine. That's that reality of what the system's set up to do. You change your life and you change your situation.

The Department of Corrections has in play some programs presently online that would begin to develop that ability but in the meantime, what I do is I read. I read in depth and I have helped other people to develop their ability to do so by involving myself with Darin and several others within the Department of Corrections to begin to interact and support people in their process to make that transition. They're coming home, 97 percent of them are but what has to happen is while they're in, there has to be an understanding that you're there to develop your abilities so when you walk out their front door, you're running.

It's uncomfortable for us to deal with the fact that there are circumstances that are in the Department of Corrections that have been there for many years, but if a person makes a decision to change their lives, begins the process of incorporating all the support that they can through family and friends and resources that are available, we can make CORI stand for challenge, opportunity, repetition, and initiative. That's what's going to have to happen. Thanks.

KAREN SPENCE: Next, we are going to have a person speak for Joseph Wood.

CARA FOR JOSEPH WOOD: That's a huge visual difference, right? Commissioner Clarke and panel members, first thank you all for allowing me to be heard tonight. Second,

Commissioner Clarke, on June 5th, 2008, you visited Walpole State Prison for a tour to the facility. Upon entering housing block A3 where I am housed, I approached you and introduced myself. Mr. Clarke, during our brief conversation, I informed you that I was soon due for release but I live in Redmond, Washington where you were the head of the DOC in the Seattle area. I also informed you that the Walpole administration will not explain how I am supposed to get back to Seattle, how is my medical and mental healthcare going to be transferred out to Washington State because Mass Health Insurance cannot be used out of state.

Commissioner Clarke, you personally looked me in the eye and told me I would receive a bus ticket back to Seattle and all my medical and mental health care needs will also be transferred to Seattle as well. Well, Commissioner Clarke and panel members, I'm being released on December 22nd 2008 without medical and mental health coverage. I will be homeless because the Walpole administration refuses to follow the DOC release preparation regulations 103 CMR 493, which mandates that release planning, is to begin one year prior to release.

However, the Walpole administration tells me that their release planning does not begin until my last two months. Despite the laws found on the release preparation regulations clearly stating that all inmate release planning is supposed to begin within one year of release, the administrative staff at Walpole does not begin release planning until the last two months of my/our release date. Next, the DOC mental health release planning regulations 103 CMR 650.17 states that the Department of Mental Health was to visit Walpole prison six months before my release but your staff and or mental health contractual providers will not contact the Mental Health Department for an interview that was to be held in June 2008 so I may receive continued mental health care upon release on December 22nd 2008.

Please note after all the mental and physical abuse I have been subjected to, I now have to take psychotropic medication Ativan every time I leave Walpole for outside appointments. And that is in addition to my daily mental health medication that I take. Please also note on May 5th 2005, I was sent to Walpole for swearing at MCI Norfolk.

In other words, Mr. Clarke and members of the panel, I am being released back into society mentally unstable and more of a danger to the public than I was when I entered the DOC in 2004. This is particularly so since I will not be receiving continued mental health care upon release because the Walpole administration and/or your mental health contractual provider, Mental Health Management Incorporated, will not adhere to the DOC's mental health release planning regulation 103 CMR 650.17.

Moreover, I will be released without continued medical care for A hepatitis C treatment, of interferon and Ribavirin; B. rheumatoid arthritis; C, Reiter's syndrome and disease; D, glaucoma; E, Uveitis of the eyes and; F, delayed/denied MRI and surgery for my left shoulder after four years.

In closing I have attached my mental and mental records, denied DOC and medical mental health grievances regarding the Walpole administrative refusal to prepare inmates such as myself release planning for your review. I also authorize the End the Odds Coalition to use my medical and mental health records for any use whatsoever because it is the Massachusetts taxpayers who are being charged twice for my mental and medical health care; once during my incarceration and once upon my release because of the DOC's medical contractor has delayed denial of healthcare for the past five years. While incarcerated, it was never taken care of. Also enclosed, please find the pertinent parts of the DOC release planning and mental health release planning regulations.

In addition, I have enclosed a copy from my reentry case worker, Jessica Gregoire, a letter informing me that there was no success in finding me release housing and she, Walpole, is aware of your risk of being homeless. In other words, good luck Mr. Wood on your December 22nd 2008 homeless release because the DOC began your release too late.

Therefore, yes Commissioner Clarke and panel members, I know for a fact the issues of reentry in our prisons because I am leaving it on December 22nd 2008 and I would be honored to assist you on overhauling the reentry failures of the DOC so that the situation I am in will be the last inmate this happens to in the future. Mr. Clarke, I saw the successes you had in Washington and I know you will be able to do the same in Massachusetts if given the full reign of authority. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation in this matter and I look forward to working with any members of the panel if interested. Sincerely, Joseph A Wood.

KAREN SPENCE: Next I have Lyndia Downie from Pine Street Inn.

LYNDIA DOWNIE: Good evening. I want to thank the Commissioner and the people who are here from the Department of Corrections. I think I have a tough job. You have a job that's probably 10 times tougher. I'm going to keep my remarks short. We have submitted written testimony and I want to echo what our colleague, Fred from St. Francis House said. But I want to talk about some of the numbers and some of the things we're seeing at Pine Street Inn. I went back and looked at the number of people we have seen who are self-reporting coming out of jail or prison directly into shelter. There has been a 46% increase from 2006 to 2008 in the number of ex-offenders coming directly to us. Last year when I looked at our new intakes, 22% of our new intakes self-identified as having come from jail or prison directly into our shelter. I have watched over my 25 years at the inn many doors close for people who are trying to get back into the community, trying to find jobs and housing and I have watched as this system has become more and more punitive, but have yet to see any data that supports a reduction in recidivism tied to that more punitive system.

Once people come to us, we have STRIVE, we do a lot of the same kind of work that Fred does but we find that CORI remains a barrier. Despite the governor's recent changes to CORI, the reality on the ground is that the CORI laws remain enormous barriers to housing and it remains a very large barrier to jobs, and I have looked, I have done a number of searches on line. I have talked to people I know. I can find no correlation between CORI and reduction in recidivism. If it's out there, I'd love to see it but I don't think there is any correlation. We are spending lots of time, lots of money. It's a huge issue and a lot of work for employers but there doesn't seem to be any data to support the fact that it somehow reduced recidivism or increased public safety.

The last thing I would say is that we have a policy in Massachusetts whether intentional or not, where many sex offenders are ending up on the street. I can't find any data at all to support the fact that when sex offenders end up on the street that that's a positive outcome for them or on the public safety side. We have really put our heads on the sand on this issue. We need to find a rational system for sex offenders. Discharging them to the street, if anything, increases the recidivism because they find themselves without any support, without clinical services, without jobs, without housing. We've got to look at it. I think our assumption has been we'll just ignore it and it will go away. In fact, if anything, it's getting worse. Thank you very much for listening.

KAREN SPENCE: Next, I'd like to bring up Paula Verdet of the BU Prison Education Program.

PAULE VERDET: I'm not used to teach from a podium, you know, usually put the thing aside but I've been teaching in the prison education program of Boston University. For now, I'm finishing my 18th year and one of the things that I want to mention briefly today is my reaction at seeing currently when it looks as if there is a real chance for change for this focus on reentry at reentry. You see, a college teacher in Norfolk and Bay State has the experience of doing extraordinary things. Never mind not doing one's self but getting and seeing men. I'm sure this happens to the women also but seeing men do extraordinary things with themselves if they are given the chance which they are, you know, to spend years for instance in the BU program and I see from the elevator building which we share with the people who have just teaching, you know, elementary school stuff or GED or ESL. We see the rest of the prisoners, you know, walking in that marvelous quadrangle, you know, some genius brought university at the prison but we see those people who might have no academic interests but who could if they were in contact with people who trust that they can do something with themselves, could have the same kind of renewal, you know, of conversion, of finding themselves which our students have.

And I'm delighted to see that one the people who were smart enough with the things to send the document here that he is evoking what was done at the time of the Governor Weld. You know take the DOC and put it with public safety. Never mind human services.

It's the human service approach, which has to be experienced and acted upon again. I want just to give you a small...how am I doing?

A small example the way in which I have discovered that so many of my students are dyslexic, and also with also with ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Those kids, I have traced with one of them, his whole experience of special education being put with other kids who didn't have his brain, you know, or his enthusiasm but were kind of problems, you know. The poor dyslexic child or adult who is trying to get letters to stop running around, you know, in his mind is treated by a care-giving parent or teacher as being unable to concentrate. His concentrating 10 times what the teacher is able to do but it doesn't show, and the attention deficit disorder child or adult happens to be, and everybody again cares for them is trying to get them to meet the deadline or to keep doing what he is about to do and not being unable to control himself, lack of discipline. I can see how these people have the prison as their normal place to stay because they have been experienced by people who are trying to give them an education. They have been treated as incorrigible and the incorrigible, you where they end? It's in the isolation.

So, I am saying let us not waste the time that are, you know, that the prisoners have during those endless years that they are in prison. Let us not have them be on waiting lists forever, you know, the waiting list, you know, for this program, that program. Let us try to change maybe the priorities when it comes to budget and all that and have things for them to do to experience to find themselves.

KAREN SPENCE: Next, we have Darin Howell.

DARIN HOWELL: Good evening all. My name is Darin Howell. I am currently the director of Constituent Services for Boston City Councilor Chuck Turner's office. I'm also an ex-prisoner myself. I was currently incarcerated from September 2003 to September 2004 and I recidivated from March of 2005 to April 2005. What I believe what led to my successful reentry was images, men that model success that I thought I couldn't achieve for myself based upon CORI. I went through a discouraging time but I knew how to go about seeking gainful employment through strategies I learned prior to my incarceration. Due to lack of resources to focus on the attitude that I developed while incarcerated of hopelessness and a not caring attitude, I didn't know how to deal with the discouraging feelings and emotions that came about being terminated behind my CORI.

I learned how to address those issues by a program called STRIVE Boston which in actuality, for those that know me well, know that was my last stop before I committed myself to a life of crime if that didn't work because of all the programs and other alternatives I sought to do the right thing. Through STRIVE Boston, I learned how to deal with those discouraging feelings and emotions. I have recognized the potential in myself to do great things and since then have been leading several initiatives within the

Department of Corrections to allow inmates that want to play up a positive productive role within the communities they come from by allowing them to have a voice on the outside by somebody that can relate to the issues that's going on, on the inside. Through that, there has been a lot of positive feedback behind forgiveness and reconciliation that we are hoping to achieve and focus on. I'm just happy a part of that process and I hope that these men are allowed to be the ambassadors of the message that DOC hopes to bring about. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: Next I want to bring up Lyn Levy of SPAN.

LYN LEVY: There aren't enough people here. [No legislators] In 1974, I went to Concord and I worked with 14 people there. I was classified then to Walpole and worked with 25. We were doing reentry work, officially funded in 1976. Last year, SPAN served 1279 men and women both in prison and in the community during the critical period just prior to and after release. Four hundred and eight, those men and women came directly out of our state prison system.

We learned something. Incarceration affects all of us. That's why there should be more people here. It affects families, friends, neighbors, and communities. The sentencing of prisoners is not just the business of the courts, and the housing of prisoners isn't just the business of the Department of Corrections. This is our business. These are our friends, our relatives, our families, our neighbors. The business of the community is an urgent business. We need to address the issues that folks who lived with us needed to address before they went to prison and didn't and must address when they are released from prison in order to stay home.

A reentry plan is nothing without the services and the support that follow release. Saying to someone, "We can't do anything. It's too late," doesn't work for any of us. Work on going home should begin at sentencing with the system that mandates the most creative alternatives to incarceration possible. We need to recognize that prisons are not drug treatment programs. They are not mental health care providers and they are not educational institutions. They are prisons. If serving time in prison is the end result of the sentencing process then the time served must be as short as possible with the lowest possible security option and least amount of restriction placed on families and friends who want to visit and an intensive reentry planning process must start at least a year before people are released. Addiction treatment, health care, mental health care, and education for prisoners must be provided by licensed providers becoming an integral part of our community's public health system. We're all living in the same neighborhoods. We need to adhere to the same standards of care. We need and they need to be administered in the least restrictive and most compassionate way possible. There is no such thing especially now as separate but equal.

We can't continue to live in a throwaway community. Whole generations of young people can't be seen as expendable. Prison is not college and it shouldn't be seen as

such although it's wonderful that people learn what they learn when they're inside. I'd much rather see that \$48,000 a year spent on tuition assistance for someone to go to BC or BU.

Individuals who have been incarcerated, survived, and become members of our communities must be welcomed back into prison [as volunteers] as proof that treatment works, that study pays, that learning from those who know and from those who went before is probably the most valuable learning that there is. We should not have to fight to get successful men and women who have been out of prison for three four, 10 and 12 years permission to go back into institutions as trained providers and work with inmates who are getting ready to be released. Twelve-step programs, mentoring programs, educational programs, support programs must come from the communities where prisoners came from and are returning to. This programming has to be made an integral part of the prison culture. CORI regulations, housing restrictions and work limitations make it difficult but not impossible for the formerly imprisoned to succeed in our communities because it was impossible, we'd all be locked up. Once a prisoner has been released, he or she has served their time and paid their debt but we have created a system where payment continues forever. When we make laws that restrict the opportunities for a particular group of people, the message is clear. If you want to succeed, you can't, not here, not now, not in my town, not in my neighborhood, not in my company and we used to say, not in our presidency either.

If our community is to thrive, we must assist all members including those who have made mistakes and experience their share of life's challenges. Communities must assist men and women in prison to come home strategically, openly, supported, and encouraged. The reality of the prison experience has to be shared by those who survived it and been able to transform their lives for the better.

In summary, if we need to restore a system that supports opportunities for all of its members, we need to house inmates in the lowest possible security level. We need to increase community-based services in prison especially during the last year. We need to facilitate and encourage the earliest release possible and we need to work with the Department of Correction to support a creative and collaborative system of care that gives everybody an equal opportunity to be successful.

KAREN SPENCE: We want to break again if you have any questions. Anyone? Are we good?

KAREN SPENCE: I'm going to read for Dirk Greineder, M.D., formerly chief of clinical allergy, Brigham and Women's Hospital, assistant professor at Harvard Medical School currently at Norfolk. It's a commentary on health care on Massachusetts's prisons.

As a physician with 30 years of experience providing healthcare and administrating health care delivery systems who has been incarcerated here for over eight years, I

would like to briefly offer some comments about medical care in the Massachusetts DOC and possible consequences of what has unfortunately been a severely dysfunctional system.

While there are many specific areas of concern, a few of which have been addressed by the executive board of the Lifers Group, I will limit myself to one overarching issue that embodies all others. This issue, possibly the most damaging of all is the apparent lack of adequate care and empathy exhibited by all levels of health care providers responsible for prisoners. This problem seems to transcend the specific agencies responsible as transition from CMS to UMass Correctional Health has seen if anything, a worsening of conditions and increasing disregard of prisoners patient's needs and healthcare. Significantly, whatever ailments that are not easily diagnosed and treated are soon ignored by responsible providers, the patients told they are malingering, not sick or simply deferred or ignored despite of obvious problems.

When an occasional front-line clinician does actually exhibit concern and recognize a problem and wishes to provide diagnosis or care, these interventions are almost inevitably denied by an offsite so-called utilization reviewer with no personal knowledge of the patient's real needs or circumstances. It is only when a problem becomes life threatening that any more than superficial diagnosis consultation or treatment is provided.

This, of course, has three further consequences. It results in situations becoming more dangerous, often dramatically, more expensive to treat and frequently causing undue harm, pain, and anguish to the patient. Some patients are irrevocably harmed or even killed by the systemic unwillingness to intervene appropriately. It is likely that the systematic strategy actually increases long-term prison healthcare cost for those prisoners who don't die quickly or those who are not fortunate enough to be soon released, though this leaves their unresolved and exacerbated health issues to burden the Commonwealth's health care system.

There is, however another less visible but more serious consequence of this medical neglect and lack of concern. Prisoners are already isolated from family, friends, and community, already constrained by prison's depersonalizing influence are now dehumanized by the neglect from the medical department which should have been a safe harbor from some of the rigors of incarceration. Instead of finding a caring and responsive medical system that strives to provide needed care, the prisoner now finds himself confronted with disrespect and a stunning lack of interest in meeting his critical health care needs leaving him with nowhere to turn. If he then resorts to the grievance mechanism, he soon discovers this is even more dysfunctional than the medical care. If a given prisoner is fortunate enough not to have any significant medical needs, he nevertheless encounters similar disinterest in even the most mundane interactions with the medical department, and is a likely witness to the neglect of his less fortunate fellow prisoners who are visibly suffering as a result of inadequate care. When treated in this

manner by the medical system and staff, the prisoner finds himself betrayed, devalued, and totally dehumanized, his last hope for empathy squashed by disinterest and neglect from the very element that should provide health, comfort, and respite from the rigors of incarceration. The inevitable result is anger and a desire for retribution; neither emotion is sound basis for rehabilitation or reentry into society.

Consequently, the dysfunctional medical care and system will severely impair the long-term public safety of the commonwealth when such neglected prisoners are released. Their depersonalization and dehumanization exacerbated by the very branch of the DOC that should have provided understanding, providing them with the better emotional state and reestablishing a desire to function as constructive members of free society. Incarceration is meant as punishment; however, inadequate and effective dismissive and dehumanizing health care should never be a significant element of that punishment. Lamentably, in the Massachusetts DOC, it has been just that to the detriment of society and the long-term public safety of all our citizens. Thank you.

STOP – 57:21

KAREN SPENCE: Next I'd like to bring up John Larivee of Community Resources for Justice. Is John Larivee here? No? OK. So next we'll bring up Bobby Dellelo.

BOBBY DELLELO: Hi my name is Robert Dellelo. I work with the American Friends, Criminal Justice program. First, I'd like to apologize, I had made a hundred copies of this. I thought I made too many and I didn't make enough. So those who didn't get it, I apologize to you for not getting that. If you get in touch with me, and let me know how to reach you, I will make sure you get a copy of this. It's "Strategies for a Successful Reentry Plan." What I first like to do is present a hypothetical question to you. If there was a magic button...I'm sorry. Can you hear me now? All right? How's that? If there was a magic button that if pressed would instantly rehabilitate all prisoners and reduce recidivism to zero, with a show of hands, those who believe that the Department of Corrections would not press that button, would you please raise your hand?

Commissioner, I would like you to look around. This is the problem with corrections in Massachusetts. This is where the rubber meets the road. Reentry is a very, very important concept and it requires every one of these individuals participating in that program cause if you wrote the best program on the planet earth, it will not work. Tomorrow, I will be 67 years old. I have spent over two thirds of my life in some form of confinement from reformatories to the state prison. I've been to Marion Illinois twice as we well know. I obtained a Bachelor's degree majored in Sociology while I was in Walpole. Today, you can barely get a GED in Walpole. Since I have been on the street, which tomorrow will be five years, I have obtained a paralegal certificate. I'm a certified paralegal. I would appreciate you really reading this. I am an expert, Sir, in corrections. I spent 40 years just on one sentence alone.

[AUDIENCE CLAPS]

I would ask you to pay particular attention to the second paragraph because it's really an important message to you. When Governor Weld came into this system, he devastated the Department of Corrections. All individuals that believed in rehabilitation were forced out of the system. The only people that stayed were those who were willing to violate prisoner's rights and create Walpole prison as a punitive institution. It didn't work then. It didn't work then and it won't work now. I have many, many years of experience in putting this together. You have to get all the parties to the table. We are interested in keeping our friends, families, brothers, mothers, daughters, sisters, out of prisons. We will support you 100% but you have to support us.

I would ask you to seriously read these five pages. I have included in here Governor Weld's statement to the Attorney General of the United States in the summer of 1992 where he made the asinine statements of reintroducing prisoners to the joy of busting rocks and turning the prison system into an exercise into the circles of hell. This is what modeled the Massachusetts Department of Correction system that you have just inherited. You don't have people that are trained in rehabilitation and reentry. You are going to have to go outside of the system to find those individuals that are dedicated to those principles and we will support you if you do it. But it can't be business as usual. Rehabilitation works. I never lasted more than three months on the street. If it showed a sign of life I put a gun on it and robbed it. That was my life cycle. I learned in reform school how to steal cars and how to take the antenna off a car and make a zip gun. When I got to Walpole, I learned to how to pick locks, crack safes, and circumvent burglar alarms. It was a school of education of crime then and it is now. We have to change that. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: We're running a bit over time so we may have to kind of speed through and if people can keep to their three minutes, we'd appreciate it. Next, I want to bring up, I'm going to just skip ahead here, Lois Ahrens of Real Cost of Prisons.

LOIS AHRENS: When Bobby was speaking here. I was thinking I'm really glad I don't have to follow Bobby because I'm way after him on the list. Anyway, my name is Lois Ahrens. I'm the founder and director of the Real Cost of Prisons Project, a Northampton-based national organization. And with Donald Perry, I also organized the Western Massachusetts CORI Education Project.

The Real Cost of Prisons project created three comic books focusing on drug policy, the financing and citing of prisons, and the incarceration of women. 125,000 comic books have been printed and more than 100,000 have been sent free of charge to people around the country. More than 15,000 have been sent to prisoners including some to prisoners in Massachusetts.

A request for comic books is why I was first contacted by someone from the Lifers Group at Norfolk prison. Over several years, I corresponded with various members of the group. Approximately seven months ago, one of the group's members asked me to speak. He would submit an application and I would hear from the staff member in charge. The application was submitted on June 9, 2008. After waiting almost two months, I called the staff member. He said the request was denied but I can appeal the decision by writing to the Assistant Superintendent. My request was denied for three reasons: One, it was made directly by the Lifers group rather than by me; two, the subject of the talk submitted by the Lifers group was unacceptable and; three, because of the organization I represented. I briefly want to address two of the reasons for the denial.

One, it was the belief of the person submitting the application that the Lifers Group could directly request a speaker. This turned out to be untrue. The procedure is for a perspective speaker to approach the administration of Norfolk. The speaker must not be directly asked by a member of the group. Doing so can result in a denial. Somehow, people in the outside must know of the Lifers Group, know that they would like to have a speaker and then find and contact the appropriate person at the prison and make a request. This appears to be a rather large barrier to speaking to the Lifers group.

The topic the Lifers group wrote on the application was for me to report on a national conference I had just attended on maximum security prisons. The conference was organized by the National American Friends Service Committee. On June 29th, I spoke with the Deputy Superintendent for programs at Norfolk. She informed me that the only subject one could speak to the Lifers about was reentry. I said I can speak about this topic, this is true. I said I could speak about this topic based on my work with the CORI education project and I would send an appeal letter and documentation about my work in this area and await her response. In the intervening, I made numerous calls checking on the status of my appeal. In September, I received permission to speak and I did so on October 7th, five months after the original request was made. More than 150 men attended the talk including many long termers. While reentry issues were not a priority for the Lifers, I think the large audience reflected their desire for contact from the outside.

The Real Cost of Prisons Project is an educational organization which brings together justice activists, artists, researchers and people directly experiencing the impact of mass incarceration. We believe that all people benefit from knowing more about the circumstances of their life. This includes Lifers who need contact with people from the outside to maintain their mental health and intellectual engagement so that they can do their time in a way that does not negate or even destroy their humanity.

We know that for men and women serving lesser sentences, contact with the outside through classes, talks, and letters is a crucial component to their ability to come back home with a more positive and constructive view of themselves and the world.

Over the last 20 years, prisons and even most jails have become fortresses. Prisoners have far fewer opportunities to be part of GED programs, Pell Grants ended despite the fact that they were proved to be a major deterrent to recidivism. Relevant vocational programs are scarce and as noted, there are obstacles placed in the way of people who want to speak and create programs on non-religious subject. It seems to me that these limitations run counter to the goals of successful reentry and do not serve the people of the commonwealth. Thank you.

KAREN SPENCE: OK. We are audio recording this at the moment and the person is about to change the disk so it will take a couple of seconds for him to do that.