

The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons

Summary of the Commission's
Findings

The Prison Commission report was published 8 June 2006.

It took over one year and over 30 criminal justice professionals to create the report.

Many of the Commission's professionals have extensive experience in corrections, as well as working as federal, state and local criminal justice program and policy makers, lawyers, prison epidemiologists, and academic corrections and violence researchers.

The report is one of the most comprehensive and authoritative of its kind.

Many of the things found in it the PPS are already doing, which if the public were educated on, could throw some very positive light towards senior PPS administration.

Some things, not currently being done if implemented, could help bring the PPS to the next level of progressive research-based prison administration and serve as a model evidence-based prison.

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Conditions of Confinement

On Preventing Violence

- Controlling over crowding and reducing recidivism:
 - Instead of using restricted movement* (pg 67/68) or lock downs, the Commission recommends the use of highly structured programs (pg. 23, 27)
 - A well-developed system to objectively classify prisoner by risk reduces violence among them (pg 29)
- Non-forceful ways for officers to respond to inmate disturbances should be first strike:
 - The Commission recommends that the use of Pepper Spray, TASER guns other weapons have proper training and be used sparingly (pg 31)

Conditions of Confinement

On Preventing Violence

- Barriers to access family and community contact promote safety during incarceration (pg 35)
 - Limiting family access often stresses inmates which can spill over into misconduct.
 - Limiting family access has also been found to impede reentry increasing the likelihood of recidivism.
- Search for and disrupt “goon squads”
 - Officers who are abusive or intimidating towards inmates and other COs.
- We should have very reliable measures of violence (pg 24)
 - It is important that each jail report accurately what is going on.
 - CORESTAR is going to be exploring the link between Restricted Movement and Misconduct more closely.

Conditions of Confinement

Limit Segregation

- The use of high-security segregation *can be* counter-productive (pg 52)
 - Inmates who need structured programs might not be able to get it in segregation.
- The *misuse* of segregation works against the process of rehabilitation.
- Restricted movement is best kept to a minimum.
 - There should be a culture of mutual respect (pg 66) and excessive use of RM may inhibit this.
- Housing a prisoner in segregation can be twice as costly as other forms of confinement.

Conditions of Confinement

Medical Care

- We should make sure that the doctors we have are not limited to correctional accreditation.
 - Some doctors can't find state accreditation so they seek employment in prisons that sometimes have lower standards.
- We should pre-screen and test for infectious diseases (pg 47)
- We should use a pre-release medical screen so diseases are not released into the community.
- We should not use any inmate co-payment (pg 48)

Conditions of Confinement

Medical Care

- We should partner with health provides from the community (pg 39)
 - Many community health care providers know better what is going on outside of the prisons that the prison doctors, and therefore are more attuned with what inmates may be bringing in.
- We should build real partnerships within the facilities (pg 41)
 - A sharp divide between security and medical staff can negatively influence the ability of each to do respective jobs.
- We should commit to caring for inmates with mental illness (pg 43)
 - This is an issue that legislators need to consider with regards to proper funding.

Labor and Leadership

Change the Culture and Enhance the Profession

- The Commission recommends that State and local governments must improve pay for COs in order to reduce annual turnover (16% nationally) (pg 15)
- Governors and city halls must hire the best qualified individuals and give them the freedom and resources to do their job well (pg 73)

Oversight and Accountability

Invest in External Oversight

- Invite in an external oversight commission (pg 81 / 95)
 - The public and city officials have a lot to learn about prison operations. Educating them could help garner support for the Prison.
- Internal oversight should be used (pg 79)
 - Monitor practice, not just policy (pg 88)

Oversight and Accountability

Strengthen Accountability Within the Profession

- We should have a meaningful internal complaint system.
(pg 92)
- We should be ACA accredited (pg 16)

Oversight and Accountability

Educate and Involve the Public

- We should encourage visits to the facilities, including the press (pg 95)

Knowledge and Data

Measure Safety and Effectiveness

- We should have some form of uniform reporting on safety, abuse and health information, and report this to the BJS at the USDOJ (pg 82 / 103)
- We should not hold corrections administrations accountable for safety of prisoner and staff, and for the public safety, if the necessary resources are not provided or are denied to manage the facilities (pg 17)
- City legislators should be required to confront the potential consequences of the laws they are considering (pg 17)

Conclusion

If the case is made that the PPS uses evidence-based practices but is coming up short of its goals, a case could be made regarding the Commission's research suggestions to cities and states:

give correctional administrators what they need to run facilities and accomplish goals. (pg 17)