

# ERIE COUNTY LEGISLATURE



**OLD COUNTY HALL**  
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## Community Corrections Advisory Board

February 28, 2013

Reverend Eugene L. Pierce, *Chair*  
 Nan Haynes, *Vice-Chair*  
 Joseph Sacco, *Secretary*

To: Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz  
 95 Franklin Street, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor  
 Buffalo, NY 14202

*Members:*

Karima Amin  
 Lavonne Ansari  
 James Balys  
 Joseph Cercone  
 Kenneth Colon  
 Barry Covert  
 Charles Culhane  
 Brendon Dickman  
 Thomas Diina  
 David Marciniak  
 Michael Ranney  
 William Schultz

Erie County Sheriff Timothy Howard  
 10 Delaware Avenue  
 Buffalo, NY 14202

Erie County Legislature Clerk Robert Graber  
 92 Franklin St. 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
 Buffalo, NY 14202

**RE: 2012 Erie County Community Corrections Advisory Board Annual Report**

Dear County Legislators, County Executive Poloncarz, and Sheriff Howard:

Please accept this letter as the Erie County Community Corrections Advisory Board's (CAB) annual report on its progress for 2012, and its goals for 2013.

Shiana Denise Eve, *Clerk*  
 Ph.: 716/858-8853

Progress for 2012

The CAB is comprised of people with divergent backgrounds and perspectives on jail management. Through our monthly meetings and candid discussions about what needs to be done to improve programs for prisoners in our County jails, we have gradually come to recognize that we share many of the same goals. Consequently we implemented some positive changes and discussed the ways in which the County could implement even more.

On October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, Chair Rev. Eugene L. Pierce ran a highly successful Voters Registration Drive at the Correctional Facility, with the assistance of Superintendent Thomas Diina and Jail Management Staff. As a result, 150 inmates registered to vote. He is now developing plans with the Buffalo branch of the NAACP and Jail Management to conduct Voters Registration Drives at both the Correctional Facility and Holding Center every three months.

Rev. Pierce also played a pivotal role in recruiting 135 inmates from the Correctional Facility for possible employment in Fruit Belt Development jobs. Ten of the inmates have been placed. Fruit Belt Development retains the

remaining 125 applications in its job bank for consideration as more employment opportunities arise.

The Board discussed extensively the Sheriff's sole discretion to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of income generated annually by a contract to provide telephone services to prisoners. We asked the County Attorney for his opinion about legal basis, if any, for the Sheriff's sole possession and access and access to the funds. The County Attorney opined that the Sheriff had no legal basis to possess or spend the funds at his discretion. We understand that through discussions between the County Executive and the Sheriff that the funds will now be deposited through the Comptroller's Office, appropriated through established county procedures, and dedicated to Jail Management. The Board is pleased with this development, but would like to see a portion of the funds dedicated to programs that would benefit the prisoners who pay fees that generate the funds.

We continue to discuss the need for an ombudsman as we recommended by resolution to the Legislature in 2011.

### Goals for 2013

Our top goal for 2013 is to provide the Legislature, County Executive, and Sheriff with recommendations for the implementation of a re-entry program for prisoners in our jails. Erie County has no reentry program for prisoners in either the Correctional Facility or the Erie County Holding Center. Yet such programs benefit both prisoners and the community by significantly reducing the rate of recidivism, and ultimately saving money.

Prisoners in our county jails have no adult GED program, no educational or vocational programs, and have only AA and NA meetings to help them overcome chemical dependency. We do not even have chaplains on staff at our jails. In contrast Monroe County jails have a comprehensive re-entry program. <sup>1</sup> There prisoners have adult GED programs, community based educational programs through BOCES and Monroe Community College, vocational programs, chemical dependency programs, and jail ministries. They also have the possibility of conditional release. And once released, they have access to transitional services that focus on educations, employment, training, substance abuse rehabilitation, stable/safe housing, and family reunification.

The Legislature could fund a re-entry program in part from the telephone funds that were previously under the Sheriff's control. Additionally the CAB will investigate cost effective ways to implement programs for prisoners in Erie County by creating relationships with community agencies

such as the relationship with the Fruit Belt Development that made the job recruitment a possibility. Jeff Conrad, Chair of the Safe Neighborhoods Committee suggested that several members of the CAB join forces with several members of his committee to devise policies that would support release strategies for newly released prisoners. Such collaboration has great potential.

Respectfully submitted,



Reverend Eugene L. Pierce  
Chair



Nan L. Haynes  
Vice Chair

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www2.monroecounty.gov/sheriff-jailbureauprograms> for more about Monroe County jail bureau programs and services.