

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,
Community Development, and other Social Services)



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on Wednesday, November 20, 2019

[10:15 a.m. to 12:04 p.m.]

2nd Public hearing re: An inquiry into the challenges of prisoner re-entry into society and prisoner reintegration services in Trinidad and Tobago.

Venue: J. Hamilton Meeting Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, The Port-of-Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain.

Committee members

The following committee members were present:

1. Mr. Paul Richards – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
3. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
4. Ms. Allyson West

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Witnesses who appeared

The following officials were present:

Prison Officers' Association

1. Mr. Ceron Richards - President
2. Mr. Lester Walcott - General Secretary
3. Mr. Alloyee Youksee - Former Prison Welfare Officer

Eye on Dependency

1. Mr. Garth St. Clair - Host, Eye on Dependency

Unaffiliated Officials

1. Reverend Stacey Ann Beckles – Reformed Ex-offender
2. Mr. Dane Manickchand - Reformed Ex-offender

The Way of Holiness

1. Pastor Wilma Kelly - Senior Pastor
2. Mr. Rudolph Garcia – Member

New Hope Prison Ministry

1. Mr. Richard Barker - Chief Executive Officer
2. Mr. Richard La Croix - Reformed Ex-offender

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Prison Officers' Association

- i. The need to introduce strategic sentencing/ therapeutic jurisprudence into the court system. This considers the criminogenic needs of convicts and informs their sentencing and rehabilitation.
- ii. Therapeutic jurisprudence also considers the social and psychological factors affecting the offender when determining their rehabilitation needs.
- iii. The need to create reception/assessment centres in prisons to facilitate the “onboarding” or assessment of new inmates in addition to the rehabilitation and monitoring of prisoners.
- iv. Prison Officers use the Length of Service Case Management Inventory to assess the needs and risk factors of convicted persons upon entry to prison.
- v. The Prison Welfare Department recently introduced case management to provide more individualized interventions to prisoners.
- vi. The need for transitional programmes such as “half-way houses” to recently released ex-prisoners.
- vii. The importance of systematic policies and procedures for the assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners.
- viii. The need to establish a drug rehabilitation centre or mental health unit in the prison system with qualified professionals.¹
- ix. Prison Officers currently lack the appropriate training the treat with prisoners with drug dependency issues. Some prisoners have been admitted to the St. Ann’s Psychiatric Hospital in the past.
- x. The need for more resources to expand the provision of technical/vocational, sport and educational programmes for prisoners.
- xi. Similar to other jurisdictions, the need to ensure that participation in rehabilitation programmes is mandatory and is a requirement for conditional release arrangements.

¹ This was also expressed by Eye on Dependency.

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

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- xii. The need for Welfare Officers to provide follow-up support to ex-prisoners throughout the entire 2 year post-release period as stipulated.
- xiii. The need for a change in the culture and mind-set of Prison Officers to align with the organization's restorative justice policies. Newly recruited Prison Officers participate in a Philosophy of the Organization course. Notwithstanding this, there is need for retraining of the older Officers.
- xiv. The need to transform Remand Yard into a "purpose-built" facility which treats with the needs of remandees.
- xv. The need to reduce the duration of time remandees spend at Remand Yard, given that little to no rehabilitation is provided to this population despite it being larger than the convicted population.
- xvi. The prison service has no mandate to provide rehabilitation programmes to remandees, although these programmes may be useful.
- xvii. Remandees who become convicted prisoners may be resistant to rehabilitation efforts due to anger and demotivation developed in the unfavourable conditions of Remand Yard.
- xviii. Some remandees do not become convicted prisoners and are released. Therefore, they would not have benefited from any rehabilitation programmes that are provided in prisons.
- xix. It may not be logical to provide rehabilitation programmes to remandees given that they are legally innocent until proven guilty.
- xx. The performance management system for Prison Officers is not very effective.
- xxi. There is an established procedure for liaising with external agencies, prior to the prisoners' release, to facilitate the application for/renewal of identification documents.
- xxii. The need to provide incentives to businesses to encourage them to hire ex-prisoners.
- xxiii. The need for legislation and policies to guide the employment of ex-prisoners.² These policies will also help to prevent the labour exploitation of ex-prisoners.

² This was also expressed by Mr. Manickchand.

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
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Issues discussed with Eye on Dependency

- i. In the past, a drug rehabilitation facility operated in the prison system but was shut down.

Issues discussed with Unaffiliated Officials

- i. The attitudes and behaviours of some female and male Prison Officers do not reflect the philosophy of restorative justice of the prison service.
- ii. The need for greater enforcement of restorative justice practices and principles among all ranks of prison officials.³
- iii. The need for more humane and compassionate treatment of prisoners by Prison Officers.
- iv. Employment is a major challenge for ex-prisoners. A criminal record discourages many employers from hiring ex-prisoners.
- v. The inconsistency in hiring practices of public sector organizations regarding ex-prisoners.
- vi. The Industrial Court ruled in favour of Mr. Manickchand's case against the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (MoSLED), which was based on the non-renewal of his contract on the grounds of a "policy" prohibiting the hiring of ex-prisoners.
- vii. The Court found a lack of a written policy by the MoLSED to treat with the hiring of persons with criminal records.
- viii. Some ex-prisoners gain employment in the public sector due to their political affiliations.
- ix. The need for a more reliable communication system to be developed between the Prison Service and external agencies to facilitate the renewal of identification documents before prisoners are released.
- x. Vision on Mission provided employment to Ms. Beckles after her contract at a different organization was terminated upon discovery of her conviction.

³ This was also expressed by the Prison Officers' Association.

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

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- xi. In the Women's Prison, some remandees, particularly those arrested for capital offences and/or were awaiting appeal or awaiting trial, were allowed to participate in educational programmes.
- xii. The need for more housing facilities for female ex-prisoners that can also accommodate their children.
- xiii. The need to review the Public Procurement and Disposal of Property Act, which would prohibit a company which has a director with a criminal record from receiving goods and services from a government agency.

Issues discussed with The Way of Holiness

- i. The poor hygienic environment and living conditions in prisons frustrate both the prisoners and Prison Officers and may hinder rehabilitation efforts.
- ii. Financial constraints within the prisons contribute to the aforementioned conditions.
- iii. The Way of Holiness (WOH) has sponsored sporting equipment and toiletries to the prisons.
- iv. The WOH provides Christian religious and spiritual guidance to prisoners.
- v. The need for faith-based ministries to be involved in both pre-release and post-release programmes so that they can keep family members connected to, and informed about the welfare of prisoners.

Issues discussed with New Hope Prison Ministry

- i. Prisoners with different types and levels of needs and risks are treated as one category.
- ii. Prison Officers are frustrated and require more support in the work environment.

View the Hearing

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiHZZNwAYVo>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

November 28, 2019