

Observations Concerning the Racine County Criminal Justice System
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July 31, 2006

The various organizations and agencies that comprise the Racine County Criminal Justice System have developed good working relationships and cooperate in a variety of collaborative programs with the intent of making the overall system more responsive and accountable to the Racine community. The Racine County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, the Racine County Board's Public Protection and Justice System Committee, and the Office of the County Executive are prime examples of the cooperation and leadership that brings the various entities together to focus on criminal justice issues and related concerns of the citizens of Racine County

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee was established in 2002 with a mission "To improve communication, cooperation, and coordination of agencies within the Racine County Justice System and officials of government to maximize the **efficiency** and **effectiveness** of its operation. This includes policy, program, and operational planning by identifying and analyzing current issues and recommending solutions." The committee goals include: a better understanding of crime and criminal justice problems, greater cooperation among agencies and units of government, clearer objectives and priorities, more effective resource allocation, and better quality criminal justice programs.

The committee is chaired by the Chief Judge of the Racine County Circuit Court and is comprised of criminal justice system stakeholders representing the courts, law enforcement agencies, the District Attorney, the Public Defender, the Human Services Department, the State Department of Corrections, the County Board, the Racine County Corporation Counsel and the County Executive. The committee has met on a recurring basis since it was established and can take credit for the following accomplishments:

- Jail population numbers are distributed to judges, County Board supervisors, and other stakeholders on a daily basis.
- The number of Administrative Law Judge hearings for probation and parole revocations has increased, thereby decreasing the length of stays in the Racine County jail for that reason.
- The time allowed for preparation of pre-sentence reports for persons in custody has decreased by a full week.
- The length of time between the issuance of revocation orders and return to court for sentencing after revocation has been reduced.
- Training has been offered to Law Enforcement Officers to help them better identify persons with alcohol and mental health issues.
- The process for handling mental health commitments in Racine County has been refined.

- A risk assessment process has been initiated to help provide accurate information to the courts for use in making decisions related to a defendant's bond.
- An Alcohol and Drug Court pilot project has been implemented to target up to 10 offenders charged with, and convicted of, an OWI 4th offense.
- A Treatment Alternatives and Diversion Grant application has been submitted to the State of Wisconsin, requesting \$140,000 to fully implement a Racine County Treatment Court during 2007.
- Procedures are in the process of being developed to offer Community Service work as an alternative to jail for persons who do not have funds to pay their municipal court forfeitures.
- Key members of the Racine County Criminal Justice system meet on a recurring basis to review and discuss issues of mutual concerns in an effort to improve the overall functioning of the system and to follow-up on recommendations made at the December 20, 2005 "stakeholder" meeting.

The Public Protection and Justice System Committee is a standing committee of the Racine County Board of Supervisors. The committee normally meets on a twice-monthly basis, with some meetings held at various locations in Racine County to solicit citizen comments, discuss issues confronting the Criminal Justice system and provide recommendations and reports to the County Board. The Rules of the Racine County Board of Supervisors state that the following matters should be referred to this committee:

- Circuit Courts
- Criminal Justice System
- Circuit Court Judges
- Sheriff's Department
- Dispatch
- Jail
- District Attorney
- Public Defender
- Alternatives to Incarceration
- Jail Diversion
- Water Patrol
- Public Safety
- Other matters related to the legal system and public safety

The committee provides a vehicle for citizens to have their concerns heard by their elected representatives and to monitor the expenditure of tax dollars in the County Criminal Justice System to ensure programs and services are being delivered in an **efficient** and **effective** manner. The committee receives regular updates on the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, the Racine County Judges meetings, the truancy Committee, the Drug Court Pilot Project, and the implementation of the Risk Assessment Process/Tool.

During the past twelve months the committee has received significant public comment regarding the jail renovation and expansion project (held a public hearing July 6, 2005) and has reviewed reports and had presentations on a variety of criminal justice system and jail related issues. County staff, criminal justice system stakeholders, and interested individuals and groups presented information on jail alternatives and diversion, recidivism rates, risk assessments, dispensing of medications in the jail, jail expansion and operating costs, the Criminal Justice Coordinator position, the offenses of persons detained in the jail, and the length of jail stays.

The committee also heard presentations or reports on jail safety, the Community Re-Entry Program, jail staffing needs, the Citizens Criminal Justice Advisory Task Force Report, Resolution 2005-75 regarding an Offsite Facility for Minimum Security Inmates and a Drug Court Program, Zimmerman Consulting, Inc. (ZCI) Jail Programs, the Jail Employment Program, proposed criminal justice legislation, methamphetamine abuse, UW Parkside's Restorative Justice Programs, and Racine County Jail Alternative and Diversion Programs by Adams Management and Consulting LLC.

The committee helped organize and conduct the December 20, 2005 “Criminal Justice Stakeholders Meeting,” conducted Community Outreach forums, recommended \$5000 in funding for the Drug Court Pilot, made recommendations regarding the contracts for the development of a Risk Assessment tool and a Criminal Justice Coordinator, recommended submitting an application for a State of Wisconsin Treatment Alternatives and Diversion Grant and set the following agenda of topics for their future meetings.

- 1) Bail Bonds – Loan Fund
- 2) Average Length of Stay in the Racine County Jail
- 3) Community Outreach Forums with Criminal Justice system Partners
- 4) Ride Along with Law Enforcement
- 5) Pre-Trial Options
- 6) Monitoring After Jail Release
- 7) Explore use of electronic Monitoring Bracelets
- 8) Methamphetamine Issues
- 9) Truancy
- 10) Jail Health Care

The Office of the County Executive provides leadership and promotes collaboration and the **efficient and effective** use of county resources allocated for programs and services related to the Criminal Justice System. The County Executive has responsibility for the “day to day” operations of County Government and exercises considerable control over the system through the annual county budget process. The Human Services Director, Corporation Counsel and Chief of Staff serve on the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee. The Chief of Staff and other County department heads provide information to the Public Protection and Justice System Committee and attend meetings when requested. The Chief of Staff has budget management responsibility for jail alternative programs and other related initiatives that include the Justice 2000 Risk Assessment and the Criminal Justice Programs Coordinator.

Observations

- This level of collaboration and leadership is very beneficial to the overall functioning of the Criminal justice system in Racine County and is not evident in many counties in Wisconsin and throughout the nation. It has brought members of the executive and legislative branches of county government, other elected officials, county department heads, judges, and professional staff to the table to discuss and address issues related to the criminal justice system and has resulted in innovative approaches to some difficult problems. However the current challenge of increased costs, lower revenues, greater utilization of services and citizen demands for lower taxes and expenditure restraint requires even more communication, dialog, collaboration, and resource sharing among all of the partners in the County Criminal Justice System.
- The staffs of the different organizations or departments that make up the Racine County Criminal Justice System communicate and collaborate with each other on a daily basis. However; they receive a variety of conflicting messages from the Racine Community. Some segments of the community call for tougher penalties, more law enforcement officers and longer periods of incarceration. Others in the community are asking for more programs and services aimed at reducing the length of jail stays, the recidivism rates and the need for more jail beds.
- Racine County has been willing to try new programs and initiatives related to the Criminal Justice System. The Risk Assessment, Drug Court, Criminal Justice Programs Coordinator, the Jail Employment program and the application for funding for a Treatment Court are recent examples. These initiatives may have to compete for continued funding in 2007.
- Racine County has an array of jail alternatives and diversion programs that work to control the jail population. The effectiveness and need for each program has not been independently reviewed on a regular basis. The loss of revenue and a tight county budget situation may force these programs to compete for funding with other county funded services in future years.
- The Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee and the County Board's Public Protection and Justice System Committee each meet on a regular basis, but do not meet together to discuss issues of mutual concern or plan for needs within the system. A joint meeting prior to the annual county budget process could help solidify budget priorities for the upcoming year.
- The budgets for the various departments or components of the criminal justice system seem to be developed independently without a system-wide plan or impact analysis. There are multiple funding sources and levels of authority and control that need to be coordinated.

- A significant amount of time and resources have been invested in the development and implementation of a Drug Court pilot project. An application for a Treatment Alternatives and Diversion grant has been submitted to the State of Wisconsin in an effort to seek funding necessary to fully implement a Racine County Treatment Court. There is no contingency plan in place if the funding is not approved.
- Case processing and paper flow backlogs have developed at various points in the system which may be able to be eliminated through the use of technology, the purchase of appropriate software packages, and ready access to temporary help to assist with work load peaks and backlogs. The 2007 county budget process offers an opportunity to address some of these issues.
- Length of stay in the county jail and inmate recidivism both have been identified as concerns. Best practice research suggests that these issues could be addressed through quality “in jail” programs with a comprehensive inmate discharge planning process and readily available and affordable community based services that address housing needs, employment, health care, family support, AODA and mental health treatment. Some of these services are lacking in the Racine community.
- The Sheriff has responsibility for the operation and staffing of a secure and safe jail facility and for oversight of a variety of jail alternative and diversion programs that are intended to control and reduce the use of jail beds. A variety of effective programs have been developed over the past several years. As the jail renovation and expansion moves forward it may be advisable to research management models that would separate responsibility for community based service programs from the jail thereby allowing the Sheriff to concentrate resources on the operation and staffing of the enlarged facility.