



North Carolina Department of Correction


214 West Jones Street • 4201 MSC • Raleigh, NC 27699-4201

Michael F. Easley
Governor

Tracy A. Little
Acting Secretary

MEMORANDUM

TO: Representative Alice L. Bordsen
Senator Edward W. Jones
Senator Eleanor Kinnaird
Representative Jimmy L. Love, Sr.

FROM: 
Tracy A. Little

RE: Legislative Report on Temporary Housing for Offenders
[S.L. 2008-107 (H2436)]

DATE: January 6, 2009

Pursuant to Session Law 2008-107, please find attached the Department of Correction's Legislative Report on Temporary Housing for Offenders.

Department of Correction staff members are available if further information is requested.

TAL:ea

Attachment

cc: Aaron Gallagher
Doug Holbrook
John Poteat

Temporary Housing for Offenders

[S.L 2008-107 (H2436)]



North Carolina Department of Correction
January 1, 2009

Session Law 2008-107 (H2436)

SECTION 17.1.(c) The Department of Correction shall evaluate the most effective means to provide temporary housing for offenders on post-release supervision, probation, or parole who do not have a viable residence plan and are at risk of being homeless. The evaluation shall include a review of practices in other states, an evaluation of the feasibility of contracting with community-based facilities to provide housing, and an assessment of the feasibility of establishing a central facility or facilities to house offenders on post-release supervision, probation, or parole. The Department shall report its findings to the Joint Legislative Corrections, Crime Control, and Juvenile Justice Oversight Committee by January 1, 2009.

Introduction

During FY 2007-2008, approximately 27,273 offenders were released from North Carolina prisons; of that number, 6,424 were released to community supervision. The Division of Community Corrections (“DCC”) works with offenders prior to release to ensure that an offender on probation, parole or post-release supervision has a suitable home plan. While most offenders live with family members upon release, many offenders have no reliable family support system. Despite best efforts, many offenders therefore leave prison without an optimal home plan. Community backlash often derails a prescribed home plan at the last minute, while sex offenders face additional challenges because of the many statutory restrictions related to housing, employment and offender movement.

Between July 1, 2008 and December 1, 2008, nearly 400 sex offenders were released from North Carolina prisons; approximately 10 percent of those released sex offenders had no viable home plan and were at risk of being homeless. Most community-based facilities across the state have criteria that prevent them from accepting sex offenders, which makes it extremely difficult to find even a suitable temporary housing solution for sex offenders. Only half of the 400 released sex offenders were released to a period of supervision in the community.

Because a stable residence is a critical component of successful reintegration into society, the Department of Correction is committed to making sure that every released offender has a viable home plan. For those offenders at risk of being homeless, this may translate into something other than a traditional residence and something less permanent. The Department continues to work to find the most effective means of finding appropriate housing for offenders on probation, parole and post-release supervision who are at risk of being homeless.

Other State Practices

The Division of Community Corrections conducted a review of practices in other states and found that several types of practices are used nationwide. North Carolina joins the majority of states in using community shelters operated by local governments, nonprofits or faith-based organizations to provide short-term housing. While many of these facilities accept offenders, most refuse to accept sex offenders because the facilities also house women and children. South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, also rely primarily on community providers.

In the past few years, states such as Washington, Oklahoma, Maine, and Minnesota have used federal transition/reentry grant programs to provide funding for offender housing. These states use grant funding to provide direct rental assistance to housing providers who accept offenders,

rental assistance vouchers for offenders to use or some form of assisted housing program. Beginning in 2004, the North Carolina Department of Correction provided reentry housing assistance for 26 serious and violent offenders through a federal grant from the United States Department of Justice. The Department used approximately \$25,000 in federal funds to pay for offender housing for up to 90 days. Although the payments were successful in securing stable housing for offenders, federal funding ended in 2007. The Department has no available funds to continue the initiative, but recommends such housing assistance should funding become available.

Several states, including Ohio, Illinois, Texas, and Connecticut, contract with providers to provide short-term housing. Local providers are selected in a competitive bid process and awarded contracts that provide details on housing structure, staffing, and assistance to supervision staff. The contracts normally provide housing for a short-term time period to help the offender return to an independent living situation. North Carolina's effort to pursue contracts with community-based providers is described in more detail in the following section.

Feasibility of Contracting with Community-Based Facilities

During the 2008 legislative session, the General Assembly authorized the Department to use existing funds to provide temporary housing for offenders. As of December 1, 2008, the Department had used existing funds to procure temporary housing for one sex offender, but has faced great challenges in placing many offenders. These challenges, coupled with the many manpower hours required to find housing for hard-to-place offenders, has encouraged the Department to consider the feasibility of contracting with community-based facilities.

The most viable means of providing short-term beds is to contract with those providers that already work with the federal government to provide short-term housing or halfway houses for federal offenders. DCC has established dialogue with several potential providers and some have indicated a willingness to provide contractual beds at existing facilities or to expand operations to new facilities. Until a more permanent solution can be found, DCC has elected to contract with one facility in Raleigh to provide emergency housing at a rate of \$55 per day—assuming bed space is available. The Department continues to pursue similar relationships with providers in Eastern and Western North Carolina to serve offenders returning to those areas.

Establishment of a Central Facility

The Department continues to explore ways to face the particular challenges involved in finding housing for sex offenders. If these challenges persist, one possible solution is to establish a residential home for sex offenders. Although the concept may not be feasible for North Carolina at this time due to budget limitations, the concept is something that the Department will continue to explore.

Interaction Transition House, located in a residential community in Seattle, Washington, could serve as a model for this concept. The program, which houses approximately 18 sex offenders, with an annual budget of nearly \$200,000, provides treatment, counseling and other transitional services for offenders. The community is heavily involved in monitoring the offenders, which enhances acceptance of the offenders in the community.

Conclusion

The Department of Correction is committed to helping offenders secure appropriate housing in their home communities upon release. Although the state will continue to rely on family as the first option for housing and community providers as a second option, the Department must create other alternatives for certain offenders. To that end, the Department recommends providing housing assistance for offenders and contracting with existing facilities for short-term solutions. In addition, the Department will continue to explore the feasibility of a dedicated transitional facility for sex offenders. The Department believes these solutions will reduce recidivism, make our communities safer and save tax dollars in the long run.