



**SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE TO IMPROVE THE LONG-TERM
OUTCOMES AND REDUCE RECIDIVISM OF FEMALES WITHIN THE
CRIMINAL JUSTICE POPULATION**

Report

June 4, 2024

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Commission Members

- Representative Joseph Solomon, Co-Chair – (Democrat, District 22)
- Senator Megan Kallman, Co-Chair – (Democrat, District 15)
- Representative Cherie Cruz – (Democrat, District 58)
- Representative Brian Rea – (Republican, District 53)
- Senator Robert Brito – (Democrat, District 18)
- Senator Anthony DeLuca – (Republican, District 29)
- Kathleen Kelly, RI Judiciary
- Wayne T. Salisbury, Director, RI Department of Corrections
- Lou Cerbo – Acting Director - BHDDH
- Donna Collins – Warden, RI Department of Corrections
- Michelle Alves – RI Public Defender
- Dina Bruce – Open Doors RI
- Heather Gaydos – Center for Health & Justice Transformation
- Richard Ferruccio – RI Brotherhood of Correctional Officers
- Larome Myrick – RI Department of Children, Youth & Families
- Laura Pisaturo – Chairperson, Parole Board
- Roberta Richman – Former Warden, RI Department of Corrections
- Alison Fonseca – RI Department of Attorney General
- Jazzmin Andrade – Formerly Incarcerated Union
- Tina Goncalves – Chief of Police, City of Pawtucket

Dear Speaker Shekarchi & Senate President Ruggerio:

I am pleased to provide you with the findings and recommendations of the (Special Legislative Task Force to Improve the Long-Term Outcomes and Reduce Recidivism of Females in the Criminal Justice Population. (the "*Commission*").

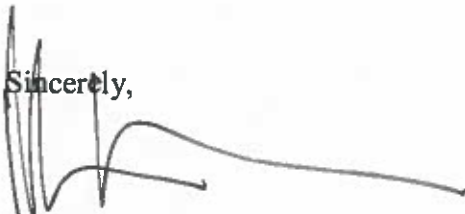
This nineteen (19) member Commission included (Senators, Representatives and stakeholders from across the fields of corrections, criminal justice and social programming.

The Commission was convened with its purpose to utilize "information from state departments and agencies to implement pre-sentencing and post-sentencing strategies for women transitioning in or out of the criminal justice system." Accordingly, the Commission heard and discussed various topics including: Analyses of women in prison (National & State), disparate impact of incarceration by age and racial background, gendered pathways to prison, impacts on women's health and housing status, prison-based therapy as well as criminal justice sentencing & reentry planning.

This final report is a culmination of *multiple* hearings that began in September, 2024 and ended in November, 2024. It contains information presented by various witnesses who testified before the Commission, including expert professionals in academia and at the RI Department of Corrections in the fields of corrections and prisoner reentry planning, as well as testimony from recently incarcerated females regarding their lived experience both as prisoners at the Women's facility and upon their release and reentry into society. The report recognizes all of the above information as presented as well as comments and contributions of Commission members offered at hearings.

I would like to express my gratitude to all members of the Commission for their willingness to take part in these discussions, and we appreciate the investment of the time and talent that they graciously provided.

Sincerely,



Meghan E. Kallman,
Co-Chair



Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.,
Co-Chair

Findings

The Commission studied the myriad issues facing incarcerated women and their hurdles upon release from prison as they reenter society. Based upon multiple, data-driven presentations on the rates and impact of incarceration on females, the policies, programs, and discharge planning efforts for female prisoners at the RI Department of Corrections (RIDOC) and the testimony of recently incarcerated women who have reentered society, in addition to related issues arising out of such study, testimony and material presented to it, and discussions by and amongst its members, the Commission finds as follows:

(Commission Findings)

WOMEN IN PRISON– FINDINGS

- Nationally – Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native and multi-racial women experience higher rates of incarceration, evidencing a racialized pathway to prison for many female prisoners.
- Gendered pathways to incarceration include:
 - Childhood victimization leading to mental illness and substance abuse
 - Abusive adult relationships leading to reduced self-efficacy
 - Low social/human capital leading to financially motivated offenses
- Impacts of incarceration specific to female prisoners include:
 - Trauma and disadvantage (adverse childhood experiences and school pushout)
 - Mental/physical health issues
 - Medicalization, medication, self-medication
 - Lack of employment, underemployment, employment instability
 - Gender-based violence, vulnerability to further violence, dependence on abusive others
 - Chronic health conditions
 - Homelessness, unstable housing
 - Loss of custody of children
- Consequences of incarceration specific to women include:
 - Family disruption, residential instability and school displacement
 - Negative effect on economic well-being of family and relationships with fathers of children
 - Lost connections between families and communities
 - Increased difficulty in securing stable housing
 - Greater likelihood of an intergenerational impact on female prisoners and their family members

- Incarceration has a particularly negative impact on women's health as they are more likely than men to suffer from tuberculosis, hepatitis, high blood pressure, histories of abuse (physical and sexual) and are more likely to die prematurely than women who were never incarcerated.
- Females in prison over the age of 50 experience acute and chronic health issues due to incarceration and age.
- Recidivism amongst female prisoners over the age of 50 is driven by probation and parole violations not new criminal offenses, so that meaningful de-carceration policies must address probation & parole.
- Prison-based therapy has been historically ineffective for female prisoners upon their release, as incarceration and involuntary treatment are associated with high rates of fatal overdose after release.
- Rhode Island has a low incarceration rate for females when compared to the national average.

RIDOC FINDINGS:

- Rhode Island has experienced a 50% reduction in the female population at the RIDOC since 2008, which RIDOC attributes to:
 - Legislative enactments regarding "good time" credits
 - Changes to RI's narcotics offenses and decriminalization of marijuana
- In FY 23, RIDOC had 243 sentenced female releases of whom:
 - 58% were serving for non-violent offenses.
- Only 2% of females releases in FY23 were serving sentences of 2 years or more.
- At least 84% of females released in FY23 were serving sentences of 6 months or less.
- In FY 23:
 - the average length of sentence was 104 days.
 - The median sentence length was 56 days.
- In FY 23, sentence reduction credits reduced the overall sentences of females by 13% (violent offenses), 18 % non-violent offenses and 20% (drug offenses).
- In FY 23, only 10 females were released from their sentences via a grant of Parole
- The vast majority of females committed and released throughout FY 23 were at the women's facility for relatively short lengths of stay.
- RIDOC's focus areas of social assistance to female inmates include during incarceration (job training, medical enrollment, discharge planning) and post-release (probation terminations, employer assistance).
- RIDOC Transitional services & discharge planning seeks to reduce recidivism by
 - providing available community resources and programming
 - addressing post-release needs
 - role modeling & motivating for prosocial behavior change and alternatives.

- removing barriers to reintegration via collaboration with community/state agencies.
- RIDOC maintains Community Corrections Assessment Analysts (CCAAs), Specialized Discharge Planners (SDPs), Information Service Technicians who work with sentenced Adults in Custody (AIC) who are to be released within 9 months.
- Female prisoners who make up the awaiting trial population are primarily assisted on a case by case basis with the assistance of the public defender's office and defense counsel.
- AICs are able to make a free phone call from any facility to speak with a staff member during the work week and all females (incarcerated or released) are welcome to stop in to the discharge planning office for assistance.
- Due to "short stay" sentences/releases, many incarcerated females are released from Women's Facility before they have been able to obtain the full benefit of available institutional programs and course offerings.
- RIDOC defines a recidivist as a person released from a sentence who either returns as a sentenced incarcerated person or an awaiting trial detainee within 36 months of release from the original sentence.
- In FY 23, the recidivism rate for females was at:
 - 49% for those awaiting trial
 - 34% for those sentenced
- Of 1,344 female awaiting trial releases in FY 23:
 - 60% were released at Court
 - 20% were bailed
 - 13% were released after a sentence
 - 5% were discharged per Court order
 - 2% were released via a separate means to include death, discharge to a mental health hospital, discharged out of state, or discharged to the US Marshalls.

Recommendations

Based on its study of issues facing incarcerated females in prison and upon their release and reentry into society, and based on such study, testimony and material presented to it, and discussions by and amongst its members, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. Continued expansion of justice reform initiatives by improving community supervision, resentencing medical parole, and parole and clemency programs.
2. Evaluate and create more supportive housing, shelter services, and community-based transitional programming within the state as a whole, to act as a crucial first step toward decreasing both incarceration and recidivism.
3. Explore potential housing opportunities on the RIDOC campus to include empty/un-used buildings as well as buildable tracts.
4. Review potential funding sources via state and private partnerships to support reentry services and/or housing of reentering female prisoners specifically. This review should be undertaken with a focus on gendered pathways to incarceration.
5. Create and support RIDOC programming that focuses specifically on the women's facility and its transient population, recognizing that "short stay" incarceration is prevalent amongst female prisoners.
6. A coordinated effort among state agencies to create or make available transitional housing to incarcerated females who have been held for "short stays" at the DOC.
7. Promote collaboration between the Judiciary, the RI defense bar, the Attorney General's office and RIDOC on identifying those female prisoners who are likely to be released from their hold in under six (6) months.
8. Develop a greater focus on job training for individuals reaching the end of their sentences and assistance with job placement upon their reentry.
9. Create programming to ensure that reentering prisoners have assistance with producing necessary documents of identification (E.g.- Social Security card, Birth Certificate, drivers license or state I.D.).
10. Identify female prisoners in need of recovery services for substance abuse disorders, as well as from trauma and assault, and ensure that every option for treatment/services is consistently made available to those individuals before their release.

Appendix A – Enabling Resolutions - H6163 House Resolution

2023 -- H 6163

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

**JOINT RESOLUTION CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE TASK
FORCE TO IMPROVE THE LONG-TERM OUTCOMES AND REDUCE
RECIDIVISM OF FEMALES WITHIN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE POPULATION**

Introduced By: Representatives Solomon, Edwards, Kazarian, Casimiro, Spears, Casey,
Potter, Cruz, Felix, and Kislak

Date Introduced: March 17, 2023

Referred To: House Judiciary

WHEREAS, Incarcerated women are often young, single mothers from ethnic minority backgrounds who have little education, poor work histories, and are disproportionately low income. Mental illness, and high rates of PTSD and substance-use disorders, are common problems among female detainees who have often also been victims of abuse themselves; and

WHEREAS, The most difficult part of an incarcerated female's experience is often re-entry, when women must comply with conditions of probation or parole, achieve financial stability, access health care, locate housing, and attempt to reunite with their families; and

WHEREAS, Employment is only one of several major factors that plays a key role in the successful re-entry and rehabilitation of justice-involved individuals. Statistically, 60 percent of incarcerated women "met the cutoff for PTSD," while 80 percent met the criteria for having a substance-use disorder, and 60 percent had children; and

WHEREAS, Problems surrounding separation from children and family, lack of housing, inadequate mental health care, and insufficient substance abuse treatment during and after their imprisonment often contribute to increased recidivism; and

WHEREAS, Currently, existing services and supports are not fully leveraged to wholly assist individuals as they transition from a correctional institution back to the community. This creates significant gaps in care for Rhode Islanders who are exiting prison or jail and returning home to families and communities; and

WHEREAS, By investing in support for mental health and abuse, and by expanding diversion, parole and re-entry programming and housing, government can better support our communities and families as a whole by greatly increasing positive outcomes; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That a special legislative task force be and the same is hereby created 5 consisting of nineteen (19) members: three (3) of whom shall be members of the Rhode Island Senate, with not more than two (2) from the same political party, to be appointed by the President of the Senate; three (3) of whom shall be members of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, with not more than two (2) from the same political party, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom shall be a representative of the

Judicial Branch, to be appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; one of whom shall be the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (DOC), or designee; one of whom shall be the Director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), or designee; one of whom shall be the Rhode Island Public Defender, or designee; one of whom shall be the Rhode Island Attorney General, or designee; one of whom shall be the Chair of the Rhode Island Parole Board, or designee; one of whom shall be a former warden of the Rhode Island women's prison, to be appointed by the President of the Senate; one of whom shall be a representative from Open Doors, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom shall be a representative from the Formerly Incarcerated Union of Rhode Island, to be appointed by the President of the Senate; one of whom shall be a representative from the Center for Health and Justice Transformation, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House; one of whom shall be a municipal police chief, or designee, appointed by the President of the Senate; and one of whom shall be a representative from the Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers, to be appointed by Speaker of the House; and one of whom shall be the Director of the RI Department of Children, Youth & Families, or designee.

In lieu of any appointment of a member of the legislature to a legislative study commission or task force, created by a General Assembly resolution, the appointing authority may appoint a member of the general public to serve in lieu of a legislator, provided that the majority leader or the minority leader of the political party which is entitled to the appointment consents to the member of the general public.

The purpose of said task force shall be to acquire the data and methodology to formulate a detailed blueprint for a Request for Proposal (RFP), utilizing information from state departments and agencies to implement pre-sentencing and post-sentencing strategies for women transitioning in or out of the criminal justice system including, but not limited to: Examine best practices to improving the long-term outcomes and reduce recidivism of individuals awaiting sentencing; Ascertain intervention and supportive pathways and services; Calculate estimated costs for implementation of all programs; Provide costs and local participation policies and requirements for potential housing sources; Ascertain sustainable funding avenues and legal pathways to implementing policies and programs on the State and local level; and Differentiate the needs of those entering the criminal justice system and those transitioning back to the community following a period of incarceration. Forthwith upon passage of this resolution, the members of the task force shall meet at the call of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House and organize, and shall select co-Chairpersons from among the legislative members.

Vacancies in said task force shall be filled in like manner as the original appointment. The membership of said task force shall receive no compensation for their services. All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish such advice and information, documentary and otherwise, to said task force and its agents as is deemed necessary or desirable by the task force to facilitate the purposes of this resolution. The Committee on Legislative Services is hereby authorized and directed to provide suitable quarters for said task force; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the task force shall report its findings to the General Assembly no 21 later than February 5, 2024, and said task force shall expire on April 5, 2024.

Appendix B - Meeting Agendas and Presentations

These documents have been posted in the Female Recidivism Commission section of the Commission/Task Forces tab of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website:

<https://www.rilegislature.gov>

- **September 26, 2024**
 - Agenda (See attached)
- **November 8, 2024**
 - Agenda (See attached)
- **November 28, 2024**
 - Agenda (See attached)

Appendix C - Written Testimony and Material

These documents have been posted in the Female Recidivism Commission section of the Commission/Task Forces tab of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly website:

<https://www.rilegislature.gov>

- September 26, 2023
 - *“Women in Prison”*
 - Professor Rebecca Stone

- November 8, 2023
 - *“Analytical Review of Females held/incarcerated in RIDOC’s Women’s Facility I”*
 - Wayne Salisbury – Director, RIDOC
 - Keith Ivone, Principal Research Technician, RIDOC
 - Christine Imbriglio, Transitional Services & Discharge Planning Supervisor, RIDOC

- November 28, 2023
 - *“Lived Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated Females”*
 - Dina Bruce
 - Stephanie Boucher
 - Jill Mather
 - Kendra Johnson
 - Lasahara Newkirk
 - Jazzmin Andrade