

**MINUTES
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**November 10, 2015
5:00 P.M.
CONFERENCE ROOM D - COUNTY SQUARE**

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting date, time, place and agenda was posted on the bulletin board at the entrance of the Council Office and mailed to the newspapers, radio stations and television stations.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Liz Seman
Vice Chairman Joe Baldwin
Councilor Lynn Ballard
Councilor Lottie Gibson
Councilor Willis Meadows

COMMITTEE MEMBER(S) ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Jeffrey D. Wile, Assistant County Attorney
John Vandermosten, Interim Assistant County Administrator
Debbie Templeton, Administrative Assistant
Helen E. Wood, Clerk to Public Safety Committee

OTHERS PRESENT:

Greg Stewart, Agent in Charge Probation and Parole Office
Stevie Simmons, Agent Probation and Parole Office
Meredith Wood, Agent Probation and Parole Office
Jocelyn Jones, Offender Supervision Specialist Probation and Parole Office
Trevor Whitfield, Agent Probation and Parole Office

CALL TO ORDER:

Liz Seman
Chairman

INVOCATION:

Willis Meadows
Councilor

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

ACTION: Councilor Lottie Gibson moved to approve the minutes of the Committee on Public Safety and Human Services' meeting of October 13, 2015. Motion carried unanimously by all Council members present.

PROBATION AND PAROLE OFFICE OVERVIEW

Agent in Charge of Greenville County Probation and Parole Office, Greg Stewart, explained that Probation, throughout the state, has an office in every county. Greenville County has the largest office and is staffed with 52 employees. Solicitor, Walt Wilkins, has a backlog of 30,000 warrants in any given court term. He prosecutes 15,000 of these yearly. As a result, the Greenville County Probation office receives 2,000 new admissions in a year. These numbers are twice the volume of Richland County. Probation and Parole is the sentence of choice under most circumstances. The alternative sentence would be the South Carolina Department of Corrections.

The mission of the Probation and Parole Office is to offer to each new admission a second chance on life.

The national success rate for those sentenced to Probation and Parole is 66%. The Greenville office of Probation and Parole has a 73% success rate. Repeat offenders and felons account for 27% of cases that are unsuccessful. Agents have an average of 1 ½ years to assist clients through Probation and Parole. Assistance is given through drug and alcohol abuse classes, work readiness classes, life and work skills classes, adult education and GED readiness. Most clients are initially offered the drug and alcohol abuse classes as about 65% test positive for drugs upon admittance. The majority of clients are reading below an 8th grade level. These clients would participate in adult education, rather than the GED prep classes. Probation and Parole also works diligently to place clients in jobs in order for the clients to take care of themselves and their families upon completion of the sentence. Most clients find success in jobs within the hospitality, construction, and restaurant industries. There are multiple referral services throughout Greenville County that assist Probation and Parole clients with their needs.

Agent in Charge, Greg Stewart, thanked the Public Safety Committee for all they do for the people of Greenville County. He admitted that the Probation and Parole Office couldn't do what they do without the efforts of Greenville County Council. Agent Stewart asked for diligence in bringing low tech jobs to the Greenville area as these are the jobs that could be filled by the Probation and Parole clients.

Councilor Gibson asked if Probation attempts to gain employment for each of their clients. Agent Stewart answered affirmatively, but explained that the first issue to resolve is that of drug and alcohol dependency.

Vice Chairman Baldwin inquired as to how Probation deals with businesses not wanting to hire people with criminal records. Agent Stewart conceded this was an issue. He advised the committee of legislation currently underway in the State House which would make some General Sessions charges eligible for expungement. Currently, only magistrate court charges are eligible for expungement. No General Session charge is able to be expunged. This change in legislation would allow some clients to seek employment with a clean criminal record. This is a future resolution to an immediate problem. At present, some clients may gain a pardon from the governor through the Probation and Parole Office. However, these charges would remain on their record with note of the pardon.

Councilor Meadows said he would oppose a blanket expungement of General Session charges. He explained that business owners are ultimately responsible for whom they hire and they need to know if they have criminal records. Agent Stewart explained that limits could be set and certain General Session charges would remain ineligible for expungement.

Councilor Ballard questioned how it is decided who is sentenced to probation and who is sentenced to jail time. Agent Stewart replied that Probation is the sentencing option for every county in the state. The majority of people who go through General Sessions court go to Probation and Parole to begin supervision.

Vice Chairman Baldwin asked if Columbia Farms would be an eligible employer for Probation and Parole clients. Agent Stewart replied that Columbia Farms and certain other businesses do allow for the hiring of people who may have a criminal record. Vice Chairman Baldwin inquired if there was a reason a physically capable person could not find some type of work. Again, Agent Stewart said his office has to first treat any addiction that the client may have. The type and severity of the addiction will determine how quickly employment can be found.

Chairman Seman thanked Agent in Charge, Greg Stewart for his overview of Greenville's Probation and Parole Office.

ADJOURNMENT

ACTION: Chairman Liz Seman moved to adjourn the meeting of the Committee on Public Safety and Human Services. Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 5:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Templeton, Administrative Assistant