

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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The Maine State Prison Board of Visitors

Annual Report 2018

Date: December 30, 2018

To: Warden Randall Liberty, Director Ben Beal, Commissioner Dr. Joseph Fitzpatrick, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee for Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

From: Perry Gates, Chair, ex officio as of December, 2018.

The Maine State Prison Board of Visitors met four times during 2018; however, with unscheduled moves, retirements out of state, planned absences and long travel distances for some members (4 hours one way) the membership at the meetings was three at most and occasionally only two. Retirements from the Board and conclusion of terms of service reduced membership to two active members by late November. A third member was recently reappointed by Governor LePage. The diminished numbers, while disappointing, are circumstantial and in no way detract from the Board's expanding enthusiasm for the exemplary, trend setting reform work performed by the Warden and his administrative staff. Clearly, the Board has management issues that will be addressed at our first meeting on January 15, 2019.

What follows is a summary of notes taken for personal reasons with no thought given at that time to the possible responsibility for preparation of this report.

Here we go!

Lack of vocational training (access to vocational training) remains an inmate concern both at MSP and Bolduc Correctional Facility. As reported

by inmates in early December, no vocational instructors were employed at Bolduc. They all left. For many inmates vocational training is preferable to the college or HiSet opportunities offered at both institutions. A substantial inmate majority neither qualify for, nor desire to attend the college programs and, therefore, they feel ignored and underserved in the corrections process without vocational training.

As reported by DW Magnusson for the 2nd quarter of 2018, 26 of 78 HiSet inmate students are ready to move on to college level work. The success of the college level education programs is almost beyond belief. Over a 10 year period, of the 102 graduates and the 75 who have been returned to the general community only one (1) has returned to MSP that we know of. That is a recidivism rate of 0.9 %. How's that for public safety! Compared to a national average recidivism rate of 67% and it is clear that through college education MSP - Bolduc offer a corrections strategy that works!

Also, please note that college education programs are inspired exclusively by initiatives from outside the DOC. The overall success is embraced by the DOC; however, we are unaware of any plans for future funding should private foundations, Maine's University system, and Second Chance Pell grants end. Similarly, the introduction of Hospice programming at MSP is paid for by outside funding with no plans that we know of to pick up the slack after 15 years of success. In our opinion, the legislature must, at the very least, set aside line item funding that pays for an annual % of all programs brought in from outside the prison system. Public safety is at issue here. That is our job.

Please see last year's Board of Visitors annual report for inmate concerns about the Disciplinary Board (D-Board) process. Although a subcommittee has been appointed with the Warden's review, it seems structurally unwieldy that only one person within the guard hierarchy makes decisions on these cases. We recommend a further review of the D-Board process.

Trust and fairness are the issues since it is their application that determines the overall behavior of the inmate population.

The continuing reduction of inmates housed in the Special Management Unit (SMU or "solitary confinement") is heartening as is the overall success of the Mental Health Unit. However, as of this writing, the BOV feels too swamped to enumerate all the extraordinary offerings brought in from the outside by Warden Liberty and his staff. Probably the best way to summarize it is to ask the Warden for a table of contents of what he has introduced and then review that with him in a closed door session.

One serious issue does remain at MSP and Bolduc... and that is the short staffing. This is a major issue brought on as much by national economic trends as it is by local political chicanery. Earlier this month we heard that both institutions were short a total of 135 staff, corrections officers simply not there. Although the result is a nervousness about security within the prison, the overall cause for this reflects something far bigger. Young men and women do not graduate for high school or college or where ever saying to themselves: "I want to make a career in corrections." And it may not be that the starting pay is awful, or that the work is hard, or that public opinion is indifferent ... Working in corrections is not a desirable career track, whereas similar tracks in the military or state police forces are desirable. This disparity needs to be addressed. Let's start with some serious marketing, a serious understanding of what makes a career in corrections a process for personal growth. Let's provide professional development opportunities. Let's borrow pages from military career professionals to determine what links them together in their desire to serve. Let's replace broken institutions of punishment with communities of healing. Let's grow and take the next step so that people want to get into MSP rather than be sentenced to it. Attend one of our BOV meetings for a "good news" report from the Warden. (You will find that it rivals a brochure for Harvard :-). And then let's make that "good news" public.

In summary, with the exception of staffing for careers in corrections, MSP and Bolduc are in good hands and setting national standards for positive change. Come join us.

Respectfully submitted,

Perry Gates, BOV Chair ex officio, MSP and Bolduc.

Denise Altvater

Jon Wilson