

## May 5, 2025 Special Commission on Correctional Consolidation and Collaboration

### Attendance

- Meaghan Dupuis
- Bob Gittens
- Andy Peck
- State Representative Dan Hunt, Chair
- State Senator Will Brownsberger, Chair
- State Representative David Muradian
- State Representative Estelle Reyes
- Sheriff Nick Cocchi
- Sheriff Joseph McDonald
- Sheriff Patrick Cahillane
- Anthony Amore, *remote*
- Andrea Cabral, *remote*
- State Senator Adam Gomez, *remote*

### Approval of 3.31.25 Minutes

### Sheriff Presentation given by **Sheriffs Cocchi, Cahillane, & McDonald**

(slides available [here](#), titled MSA 3 31 25 Presentation)

- X. What Unique Roles do the Sheriffs have in Varying Urban & Rural Regions?
  - o Sheriffs are integral part of communities they serve; departments look different because regions look different across the state
  - o Sheriffs build trust and relationships with communities they serve
  - o Some individuals have cases in various counties
  - o Urban County Examples – see slides
  - o Sheriffs run safekeeps
  - o Rural County Examples – see slides
    - in Dukes County, the Sheriff office is the only holding cell on the entire island for the 6 island police departments, state police, and Edgartown District, Superior, and Probate Courts
    - Franklin County –
    - Nantucket County – Sheriff is main convener and authority on Civil Process; provides Meals on Wheels to seniors
- XI. How do the Sheriffs Recognize the Unique Issues Posed by Incarcerating Female & LGBTQI+ Populations?
  - o Sheriffs Excel in their Management of Complex Populations
    - Sheriffs go above and beyond to support specialty populations

- At the table on Commissions – Panel on Justice-Involved Women; LGBTQI+ Health and Safety Commission
  - Sheriffs’ Offices have the newest and most modern gender-responsive programming
- County Facilities that Hold Incarcerated Women
  - Barnstable (Regional)
  - Bristol
  - Essex
  - Franklin
  - Hampden (Regional)
  - Middlesex
  - Suffolk (Regional)
- **Chair Hunt:** Could you expand on regional holdup?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Regional facilities are set up for gender-specific programming. Regional facilities have deliberate emphasis for developing programming, housing etc. for females.
  - Contact visits for women and their children when there are no-contact visit policies at the facilities.
  - Programming targeted for female inmates.
- **Chair Hunt:** What about regionalization approach?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Separating women and children will not support reentry. Keeping women close to their families helps support reentry and family reunification. Consolidation will not be in best interest of women and their children if it is removing them from their counties and families. For every penny we save in consolidation, there will be consequences. In this regard, it will be more difficult for the women to step back into their mothering roles.
- **Chair Hunt:** I agree that separating women will be more difficult for family reunification, but I am interested in the logistics of how the regional units function. Norfolk is not on the list but it is a large county.
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** Norfolk should be on the list.
- **Sheriff Buckley, Barnstable County:** Barnstable houses women from Barnstable, Dukes, Nantucket, and Essex. The women in Essex were previously in Suffolk county.
  - Pretrial women
  - Sentenced women: make arrangements for visits. Work closely with Essex County Sheriff for reentry. When someone is sentenced and doing their time in Barnstable, they are working towards doing S.T.A.R. Program in Essex, and doing reentry work in Essex.
  - Most women do not want to reenter community they came from. We support them in their reentry wherever they want to be, just as we do for men.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Hampden County is regional facility in west. 260 bed facility, with 170 females currently there. It is driven by specific programming. When you

ask why facilities don't house women, it is because many facilities do not want to house women. If you have a male facility, the worst thing you can do is house women in the facility. There is reason that there are men that work in the female facility to help establish trust in healthy interpersonal relationships with males. The majority of women that come to facility are victims of some type. It is cyclical cycle that sheriffs see on daily basis.

- MA Bail Fund is good in theory, but when they post bail for any women under certain amount, the women are bailed out with no plan. Women often then call the person who is victimizing them to continue to do sex trafficking etc. MA Bail Fund needs to work collaboratively too.
- **Rep Reyes:** When a woman is reentering, how do you support them and ensure that moving somewhere new is not disruptive?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Incarcerated women continue their relationship with the children. Sheriff asks a woman where they want to go. We try to get them housing and employment, often on a bus line, and continue support services after they leave the facility. Women continue to come to reentry centers for support. Sheriffs offices continue the relationship. There is intense support to a person post-incarceration, which costs much money. This is important to remember as incarceration numbers decrease, because this post-release connection is intense.
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** From a regional standpoint, there is soft handoff from county to county if someone is reentering in different county from which they served their time in. This is handoff for wraparound services post-incarceration.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** There is a list of programs that sheriffs provide for Women in Transition in Education, Programs, and Vocation. The things listed on the slides is not comprehensive but does illustrate what is being offered to women incarcerated.
  - Western Massachusetts Regional Women's Correctional Center (WCC).
  - I hired a formerly incarcerated woman who has since earned her PhD. I have hired many ex-offenders to work in Hampden County Sheriff Department, as have many Sheriff colleagues.
- **Chair Hunt:** I appreciate the work you are doing, as I have heard of the great work and services being done out there.
- XII. How do the Sheriffs Address the Importance of Social Determinants of Health?
  - Sheriffs Focus Programming & Reentry Services on Addressing Social Determinants of Health
    - Sheriffs are intersection of public health and public safety.
    - Sheriffs bridge the gap upon reentry providing the tools and resources needed to improve overall health outcomes with the goal of eliminating recidivism.
      - Individuals meet with reentry teams within 72 hours of admission.
    - Focus on reintegration. Education, job training, affordable housing, health care access, and social support services.
      - Prepare individuals for successful release into their communities.

- Sheriffs don't just count individual touches/connections with individuals, but also look at quality of support offered.
- XIII. What Role do Community Organizations Play in Reentry Services?
  - Sheriffs Collaborate with Community Organizations to Provide Critical Reentry Services (Just a Sampling – See CJ CrossTracking Dashboard)
    - This is a sampling of what Sheriffs
- XIV. What Alternative Needs may the County Sheriffs Address?
  - Sheriffs Provide Numerous Alternative Services Above and Beyond Care & Custody
    - Operational support for large-scale public events
    - Free medical equipment
    - Ongoing recovery counseling
    - Honor Guard
    - Worcester County's annual coat drive distributes 4,000 new winter jackets to vulnerable populations
    - Adventure Based Programming at the Braintree Ropes Course
    - Student Health Fairs
    - Community Engagemt Programming Across Norfolk County
  - Franklin County Sheriff's Office: K9 – called out numerous times a week to support small police forces.
  - Plymouth County Sheriff's Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI): **Sheriff McDonald**
    - Service to supplement detective services, crosses county lines. Helps process crime scenes and help solve crimes. Towns do not reimburse sheriff office for this, but rather the work would not get done and crimes would not get solved. This is way of supplementing law enforcement agencies in Plymouth County.
- **Chair Hunt:** My hope is to find a better way to serve sheriffs and law enforcement. Sheriffs should be getting paid for things that they are doing in and across counties.
- **Sheriff McDonald:** Grateful that you notice we are doing this and noticing that regionalization of services is happening naturally. We should be looking into ways to do more of this as it gets more difficult.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** It is perplexing that all this data is available at your fingertips but we continue to talk about consolidation.
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** Over last 12 years, there have been 5 commissions that examine the sheriffs: 2013 Special Commission, nothing happened from that action. 2016 Consultants hired and found that some sheriffs offices were chronically underfunded, including my county, but no changes to funding were made. The 2018 CJRC included unfunded mandates. The Special Commission on Correctional Funding concluded its work in 2022. There is now the current 2025 commission.
  - There has not been one single commission focused on crime reduction during this same period. The Judiciary is not at the table.

- 9 voting members who do not have stake in the voting, and 11 nonvoting members, who do have stake in future.
- These various commissions have showed that the sheriffs are doing good work. The question before us should not be have the sheriffs earned their keep, but rather how can we support the sheriffs? The commission thus far has proven that the sheriffs have earned their keep. The question should now be how to support the sheriffs, and how to reduce crime.
- Reducing crime should the goal, but eliminating the sheriffs will not lower crime rates. Sheriffs uphold this work.
- Many remember the dismantling of MA state hospitals and the turmoil it caused the public. Dismantling the Sheriffs to save several million dollars will not reduce crime. Keeping our society safe should be the goal of the Commission.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Thank you, and I want to introduce Sheriff Perelman from Nantucket County, Sheriff Donna Buckley from Barnstable County, Sheriff Ogden from Dukes County, Sheriff McDermott from Norfolk County, and Sheriff Lori Streeter, who is interim Sheriff from Franklin County.
- **Chair Hunt:** Thank you, and it is not my perspective to be adversarial. The goal is to determine what barriers exists and ways to help the whole system better.
- **Chair Brownsberger:** I agree and we are not talking about de-incarceration in this commission. The conversation is how can the system best handle who the courts sends.

### Discussion Regarding Sheriff Presentation

- **Chair Brownsberger:** This has been a lot presented, and a lot more on the table. Probation will present in June and DOC will present in July.
- **Bob Gittens:** Thank you to the Sheriffs for this presentation that was well delivered with great information. It is helpful and great to see the great work that is being done today. I do not have preconceived notions on what the outcomes can be. The question is what we can do to reduce crime and keep our communities safe. I have several questions:
  - For regional facilities that house women, do they house both pre-trial and sentenced women?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** It is mixed. Some counties hold their women pre-trial while other counties send them to regional area for pre-trial. There is not one standard across the state.
- **Bob Gittens:** Another question is partnership and collaboration with others. ROCA is one organization that has been in the news with cuts in federal funding. I asked Roca if the services they provide in partnership with the Sheriffs will be affected by the cuts, and they said yes, they will be based on cuts. Would it be helpful to create spreadsheet that illustrates the cuts and effects on services?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** We can find some of this. In the near future, we will be put on notice for what services will be reduced. We don't yet know those.
- **Chair Hunt:** We can do this work to determine, too.
- **Andy Peck:** Some of this is funded through EOPSS and state funding.

- **Representative Muradian:** Thank you for a helpful presentation. Something that came up, including in the House budget debates last week: is there a conflict between all the programming offered versus the amount of time that inmates are spending on tablets allowable through no cost communications.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Each sheriff is slightly different, but we have not changed our policy on no-cost communications. Programming comes first. Nowhere did no-cost communications say no-cost communications anytime. The inmate is there to attend to the issue they are here for, including programming. Inmates can use phones at times when it is appropriate, at no cost to them, which inmates use, but the Sheriffs can regulate when they can use phone calls to ensure that inmates are going to programming. We are managing this well so far.
- **Representative Muradian:** K2 (synthetic marijuana) is another issue; can the sheriffs or others speak to this? What are best practices?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** K2 is synthetic marijuana substance that we cannot get ahold of because the formula changes regularly. It takes 3 weeks to train a dog to sniff, and in that time, K2 will change formula and dog no longer smells it.
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** Most places are photocopying mail because K2 is being soaked onto paper and brought into it.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** K2 in correctional institutions is our biggest nightmare right now. The high price of it leads COs to become victims to bringing it into the facilities because of the financial incentive. K2 is so dangerous because it brings psychosis into the mix. DOC has the same issue. This is issue with CO unions as inmates smoke it, and COs are getting affected secondhand from the smoking of it and the secondhand smoke effects. We do not have the answer on the K2 issue.
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** Scanning onto tablets is for personal mail only. For legal mail, we are not scanning it, but if it looks like it is not regular legal mail, we will call the attorney's office and ask if the attorney sent something to the facility.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** We don't read legal mail, but we do stand there when inmate is standing there and make them shake it out. We also confirm legal mail by BBO license number on the legal mail.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** There is a bill to make K2 in any form come in as Class D offense so we can charge the person trying to bring it into the facility.
- **Sheriff McDonald:** It is not currently listed as chemical drug, which makes it difficult to prosecute.
- **Representative Reyes:** Which programming is the most important if cuts to funding is coming?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Since COVID, domestic violence is largest conviction type coming into sheriff facilities. The programming that addresses DV, anger management, substance use is so important, as substance use drives anger and DV. Substance use, including NA and AA, are important. Continued mental health support, and substance use services are important, because we can then work on long-term behavior changes, including DV programming. But without wraparound services like housing and employment, a person who leaves a facility will likely end back up in our facilities.

- **Meaghan Dupuis:** On the question of K2, as someone who worked in facilities and saw the disruption that K2 has caused, we have a clinical pharmacist who has done work on educating around K2, which I can disseminate to commission members. This work is being done
- **Bob Gittens:** Can you speak on gang-related issues in incarceration?
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** Smart classification of separating gang members was easier in 1990s and early 2000s because we were looking at national gangs. Today, the most dangerous gangs are street gangs, which are done by geographic locations. It is young kids pulling triggers, and street gangs are driven by drug sales. In our facilities, there are technologies that do not allow one member to leave their cell until there is someone from another gang who is moving around the facility. Technology helps but there can be missed information. We do our best to avoid fights and if there are fights, that they are as least disruptive and harmful as possible. Sheriffs collaborate with one another to transfer an inmate for a calm down from gang-related issues.
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** There is classification process that is filtering process to ensure that rival gang members do not end up in same housing unit, in same classroom, etc. This is now done on the individual level.
- **Sheriff McDonald:** Even before classification, our booking officers can look at tattoos that are displayed and can determine gang affiliation. Many inmates self-identify with a specific gang for their own safety, as well. The COs have developed expertise regarding meaning of tattoos and gang-involvement.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** We have classification departments in each facility. Classification is a well-trained person making an educated decision on where person should be placed. These are experienced people making good, calculated decisions, but people do make mistakes. We must be careful in classifications, especially in those that trickle down and interface with public. At the same time, when we remind people that they have the chance for redemption, many incarcerated people step up to it. We use their institutional record when making classification decisions, as well.
- **Chair Brownsberger:** I wanted to take a minute to acknowledge that Commissioner Cabral is online, Commissioner Amore was online, and Senator Gomez was online and is now in person.
- **Senator Gomez:** I still live in neighborhood that is stigmatized as being Latin King neighborhood. Growing up, I would regularly have to tell police that I am not gang-involved, I am not a member of the Latin Kings. This was issue when I was running for office at a point. It is true that individuals do not identify with a gang, but rather with their block. There can be misidentified based on tattoos, including my brother who is a pastor. Being able to identify people based on their colors is no longer accurate now. These are tough issues that sheriffs grapple with. In early 2000s, there was a lot of sweeps and raids, a lot of young kids did not grow up hearing not to do things. For example, last year there was a shooting where a gang misidentified a car and shot it up, who was actually a police officer going to work. He is still alive luckily. K2 issue was recently brought up to the Black and Latino Caucus as an issue.

- **Sheriff Cocchi:** I recognize that we sheriffs are very frustrating, but there is no place in sheriff office for politics. Services we provide do matter, so it should not matter whether a sheriff is Democrat or Republican. Each sheriff should have arm on progressive/left side of corrections to help rehabilitate and help reenter. We must also speak from the right side of corrections, remembering that there are victims in the community left behind by their actions. I recognize we speak out of both sides of our mouths. The community resonates with the sheriffs. We need to be respectful and responsive to the members we serve, to the people we incarcerate, and to the larger communities we serve. When we do post-incarceration engagement, it is to prevent future incarceration. We must also focus on community providers who are providing free services to the sheriffs and hope that these services are not cut.
- **Chair Hunt:** One slide mentioned sheriff collaboration with RMV. I have seen several demonstrations about parolees coming out of facility with their ID. How do sheriffs work with RMV to get licenses?
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** In my county, we have staff trained so that staff can walk in with person to get their ID or driver's license. We start working with clientele right away. Most people do not have access to social security card, birth certificate, and ID. We begin working with them to get these documents. We have had success, but it takes effort on staff part.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** One issue we have in Hampden County is that a large population is from Puerto Rico. We struggle to get birth certificates due to a flood. We are considering flying someone to PR to establish relationship to get birth certificates from PR so we can help people get jobs. There are also \$40 fees for birth certificates. This funding used to be paid by commissary funds, but this is no longer
- **Senator Gomez:** This is going to be exacerbated by the REAL ID requirements, because now if an individual gets out and doesn't have birth certificate, they will no longer be able to fly to go get that documentation. Rep Gonzales and I have been working on this issue, as it has been almost 10 years since Maria. We are working on this issue.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** We also find that birth certificate is not accurate to exact date of birth; might be a week late.
- **Senator Gomez:** Secondary last name is also issue. When someone comes over, they may do away with last name, which makes it difficult because their name does not match up with the birth certificate name.
- **Sheriff Cahillane:** RMV has come a long way to accommodate these issues. They have established MOU with most facilities for a point of contact to work through these issues, but this is just one piece of the puzzle. Scheduling that RMV is navigating with REAL ID has created an additional burden. Sheriffs cannot solve everything but doing the best they can with what we can control.
- **Chair Hunt:** The entire point of commission is to figure out ways to make your lives easier. The RMV has come a long way, but if there are other ways we can help make this relationship easier, we are open to that.
- **Sheriff Cocchi:** RMV is working hard, but laws change. Unintended consequences of law changes, including REAL ID, have unintended consequences. The people who need



REAL IDs more than anyone are justice-involved individuals, and many do not have the proper documentation. We are going to continue to work at this.

#### Next Steps

- **Chair Brownsberger:** We have had a good discussion on the good work that the sheriffs are doing to take care of offenders in MA. Probation will present at our June meeting, and DOC will present at our July meeting. We hope we can stick to that schedule. I don't think we can address the Friday meeting issue for the summer, but we can try to move the schedule around for future meetings. There are deeper questions in the background, but I think we need to hear presentations from DOC and Probation

Motion to adjourn.

Next meeting on Friday 6/11 at 11AM.