



Okaloosa County Public Safety Coordinating Council

Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting: January 2021 12:00 PM

**Courthouse Annex Extension, Fort Walton Beach/
Zoom**

Public Safety Coordinating Council Members

Present	Name	Agency
x	Paul Mixon	Board of County Commissioners
x	C. Eric Esmond	Chief Corrections Officer
x	Judge Gontarek	Circuit Judge
	Judge Grinsted	County Judge
x	Jay Jones (Jeremy Miller)	Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Designee
	April Madden	Assistant State Attorney
x	Charles Russell	Assistant Public Defender
x	Robert Kemp	Circuit Administrator, Florida Department of Corrections, Probation and Parole Services
x	Kelli Huckabee	Pretrial Services
	Tina Ferland	Judicial Corrections Services, County Probation Provider

Other Attendees:

Craig Coffey-Deputy County Administrator
 April McDaniel, Captain, Department of Corrections
 Tammy Matthews, Department of Corrections
 Desiree Hartwig, Department of Corrections
 Dennis Knighten, Department of Corrections
 Susan Priddy, Corizon Health Services, Department of Corrections
 Larry McFarland, Bridgeway Center, Inc.
 John Anderson, Okaloosa Clerk of Court Office
 Valerie Broxson, Clerk of Court Administration
 Janice George, Big Bend/Department of Children and Families
 Robin Wright,
 Cassie Reed,
 Ken Lapee,
 Dale Carter,
 Julie Gaither,

Meeting opened at 12: pm.
Meeting conducted via Zoom.

Welcome:

Chief Esmond opened the meeting.

Minutes/Commissioner Report

1.
 - a. The minutes were approved as sent.
 - b. Commissioner Mixon was having technical difficulties and was not on the Zoom call at the start of the meeting; once he joined the meeting, he welcomed everyone and asked that Chief Esmond continue to Old Business.

2. **Old Business**
 - a. Chief Esmond opened for questions on the previous COVID-19 status and standards; no questions were posed by the attendees. Chief Esmond indicated new standards and information related to COVID-19 would be discussed later in the meeting.

 - b. Chief Esmond opened for questions regarding the expanded court docket; no questions were posed by the attendees. Chief Esmond indicated that the department is looking to continue limiting transports for court appearances. There will be some follow up discussion with Mr. Coffey regarding additional hearing rooms at the jail.

 - c. Chief Esmond indicated that the department has done an excellent job expanding inmate programs, however, programs have been recently scaled back due to COVID-19 precautions. Reintroduction of programs will be considered on February 1st, as positive cases within the department are lessening.

 - d. The proposed meeting schedule for the remainder of 2021 (04/29, 07/29, 10/28) was approved.

3. **Jail Report**
 - a. Chief Esmond presented the statistics report and opened it for questions; no questions were posed by the attendees regarding the statistics report.

4. **Pretrial Services Report**
 - a. Ms. Huckabee reported that the GPS cases are still the highest they have ever been. She summarized the data for 2020 reporting that there were 33 individuals enrolled in the mental health diversion program. 15 participants successfully completed the program while 10 participants were unsuccessful. Of the 15 who completed the program, four were rearrested. She indicated that the legislature continues to support the program going forward.

5. **New Business**
 - a. Chief Esmond shared that the department and Corizon will be initiating a pilot program for tele-nursing at the jail. The department is at the forefront of many things where inmate medical services are concerned due to the newly acquired dual accreditation and the ongoing professional relationship with Corizon, as the two have been partnered since 2003. The pilot program aims to determine how many nursing services (and to what extent) can be performed and accomplished off-site. Any services able to be performed off-site in this manner will be paramount should short staffing occur due to COVID-19. Ms. Priddy indicated that Corizon is very excited for the

program. A corporate team from Corizon will be providing the necessary equipment for them to set up beginning on Monday, February 1st. This tele-nursing program has the potential to be launched nationwide if successful here in Okaloosa County.

- b. Chief Esmond indicated that he spoke with Sheriff Aden last week regarding the strategy for Spring Break 2021. He has conducted some research regarding colleges in other states whose students typically matriculate to our area for Spring Break. Some schools have restricted travel for Spring Break while others have not. Previously, Sheriff Ashley wanted Spring Breakers to feel the full effect of any crimes committed; as a result, most were booked and processed through the department, albeit many were quickly bonded out. Sheriff Aden reportedly wants to modify this process; the plan is to issue notices to appear rather than processing everyone through the jail; Chief Esmond agreed with this plan, as booking and processing all these individuals (597 two years ago) has tremendous impacts on the department and would also increase the chances of introducing COVID-19 into the jail. Commissioner Mixon indicated that he does not want to advertise to Spring Breakers that they can “come here and do whatever they want.” He stated that there will be a back-up plan in place; the county would be willing and able to set up a processing center elsewhere in the county and/or go back to processing Spring Breakers through the jail if needed to ensure that Spring Break does not get out of hand as it was before Sheriff Ashley’s new approach.

- c. Chief Esmond reported that review and adjustments as to COVID-19 are a daily exercise for the department in order to ensure proper housing for quarantine and isolation to mitigate the spread. This has been extremely challenging for the department due to the population. At the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, the jail population was drastically reduced to the mid 400’s, which gave the department leverage as to housing; however, it has since climbed back up into the 700’s which is well over the jail capacity. As of today, there are only 5 positive inmates. Chief Esmond recognized that all facets of the judiciary have been impacted and thanked them for assisting the department to deal with some of these overpopulation and housing issues. Captain McDaniel corrected the positive cases and indicated that there are only 3 individuals isolated at this time, which is a positive thing for the department. She pointed out that those individuals are housed with other inmates, however, as the department does not have the ability to completely isolate them. She outlined some of the current procedures regarding quarantine (14 days for new commits) and isolation periods. She indicated that female housing presents unique challenges, as there are already limited housing sections for female inmates; the department is transitioning to utilizing male housing for female new commits, but this is not easy to facilitate. Housing is constantly being manipulated to ensure safety and the increasing population only adds to the challenges the department faces. Chief Esmond clarified that that the concerns which have been raised by the department regarding the increasing population are not out of convenience, but safety. As of today, 1341 inmates and 450 staff have been tested for COVID-19. At this time, inmates do not qualify for the vaccine. Mr. Russell inquired as to vaccines for

the Correctional Officers. Chief Esmond stated that he speaks to the Public Safety Coordinator regularly regarding such, but there is not yet a definitive date. Ms. Priddy reported that the department is able to administer the vaccines and are prepared to do so as soon as they are made available to the population. Mr. McFarland advised that his staff recently completed their second round of vaccines and all were out sick; he suggested that the department stagger the officers who choose to vaccinate, as it is likely they will get sick following the second vaccine, which could create severe staffing issues.

- d. Chief Esmond reported the retirement of Captain Hanratty, who has completed 30 years of service with the department. He encouraged anyone who comes in contact with Captain Hanratty to express their gratitude.
- e. Judge Gontarek reported that jury trials have been suspended for an additional 2 weeks. He has cancelled all his civil jury trials through the summer and filled them with miscellaneous court dates to address pleas, bonds, etc. The chief judges have been discussing allowing the family law judges to assist in facilitating criminal trials. The judiciary has also increased those able to get out of jail on probation and/or bond and allowed certain individuals with medical conditions to be released on their own recognizance to assist the department with population control.
- f. Ms. Reed advised of a 2010 administrative order which has the ability to eliminate warrants for technical violations of probation; notices to appear may be used instead for supervisees who meet certain criteria. They plan to utilize this order more widely than they have in the past to decrease those coming into jail for technical violations of probation.
- g. Mr. Russell indicated the PD's office has had some issues with scheduling and/or facilitating video calls through Securus. Captain McDaniel reported that the department is unaware of any systemic issues with Securus, but that some inmates do lose access to those privileges due to behavior; however inmates should always be able to speak with their attorneys and attorneys are able to call or email Christy Rogers if there are issues with visitation. Captain McDaniel will also provide some additional points of contact in the event Ms. Rogers is not available.
- h. Mr. McFarland shared that there is a new grant available which supports diversion programs. The grant offers 100k for the first year for planning and 400k for implementation each of the next three years. The County must be the entity to apply and the application is due in March of 2021; Bridgeway will be meeting with the appropriate County personnel regarding such. He believes this grant will increase the numbers of those engaged in the diversion program. He reported that CARES funds were received to support aftercare for the current diversion clients and believes this will assist in lowering recidivism rates.
- i. Commissioner Mixon stated that he is hopeful the next meeting will be in person. He reported he has been working with Chief Esmond and the

department regarding putting together a team to work on addressing jail improvements. He would like to see the department as a whole (medical, programs, and facility) be something other counties wish to emulate. This team will be addressing the facility piece.

Meeting ended at 1: .