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A PROPOSAL FOR THE PLANFUL RE-INTEGRATION OF EX-OFFENDERS INTO THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

**Submitted by the Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center
Community Advisory Board**

INTRODUCTION

The Chaney Center

The Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center is a community correctional facility located at 2825 N. 30th (at Fond du Lac Ave.) that commenced operations on May 19, 2000. Currently, it houses 107 residents, of which 57 are on full-time work release and eight inmates are involved in the FDOATP Program (Felony Drug Offenders Alternative to Prison Program).¹ Inmates involved in this stringent program (see footnote # 1) are eligible for the program only if they have had no prior adult or juvenile prison commitments, have been convicted of possession/intent offenses not involving the use of a firearm, have had no prior sexual assault histories, do not present as an unreasonable assaultive risk to the community, and are assessed as being likely to benefit from treatment. As promised by the Department of Corrections (hereinafter "DoC"), some of these same stringent themes comprise a framework for the eligibility of all other inmates domiciled at the Chaney Center. Sexual predators, for example, and again as promised by DoC, are ineligible for placement at Chaney. Additionally, eligible inmates must have been assessed by DoC as being those most likely to be successfully re-integrated into their families and neighborhoods. Community organizations located in the vicinity of the prison, and individuals such as Mr. Felmers O. Chaney, were promised, prior to construction of the prison, and as a condition for their endorsement to build the prison, that Chaney's inmates would constitute an elite echelon of the Wisconsin prison population (community custody inmates ready for re-integration). DoC, during 1999-2000, in fact, promised various community organizations and individuals, in exchange for their support to build the prison, that substantive family/neighborhood re-integration mechanisms would be made available to all Chaney inmates. DoC also promised, as a condition for the support of the Sherman Park Community Association, that an independent advisory group of Milwaukee citizens would be formed at Chaney to work in conjunction with DoC.

Felmers O. Chaney Community Advisory Board

The Chaney Center's Community Advisory Board, hereinafter "FCAB," was formed in 2000, for the purposes of: Identifying and encouraging adoption of

¹ The main features of the FDOATP Program include: (1) One year condition-of-probation commitment in the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF); (2) Three to five years probation; (3) 4.5 months to 6 months commitment at the MSDF; Minimum of 45 days at Felmers Chaney Correctional Center; (4) Minimum of 6 month enhanced probation supervision; (5) Needs and risk assessment, development of Individualized Service Plan, assignment to a FDOATP Probation/Parole agent, random urinalysis, cognitive behavioral restructuring, community restoration, adult education, cognitive-based AODA treatment, pre-employment and job retention skill training, life skills, family program, fatherhood program, community involvement, recreation/stress-reduction activities, individual counseling, mentorship program, minority offenders' cultural issues support group, voluntary spiritual-based support group, securing of employment, securing of education, 60 hrs. of community service, family or transitional-living residence, electronic monitoring for a minimum of 60 days, cognitive behavioral restructuring and AODA aftercare, participation in the Repeat Offender Prevention Enforcement Program (ROPE Program), and weekly contact by offender's probation agent with offender's family and/or significant other and employer.

correctional policies, procedures, and programs that enhance the rehabilitation and community re-integration of inmates; identifying and promoting policies, procedures and programs with businesses, schools, churches, and other organizations that serve to enhance the attainment of desirable inmate rehabilitative and community re-integrative goals; and encouraging policies, procedures, and programs that harmonize the Chaney Center's relations with indigenous neighborhood residents. Additionally, FCAB also concerns itself with any safety issues associated with the Chaney Center that pertain to the safety of citizens of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Community. This mission is accomplished within an advisory framework, only. FCAB is neither a rule-making nor a policy-making body for any aspect of the Chaney Center's operations, nor is it a rule-making or policy-making body for any aspect of the operations of the Department of Corrections.

THE CHALLENGE

As noted by former DoC Secretary, Matthew Frank, in 2006:

“While serious and violent offenders need to be locked up for a very long time, the majority of offenders will some day return to our communities after they complete their prison sentence. Our three minimum-security correctional centers in Milwaukee house hundreds of male and female offenders every year in their last months of incarceration before they complete their prison sentence and are released to the community. While a primary focus of the centers is on job experience and employment readiness through work-release programs, the centers also focus on treatment, education, community service and other programs that help prepare offenders for their return to the community. The public is best served if these offenders are not only held accountable for their crimes, but also have the chance to become successful in the community after their return from prison, resulting in fewer new crimes, fewer new victims, fewer tax dollars spent on the criminal justice system and safer neighborhoods.”²

Implementation of re-integration initiatives enhancing prospects of ex-offenders becoming successful in their communities is an urgent matter when one considers that, in Wisconsin, 45 percent of all inmates will recidivate within 18-36 months.³ Although urgent for all inmates, it is particularly urgent for African American males when one considers that Black males, born today, have a one in three chance, compared to a one in six chance for Hispanic males, and a one in seventeen chance for White males, of going to prison during their lifetimes.⁴ In Wisconsin, Black males have an incarceration rate at least 12 times higher than white males.⁵ Absent substantive re-integration efforts, designed to increase prospects for stable employment and stable families, it is unlikely that improvement will be seen in regard to dismal present-day statistics trumpeting that about 70 percent of all Black children, and about 45 percent of all Hispanic children, are being born into single-parent homes. The racial composition of Chaney's inmate population has tended to be about 75 to 80% African American; about 16 to 18% European American, about 5-6% Hispanic, and no more than 1% Native American. The average age of inmates has been about 24-25 years. But individuals as young as 18 and as old as 55 have been domiciled at Chaney.⁶

² Matthew Frank, “Three New Superintendents to Lead DoC Correctional Centers,” State of Wisconsin, Department of Corrections, Press Release, February 2, 2006.

³ Matthew Frank, remarks made to the Chaney Center Community Advisory Board during the Advisory Board's business meeting of January 18, 2006.

⁴ Cf. Mark Mauer, The Crisis of the Young African American Male and the Criminal Justice System (monograph), The Sentencing Project, Prepared for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C., April 15-16, 1999: 18 pp. Also, see any of a number of synoptic reports done by Jerome G. Miller, of the Sentencing Project, available on the web.

⁵ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prison and Inmates at Midyear 2001 (monograph), 2001 State Incarceration Rates by Race Series.

⁶ Thomas Vanden Boom, George Rainer, and Tommy Hobson, “Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center Briefing Sheet,” Department of Corrections, State of Wisconsin, January, 2002: 5 pp; Gary W. Davis (Chaney Superintendent), “Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center Annual Report for 2000,” State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Division of Community Corrections, Wisconsin Correctional Center System, January, 2001, 14 pp; Gary W. Davis, “Statistical Data,” State of Wisconsin, Department of Corrections, September 28, 2000; 2 pp.

The Programs

As noted by the Chaney Center staff, in 2001:

“The philosophy of the Chaney Center involves assisting inmates in their effort to reintegrate back into their community and family. We assist in acquiring programming and other services needed to maintain a pro-social lifestyle upon return to the community. (Inmates) are provided with employment services to enable them to learn work skills and develop the work ethic to maintain gainful employment. Self-sufficiency and responsibility are greatly emphasized...(We) strive in our efforts to address the critical success factors for offenders. These issues include the development of stable employment, stable residence, alcohol/drug programming, strong support of family and others who will assist them in maintaining a crime-free lifestyle, and cognitive/behavioral intervention.”⁷

In order to enhance prospects for successful re-integration, the Chaney Center, which was built to house 100 inmates (50 housing rooms),⁸ has provided, among other re-integration mechanisms, the following:

- **COMMUNITY SERVICE** involved community bonding activities benefitting the neighborhood immediately surrounding the Center such as daily area trash removal; lawn cutting, and snow and trash removal for elderly or incapacitated area residents. Additionally, inmates have provided services to such groups as Project Return, Cross Lutheran Church, Neighborhood House, and the Avenue West Police Substation.
- **WORK RELEASE** (Inmates are supposed to be transitioned into DoC arranged employment after 30 days of incarceration). Off-site employment searches were accomplished via the escorting of inmates by Chaney security officers.
- **STEP** (Specialized Training and Employment Program) is a special program that teaches and assists inmates in seeking and maintaining employment.
- **FDOATP** was described previously.
- **AODA AFTERCARE** is a ten-week drug treatment program operated by Genesis Behavioral Services designed for inmates needing aftercare.
- **IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS** such as social security cards, birth certificates, I.D. cards, etc., in the past, were applied for following a program review held for each new inmate shortly after arrival.
- **ON-SITE COUNSELING** provided by Chaney social workers designed to increase inmate recognition of the impact of their crimes on victims, and in regard to family/marital counseling including counseling with wives and immediate family, has been provided in the past. Chaney, in the past, worked with the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization to assist offenders in rebuilding their family systems by working with all family members. Chaney social workers facilitated the support of inmates’ children, and the enhancement of inmate relationships with their children, by working with child support agencies. Indeed, Chaney reported that \$53,131.95 was provided by inmates, in 2001, toward their child support obligations.⁹
- **MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY** visits, allowing inmates twice-monthly access to reading materials, was accomplished via volunteer assistance from Project Return, and via escorting provide by Chaney security officers.
- **FAMILY VISITATION** once allowed family members to visit Chaney inmates for 17 hours per week.

⁷ Gary W. Davis (Chaney Superintendent), “Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center Annual Report for 2000,” State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Division of Community Corrections, Wisconsin Correctional Center System, January, 2001, 14 pp.

⁸ Thomas Vanden Boom, George Rainer, and Tommy Hobson, “Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center Briefing Sheet,” Department of Corrections, State of Wisconsin, January, 2002: 5 pp.

⁹ Thomas Vanden Boom, George Rainer, and Tommy Hobson, “Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center Briefing Sheet,” Department of Corrections, State of Wisconsin, January, 2002; p.5..

- **FAMILY DEVELOPMENT** funeral visits for immediate family, and emergency home visits, have been conducted on an as-needed basis. Home visits have also been arranged to obtain identification documents, clothing provided by family members, etc., because this (especially the provision of winter coats) has been viewed as an important re-integration mechanism.
- **RELIGIOUS AND RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING** involved community escorts, who were approved by Chaney Center staff and administration as being authorized to accompany inmates on off-site visits to churches (Sunday worship services),¹⁰ and to recreational activities, where bonding contacts with church and community members could be established during incarceration.
- **HOLIDAY VISITATION** allowed the family members of inmates to visit with inmates on the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas (including a Project Return Christmas Dinner and Christmas Family Night). Family members were allowed to bring holiday food to inmates, which was regarded as a particularly effective family and community bonding mechanism.
- **SHOPPING TRIPS** allowing inmates to purchase canteen items from off-site vendors was accomplished via escorting provided by Chaney security officers.
- **HAIRCUTS** allowing inmates to obtain services from off-site barber shops was accomplished via escorting provided by community volunteers approved by Chaney Center staff and administration and by Chaney security officers. Good grooming is an issue when inmates seek employment. The practice also was regarded as facilitative of community re-integration when inmates were accompanied/escorted to barbershops by pre-approved community volunteers.
- **OFF-SITE COLLEGE** enrollment was once permitted whereby inmates could attend classes offered at MATC or local four-year institutions.

Almost all of the re-integration mechanisms listed above have been eliminated, or sharply constrained, since 2002/03, thereby adversely affecting Chaney's ability to accomplish its expressly stated mission while also amounting to a renegeing on the promises DoC made both to community groups, and to individuals, in order to enlist community support for building the prison.

On another note, the success of measures such as those listed above takes time. We estimate that minimal time frames of 120 – 150 plus days of incarceration provides enough time to provide essential programming, for most inmates, prior to release. The pace of said time frames also reduce prospects for inmates walking away from the facility. However, currently, some inmates now are discharged from the Center after having spent less than 120 days (3-4 mos. average stay; only 20% stay 6 mos. or more), thereby undercutting Chaney's ability to achieve its mission of re-integrating inmates with their families and communities. Ninety days, for example, often is simply not enough time for effectiveness.

CHANEY ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

While re-constituting all of the afore-mentioned re-integration mechanisms would be desirable, members of the Chaney Correctional Center Community Advisory Board have identified several core re-integration mechanisms that we recommend be augmented, established, or re-established, forthwith. These include emphasis on the following:

- BIRTH CERTIFICATES
- STATE IDENTIFICATION
- SOCIAL SECURITY CARDS
- DRIVER'S LICENSES
- JOB PREPARATION
- JOB PLACEMENT

¹⁰ Cf. Jacqueline Seibel, "Inmates May Lose Church Opportunity: Clergy Urges Sheriff to Let Convicts Attend Outside Prayer Services," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 23, 2004, indicating that Milwaukee County Huber (work release) inmates have now been required to have a court order in order to attend off-site church services. However, Chaney is a state, not county, facility.

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- PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO JOB SITES
- HSED, GED
- ACCESSING THE COMMUNITY AND ITS RESOURCES
- PRE-RELEASE INCARCERATION PERIODS OF 150 DAYS ¹¹

Recent research indicates that, in Wisconsin, Black males with criminal records seeking employment have only a 5 percent chance of receiving a call back in reference to a job search.¹² Consider also that, currently, 46.8 percent of Black male Milwaukeeans (between the ages of 16 and 64) are jobless.¹³ Consequently, the importance of re-integration mechanisms, such as inmates being able to transition to employment during pre-release incarceration, via job preparation and job placement, and of being afforded sufficient time, during pre-release incarceration, to internalize re-integration values and principles, should be underscored. Critical components of being able to secure employment involve, in many instances, being able to procure birth certificates, state identification cards,¹⁴ and social security cards. Having a driver's license is often of utmost importance in maintaining the employment of ex-offenders who were employed previously as pre-release inmates on work release in locations unserved by public transport. Yet, particularly when inmates seek to restore their driving privileges, they often find themselves overwhelmed by a morass of regulations and requirements constituting a complex administrative journey they simply are unable to navigate without assistance.¹⁵ Driver's licenses need to be procured or restored while inmates are in pre-release incarceration if paying past due fines and using a volunteer's vehicle for the road test are all that are required. Wherever available, utilization of public transport to employment sites also is desirable rather than being transported during pre-release incarceration by prison vans. Off-site opportunities to complete educational programming, conferring GEDs or other educational credentials, constitute almost a *sine qua non* for some degree of employment stability after release, enhancing prospects for family stability. Exposure to and knowledge of how to access community resources gained during pre-release incarceration, too, can help to enhance possibilities for stability, especially during post-release periods of stress. Finally, the mechanisms recommended herein are consistent with recommended practices which combat recidivism that are based upon solid empirical research.¹⁶

Members of the Chaney Center Community Advisory Board are very hopeful that your organization will endorse the proposed recommendations set forth above on behalf of the community custody inmates housed at Chaney who have been assessed as being ready for family/community re-integration programming. All of the programs being recommended can be accomplished with reasonable safeguards.¹⁷ We thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,
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¹¹ While 150 days is recommended, a goal would be to not exceed one year of placement at the facility.

¹² D. Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record," *American Journal of Sociology*, V. 108, (5) March 2003: 937-975.

¹³ The Crisis (a bi-monthly magazine founded by the NAACP), Baltimore Maryland: The Crisis Publishing Co., November/December, 2007: p 6.

¹⁴ As noted on page 14 of a report of the Governor's *Commission on Reducing Racial Disparities in the Wisconsin Justice System, Final Report*, issued during February, 2008: "The State Department of Transportation and the Department of Corrections program should be expanded to serve inmates at all Department of Corrections facilities and aid inmate reintegration by ensuring that inmates who request them have a valid identification card before they are released."

¹⁵ Cf: Erica Perez, "A License to Drive, A License to Work," Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, April 11, 2007.

¹⁶ Cf: Seana Golder, et al., "Evidence-Based Practice with Adults in Jails and Prisons: Strategies, Practices, and Future Directions," Best Practices in Mental Health, Vol. 1 (2) Summer 2005: 101-132.

¹⁷ R.L. McNeely, "Reporter's Spin Confuses Prison's Real Purpose," Sherman Park Today, V. 31, No. 8, November, 2004.