



Meeting Minutes
Iowa Prison Industries Advisory Board
Friday, December 11, 2020
Meeting held online / conference call

Present: Dr. Doug Hillman, Jennifer Gardner, Bonnie Winther, Tim Diesburg, Helen Miller, Dan Clark.

Absent: Megan Ellsworth

Staff: Al Reiter, Ann Baughman, Ann Pollock, Bob Fairfax, Chad Squires, Clint Schmidt, Dane Sulentic, Jeff Bailey, Justin Opfer, Mike Lynch, Steve Forbes

Guests:

I. Call to Order.

Dr. Doug Hillman called the meeting to order at 10:02am on December 11, 2020. Ms. Miller joined the meeting during the discussion of item V.

II. Review and Approval of Previous Minutes.

The Board did not have a quorum at this point, and so adoption of the previous minutes was not considered.

III. IPI Staff Presentations.

IPI staff provided updates regarding specific topics within their area of responsibility:

- Al Reiter, Luke Fowler The new laser cutter in the Anamosa Metal Furniture shop.
- Mike Lynch 2020 yields and prices
- Ann Pollock How the Business Office team worked remotely, and working with FEMA
- Bob Fairfax A special project the commercial team worked on for textiles
- Chad Squires Homes for Iowa plans for delivery in 2021 and where we've delivered so far
- Clint Schmidt Projects installed at Brenton Skating Plaza, DM Skywalk projects, IME tear out.
- Dane Sulentic New apprentice programs for Advanced Machining and Injection Press Operator
- Jeff Bailey (Re)introduction of sewing to ISP
- Justin Opfer Canteen gift bags
- Steve Fowler/Forbes The Blue Belt

Mr. Diesburg asked Mr. Sulentic to provide a recent copy of the monthly apprenticeship report, and some information on the three new apprentice programs for an upcoming radio interview.

IV. IPI “Alumni Association”.

Mr. Clark described IPI’s goal to better prepare men and women for release, and that IPI will convene a small group of former program participants that have been released and returned to their community. This focus group of sorts will be asked to describe their reentry path, and what IPI could do to better prepare other returning citizens. Mr. Clark expects that some of the potential challenges may be outside IPI’s purview (dealing with addiction or mental health, for example), but others (using email and smartphones, for example) could provide IPI with improvement opportunities. Participants will be paid a per diem and reimbursed for their travel expenses. Pandemic-willing, the plan is to meet in June and December of 2021.

V. Racial Disparity in the CJ System, and the IPI Program.

Mr. Clark informed the Board that some program partners want to better understand IPI’s role in addressing the racial disparity in Iowa’s justice system. Although Black men and women make up about 4% of Iowa’s population, they comprise about 25% of Iowa’s state prison population. This 6:1 disparity is among the highest in the nation, and both IPI and its community partners are asking what can be done about it.

There was recognition by Board members that neither IPI nor the Iowa DOC plays a role in arresting, trying or sentencing men and women to state prison – this is the role of local law enforcement and the courts. But the DOC and IPI can affect when people are released from prison, primarily through the parole process, and the rate at which men and women return to prison (recidivism, which is reduced via IPI’s work training programs).

Mr. Diesburg described some of his volunteer work with reentry organizations in Waterloo, and related that indeed, some citizens believe IPI purposely has people arrested in order to obtain more workers. His advice was “education, education, education”.

Ms. Miller suggested that Mr. Clark reach out to State Representative Ras Smith, and that Ms. Miller’s work with Governor Kim Reynolds’ FOCUS Committee on Criminal Justice Reform showed the importance of working with employers to remove barriers such as an unwillingness to hire released felons.

Dr. Hillman stressed the importance of simply listening, that many of us have only a limited understanding of the concerns of Black men and women involved in the justice system.

Ms. Winther agreed that Representative Smith would be an excellent person to contact, and also offered to connect Mr. Clark with Former Iowa Rep. Deb Berry and KBBG radio in Waterloo. Ms. Winther related that racial disparity is also a concern for organized labor and specifically for the CWA, and that the involvement of men and women serving a life sentence, while important for mentoring and stability of the IPI program, can detract from the belief that IPI is focused on reentry.

Ms. Gardner reiterated the need to educate citizens and stakeholders that IPI is not “the system” since there can be wide misunderstanding of the role of law enforcement and the courts, as compared to the role of IPI and the Iowa DOC.

The Board then discussed disparity in certain IPI allowance levels, such as welders or powder coat painters. Mr. Clark stated that the DOC was developing the ability to compile data on allowance level by race using data in the ICON system.

Ms. Gardner asked how IPI fills an opening in welding, and whether the IPI application form indicates an applicant's race (it does not). She stated that IPI should not weaken its criteria for a good disciplinary record. Mr. Reiter described the process of accepting applications, which includes a counselor review, an examination by Mr. Reiter of the individual's disciplinary history, and then forwarding of the application to the IPI departments (shops) of interest.

Ms. Miller asked how open positions were posted, and stated that applicants of color need to perceive a welcoming environment. Mr. Fowler described the payroll system at Anamosa, which notifies all men in the IPI program of every opening. He further described that open positions are announced weekly on the closed circuit Channel 10, which is seen by all men in the institution as they're watching television. Mr. Fowler stated that these changes have largely eliminated the "buddy system" that may have been in place in past years.

VI. New Business.

There was none.

VII. 2021 Meeting Dates and Locations.

Mr. Clark recommended that the March 2021 meeting be held online, and that the June 2021 meeting be held out-of-doors at the Newton house building program. The September 2021 meeting would be held at Anamosa, and the December 2021 meeting at the IPI Showroom. Mr. Clark will recommend dates based on the Board's online poll results.

VIII. Adjourn

Dr. Hillman asked for a motion to adjourn, which was offered by Ms. Miller and seconded by Mr. Diesburg. The meeting was adjourned at 12:09pm.

Minutes submitted by:



12-Dec-2020

Dan Clark, Director

Minutes approved by:



Dr. Doug Hillman, Chair