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"Alternatives to the Corrections System"

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Alternatives, Inc.

Quarterly Newsletter

Fall, 2017

MISSION STATEMENT: We promote public safety and challenge offenders to become responsible productive citizens through firm, fair, consistent supervision, treatment, and education.

Criminal Justice Reinvestment: Will it Survive the State Budget Dilemma? – *Dave Armstrong, CEO*

Normally state revenue shortfalls occur when the economy is faltering, but despite a fairly robust economic performance and low unemployment rates, Montana's revenue has been well below expectations. Governor Bullock, as required, has notified the Legislature of the shortfall and instructed State Departments to prepare a roadmap for 10% cuts in general fund spending.

The Criminal Justice Reinvestment Plan is expected to save nearly \$70,000,000 over the next decade.

For the Department of Corrections, a 10% reduction translates into \$40 million over the biennium. This potential reduction comes on the heels of a legislative session that saw the passage of bills that overhauled parts of the judicial and correctional systems with an eye to reducing the number of offenders under supervision and consequently saving the State money. The adoption of the Criminal Justice Reinvestment Plan is expected to save nearly \$70,000,000 over the next decade, not by reducing current costs, but through the avoidance of future increases in expenditures due to uncontrolled growth in the correctional population.

The reinvestment savings are not expected to occur overnight as many of the reforms

will take time to implement and longer still before they impact the numbers in the judicial and correctional systems. Changing complex systems such as these requires upfront investment and with budget cuts looming, the question is "Can Montana afford to implement criminal justice reform?"

Cutting alternatives to jail placements (\$3-5 million) increases spending for jail beds.

As is typical, there is not a great deal of leeway in trimming the corrections budget. Corrections, which is funded primarily as a "necessity", does not have the appeal of K-12 education or support for the handicapped, addicted, or disadvantaged. That is not to say that DPHHS, for instance, is not bearing more than its share of cuts. The amount of the cuts to DPHHS total \$106 million, two and a half times those of corrections. The point is that it is extremely difficult to realize actual savings by cutting corrections. For example, cutting alternatives to jail placements (\$3-5,000,000) increases spending for jail beds. The effect of cutting nursing care, mental health counseling, and drug and alcohol treatment is harder to quantify, but without doubt impacts the numbers in the system due to recidivism. Community based treatment programs and pre-release centers tend to have lower per diem costs, cutting these bed spaces

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results in longer periods of and more costly incarceration. Correctional cuts always have the potential to adversely affect public safety.

Correctional cuts have the potential to adversely affect public safety

Without a doubt, Montanans are faced with some difficult decisions regarding the quality of life and safety of our communities. The State's budgetary woes may be temporary in nature, but it appears to be imperative that the Legislature participate in resolving the immediate needs. In the long run, the equally difficult topic of tax reform must be addressed.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT

- Federal Reinvestment Funds
- Reduced Parole Board travel
- Pre-trial programs
- Housing money for inmate re-entry
- Implementation of the Montana Interventions and Incentives Grid.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

- Ability to reduce DOC jail placements
- Timely pre-sentence reports
- Option to purchase Shelby facility in two years
- Programs at Pine Hills, Boulder, and alcohol & drug treatment program in former Bootcamp

PRE-RELEASE AND TREATMENT CENTERS:

- Nursing staff
- Mental health care
- Reduction in bed numbers
- Addiction counselors
- Low cost Transitional Living and Enhanced Supervision programs

Of RFIs and RFPs -

Amidst the discussion of the impending budget cuts, the Governor's Office released funding, for now at least, for several initiatives aimed at reducing the number of DOC offenders housed in county jails. The jailed DOC offender number fluctuates between the mid three and four hundreds, but is currently close to 350. The State pays the counties \$69.00-\$72.50 per day per offender and this rate has been a point of contention as many counties assert that it does not cover costs. Yellowstone County places its per day cost for jail inmates at close to \$100.00 per day.

The 2017 legislature appropriated nearly \$3,000,000 for jail alternatives conditional on the Department reducing its placements to 250 by January 1, 2018.

To place an exclamation point behind this appropriate, the legislature made an additional \$1,000,000 per annum in DOC funding conditional on achieving this goal.

In response, the DOC has issued a Request for Information for additional Transitional Living and Enhanced Supervision slots. More recently, two Requests for Proposals - one for Sanction and Hold services and a second for Relapse Housing, were issued.

All of the services have in common a cost per offender per day of less than the \$69 per day it costs to house an offender in jail. Enhanced Supervision services, for instance, are typically in the \$15-\$20 per day range and Transitional Living placements fall in the mid-twenties. No awards have been made to date.

DOC Officials and State Legislators Visit Board Meeting -

Dave Armstrong, CEO

At the October meeting of the Board, Alternatives, Inc. welcomed the Director of the Department of Corrections, Reginald Michael, Probation and Parole Division Administrator Kevin Olson, and DOC Facilities and Program Chief Megan Coy. Additionally, State Representative Jim Patelis and Senator Margie MacDonald were in attendance for the meeting.

Director Michael introduced himself and spoke about his 30+ years in corrections that started with the United States Probation Office in New York. He mentioned that coming to Montana in the face of a \$40 million budget cut was a rude awakening after having a \$2 million surplus his last year as Chief for a District in Florida. The Director expressed his strong belief that corrections should not be viewed as economic development, but directed toward the interests of reducing recidivism and enhancing public safety.

Kevin Olson followed by delineating the hardships resulting from having to cut the DOC budget. His division, of which Alternatives' budget is part, will face more than \$7 million in cuts which is the equivalent



(L-R) Megan Coy, DOC Facilities & Program Chief; Kevin Olson, DOC Administrator; Reginald Michael, DOC Director; Dave Armstrong, Alternatives CEO; Jan Begger, Alternatives COO, and John Williams, Alpha House Director.

of 50 probation and parole officer positions. The cuts have been spread throughout the Division. He likened this process of cutting large amounts of money on short notice to using a machete when a scalpel is needed.

Megan Coy thanked the staff of Alternatives for their working relationship with the Department. She indicated discussions with the Law and Justice Committee included access to mental health and chemical dependency services sooner in the correctional process.

Representative Patelis commented that he was very supportive of community corrections and complimented the work of the administration of Alternatives, Inc. and the staff. In his opinion, the days are gone when we can build our way out of overcrowding by constructing prison cells. Representative Patelis was the Chief USPO of the District of Montana prior to running for the legislature and so is well versed in correctional matters.



Kevin Olson, DOC Administrator; Dave Armstrong, Alternatives CEO, and Yellowstone County Commissioner Robyn Driscoll discuss jail overcrowding.

Community Service: Paying Fines and Paying Back -

Amanda Green, Beta Jail Alternatives Supervisor

Alternatives' Community Service Program offers a win/win for the community and client as it permits offenders to pay off fines while doing something worthwhile for the community each year. Nearly 550 clients perform over 10,100 hours of Community Service for 56 nonprofit and governmental agencies. The services these clients perform are valued at over \$82,000. Every now and then we hear from site supervisors about exceptional performance on the part of our workers. This past year we had a client with some developmental disabilities who was working off his fine for hours. After arriving at his site, a local nursing care facility, he quickly learned that he enjoyed working with the positive people whom treated him well. The site supervisor was so impressed with this client's work ethic and ability to care for the residents, that he asked him to apply for a permanent position upon completion of his hours. Shortly thereafter, the client's mother began working at the facility as well.



2017 Staff Anniversaries, 10 years -

Gwen Albrecht, Executive Assistant

With the opening of Passages' Women's Center in early 2007, Alternatives, Inc. had a hiring surge.

In 2017 we celebrated ten years of service given us by:

- Rick Cosgriffe, Passages PRC Case Manager
- Doug Dewitz, Sous Chef
- Georgiann Deckard, Alpha House Screening/Disciplinary Coordinator
- Jen Bauer, Alpha House PRC Case Manager
- Carolyn Pluhar, Alpha House Client Advisor III
- Misty Reed, Passages Housekeeper
- Stephanie Kraai, Passages Treatment Assistant
- Lacey Stovall, Passages PRC Case Manager
- Julie Draeger, Passages ASRC Case Manager
- Richard Weidig, Alpha House Client Advisor III

Congratulations to all! Here's to another 10 years!



A celebration was held at North Park in September for Richard, Georgiann, Jen, and Carolyn.



An October celebration took place at Passages for Misty, Doug, and Stephanie.

**Congratulations to our newest Board Member - Bill Bullock,
Carbon County Commissioner - welcome!**



Robyn Driscoll: Featured Board Member

Yolawnda Henry, Human Resource Director

When you think of politics you should think of Robyn Driscoll. Robyn loves politics and has served as everything from campaign manager to former Senator. Robyn says she became interested in politics as a child when her dad was a precinct committeeman and he would take her to register to vote. While in college at Rocky, she did an internship in the state legislature and knew that she would eventually run for public office.

She was elected to the House of Representatives and served four terms, from 2005 to 2012 followed by two sessions in the Senate. Robyn was running for her second term when Bill Kennedy resigned from the Board of Commissioners in Yellowstone County resulting in her most recent accomplishment, Yellowstone County's second-ever female commissioner.

While Robyn is quite accomplished in politics, she starts her day just like most people by waking at 4:30 am each morning to peruse the paper and workout. She loves rugged camping (not glamorous) if there are no bears! Robyn has a 10-year-old grandson and she is an avid Boston Red Sox fan. Also, if you are having a potluck dinner or party at work, invite Robyn she is a fabulous cook and makes a mean Cajun Chicken Pasta dish.

"Dinner conversations often revolved around the political news of the day."



Robyn Driscoll, Yellowstone County Commissioner and Alternatives, Inc. Board Member

Stepping In to Help Out— *Tammi Reimer, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor*

On July 24, 2017, the wife and 8-month-old son of an Alternatives Inc. resident were involved in a two-vehicle accident at an intersection near Alpha House. The baby was pinned under the van. Several residents ran to assist and Client Advisor Richard Farnsworth and Operations Supervisor Jimmy Casas followed. Jimmy arrived on the accident scene and realized it was a resident's family in the accident. Residents Henry Boit and Jeremy Sims proceeded to lift the van off the baby while the baby was pulled away from the wreckage. When EMTs arrived, the resident was permitted to go to the hospital after proper authorization was received.

Many of the residents and staff were concerned about the child's welfare and welcomed periodic updates from the resident. It was eventually determined that the baby needed to go out of state for medical assistance. Residents Heriverito Anguiano and John Hendricks came into the picture asking if they could start a fund to help pay for travel and food costs. Word spread like wildfire! In the end, 17 residents donated \$440! When our resident received the funds, he was overwhelmed with emotion and did not know what to say. He was encouraged that there were so many people who cared, most of whom he did not know personally. He stated he was

blessed in so many ways including that his son will be ok and may get to come home sooner than first thought. He thanked staff for helping and for being supportive of him and his family. He plans to bring his son and wife to visit when they get back.

On July 26, 2017, Alpha House Director John Williams presented Mr. Hoit and Mr. Sims with Letters of Commendation recognizing their quick actions in lifting the van and possibly saving the baby from additional harm.

(At the time of this article, our resident's family members are home and healing nicely.)



Staff members present Resident Hoit with a Letter of Commendation for his assistance.

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