

Board of Correction  
Minutes  
May 10, 1988

A meeting of the Board of Correction was held on May 10, 1988, at the Rose M. Singer Center (RMSC) on Rikers Island. Members in attendance were Chairman Robert Kasanof, Reverend Irvine A. Bryer, David Lenefsky, Barbara Margolis, David Schulte, and Rose M. Singer.

The Department of Correction (DOC) was represented by Julian Prager, Deputy Commissioner; Francesca Digirolamo, Director of DOC Classification and Executive Administrator for RMSC Programs; Robert Brennan, Warden of the RMSC; Robert Rosa, Deputy Warden for RMSC Administration; and Marron Hopkins, Warden of the House of Detention for Men (HDM).

The Chairman opened the meeting at 12:45 p.m..

Richard Wolf, the Board's Executive Director, reported on two recent escapes from DOC facilities, one from the Bibby Venture and another from the Anna M. Kross Center (AMKC). He explained first, however, that there have already been five escapes in 1988, and that since May, 1987, there have been 15 escapes involving 18 inmates.

Mr. Wolf stated that on April 30, detainee Paul Buffafuoco escaped through an opening in the wall of the Bibby Venture, adding that the opening was created by mechanics installing an air conditioning system. He noted that the Bibby Venture's Warden, Eric Taylor, had stated to Board staff that he should not be expected to know everything done to the physical plant by the construction crew. The escapee, who was being held on a third degree burglary charge, was apprehended on May 2 at his mother's residence. Mr. Wolf reported that the escapee had a classification code of 10, whereas the Department had advised the Board that only detainees with codes of 6 or less would be housed on the Bibby.

Mr. Wolf also reported on the escape of [REDACTED] from AMKC on May 3. He stated that [REDACTED], a detainee awaiting trial on a rape charge, escaped by cutting through the screened window of his cell. Mr. Wolf explained that the officers in the inmate's housing area, although required to check for "live bodies" when performing counts, failed to discover that the inmate had placed a "dummy" in his bed. The inmate's escape, therefore, went unnoticed for approximately ten hours, from 12:30 a.m., when fence alarms sounded, until 10:30 a.m.. Mr. Wolf stated that [REDACTED] was recaptured in Astoria on May 4 at the home of his

girlfriend, but that it is still not known how the inmate managed to escape from Rikers Island.

Mr. Schulte inquired as to whether the Board had authorized the Department to house detainees on the Bibby Venture.

Mr. Kasanof responded that the Board had granted permission for "low risk" detainees to be housed on the barge, after agreement by the Commissioner to effectuate modifications in the physical plant and staffing patterns so as to enhance its security. He indicated that the escapee from AMKC represented a more serious risk to the community because he was being detained for a crime against a person rather than against property.

Mr. Wolf asserted that a number of problems with service delivery and security at the Bibby Venture were the result of the assignment of only a "skeletal staff" to the facility.

Mr. Wolf stated that he would look into the possibility that the Department may have informally modified its criteria for security risk classification of inmates due to difficulties in identifying a sufficient number of inmates with a code of 6 or less, thereby housing higher risk inmates on the Bibby Venture than the Board had been led to expect. He explained that although the Bibby has a capacity of 386, no more than 234 inmates have thus far been housed there.

The Chairman asserted that there has been a dramatic rise in the number of escapes of serious felons during the past year, and reiterated his belief that a direct relationship exists between this disturbing trend and overcrowding. He also explained that a decrease in attentiveness is a natural outgrowth of the increases in overtime for DOC staff necessitated by the rapid growth in the size of facilities and the inmate census. He contended that widespread deployment of Unit Management would aid in the containment of officer absenteeism and injuries, as well as enhance the quality of the surveillance and security in the jails. Mr. Kasanof noted that the report recently issued by the independent Use of Force Committee had recommended Unit Management as a method of limiting uses of force and inmate violence. He also cited the Committee's recommendation that DOC select an individual to oversee Departmental trials, a policy that he had recommended to the Committee and which had been endorsed by Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward. Mr. Kasanof added that Commissioner Ward had offered to lend DOC one of the Police Department's trial rooms for this purpose.



Mr. Kasanof introduced the issue of criticism which had been leveled against him in correspondence to the Department by William McMahon, Chairman of the State Commission of Correction. The Chairman stated that Mr. McMahon had been highly critical of his contention that the February uprising at AMKC was primarily attributable to the presence of a large number of State inmates in the City system. Mr. McMahon had written that Chairman Kasanof misjudged the situation in AMKC and had been misinformed about the causes of the riot. Mr. Kasanof asserted that he still holds the same opinion, based on the fact that after the riots of October, 1986, August 1987, and February, 1988, the State's removal of its prisoners from the City system resulted in a diminishment of pressure. He promised that the Board will continue to act in the public interest by voicing its concerns to the Governor whenever necessary, and that he will not allow the dispute with Mr. McMahon to interfere with the Board's normal activity.

Deputy Commissioner Prager reported that the Department has not yet responded to the correspondence in question from the State Commission of Correction, but added that his own views on the issue of State inmates are similar to those expressed by Mr. Kasanof. He also assured the Board that the Department is pressing the Office of Management and Budget more intensely for the widespread deployment of Unit Management, based on recent data that reinforces the positive correlation between Unit Management and reduced violence.

The Chairman called for a motion to approve the minutes of the April Board meeting. Such a motion was made by Mrs. Singer and seconded by Reverend Bryer. The motion to approve the minutes of the April meeting without alteration was passed unanimously.

Mr. Wolf then addressed the Department's request for the renewal of the existing variances. He reported that the current census of 15,472 represents 100.4% of capacity.

Mr. Prager asked the Board to keep in mind that 200 of the beds which are counted in the capacity of the Correctional Institution for Women (CIFW) are unavailable for use, due to the fact that the presence of a "mixed" population in that facility results in poor movement control and poor service provision.

Mr. Wolf reiterated that the Bibby Venture has been housing far fewer detainees than had been planned.

Mr. Prager responded by promising that the Department will continue its attempts to identify inmates who satisfy the "low risk" criteria established for the Bibby Venture.

Mr. Wolf stated that the Board had been informed that inmates with classification ratings higher than six would not be housed on the Bibby Venture, and asserted that the Department should have notified the Board if it intended to modify that criteria.

Mr. Schulte reported that he and Mrs. Singer, along with John Rakis, the Board's Deputy Executive Director, recently visited the Bellevue Hospital Prison Ward (BHPW). In addition to complimenting the leadership of Assistant Deputy Warden Robert Brinson, the Executive Officer of the BHPW, Mr. Schulte recommended that the Board lend its support to DW Brinson's proposal that a dining area for uniformed personnel be constructed on the ward. Mr. Schulte stated that, at present, officers are required to leave the hospital grounds in order to eat meals, a requirement that obviously results in a substantial waste of time. He also pointed out that the construction of such a dining area would require only that a single partition be erected near the current visit area.

Mr. Kasanof expressed his agreement with Mr. Schulte's recommendation, and promised that the Board will lend its support to ADW Brinson's proposal.

The Chairman congratulated Mrs. Singer on the Department's decision to name its newest facility in her honor, and on behalf of the other members of the Board, he thanked her for her many years of dedicated service.

Mrs. Singer expressed her gratitude to Warden Brennan of the RMSC for assisting her to the facility and for helping her arrange the luncheon which preceded the meeting.

The Chairman mentioned that the Board members might want to reconsider holding regular meetings in July and August, stating that it will most likely be difficult to raise a quorum during those months. He suggested that, in lieu of regular meetings, the Board members could delegate voting authority to a subcommittee of members, or could convene telephonically whenever problems arise.

Mr. Wolf stated that the Department has made a request for an extension of all existing variances, and recommended that such an extension be granted. He then asked Mr. Prager to update the Board on the progress being made in the construction of the upstate facilities, as well as the planned opening date for the RMSC.

Mr. Prager responded that both upstate facilities will be completed by October of 1988, resulting in an addition of 1400 beds to the Department's capacity. He also said that the dedication ceremony for the RMSC is scheduled for June 20, 1988, and reported that the facility should be at least



partially occupied by the end of June. Mr. Prager also discussed the Department's plans for the Bibby Venture. He said that permission to utilize the barge at its current location will expire in August of 1988, and stated that the Department is in the process of seeking an alternate site elsewhere in Manhattan. Mr. Prager reported that the Department plans to eventually use the Bibby Venture as a base for the Work Release Program, adding that the required ULURP process at a new site is likely to take from nine months to a year to complete. He added that construction work on the pier cannot begin until the ULURP process is successfully completed.

Reverend Bryer asked for an update on the number of State inmates currently in DOC facilities.

Mr. Prager responded by stating that there are 90 "State-ready" inmates currently in the City system, 87 of whom are females. He explained that these State inmates are ready for transfer to the State system in the sense that they are at least fourteen days past their final parole violation hearing.

Mr. Schulte asked Mr. Prager to explain the reasons for the Department's confidence in gaining permission to utilize the Bibby Venture as a base for the Work Release Program, given the fact that the community near the present site has vigorously resisted such a concept.

Mr. Prager stated that though he does not foresee the Bibby Venture being "welcomed" by any of the waterfront communities of Manhattan, he is confident that the ULURP process can and will be successfully completed.

Mr. Wolf reminded the Board members that the Department also has a variance, pending renewal, which permits visitation and law library services for inmates on the Bibby Venture to be provided at the Manhattan House of Detention for Men (MHD).

Mr. Kasanof called for a motion to approve the extension of all existing variances. Such a motion was made by Mrs. Singer, seconded by Reverend Bryer, and passed unanimously.

Mr. Wolf then reported on the topic of violence at HDM, stating that the Board has been tracking violence rates at that facility as well as in the remainder of the system for several months. He said that over the last eighteen months, the rates at HDM have been consistently higher than the systemwide average.

Mr. Wolf also stated that the Department has requested a variance for HDM, and he asked Warden Hopkins to provide the Board with details.

Warden Hopkins reported that structural problems on one side of Block 8 have rendered the showers unusable for the past five months, explaining that all inmates are now showering on the other side of the block. The result is a ratio of 1 shower per 15 inmates. The Warden requested that a variance be granted to allow this practice to continue. He also stated that current plans call for the construction of a shower area on the 3rd tier of the block.

Mr. Wolf asked if the plans for a 3rd tier shower area include a provision for an increase in staff in order to monitor inmate activity.

Warden Hopkins said that the plans did not call for any additional staffing.

Mr. Kasanof asserted that any plans to shower inmates on the 3rd tier would necessitate an increase in staff in order to maintain a safe environment.

Mr. Schulte stated that the Department would be foolish to proceed with construction without first making a commitment to provide an acceptable level of staffing for a 3rd tier shower area.

Mr. Prager stated that the Department, at this point, is only seeking a variance to allow all inmates to be showered on one side of the block. He said that any discussion of inmates showering on the 3rd tier can be postponed until a later date.

A motion to approve the variance in question was made by Mr. Schulte, seconded by Mrs. Singer, and passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m..

Following the meeting, the Board members were taken on a tour of the Rose M. Singer Center, as well as the Central Bing at HDM.