

INSTITUTIONAL BRIEFINGS

Four of the largest institutional state agencies have been engaged in long-term planning or a review of their services that could affect how front line employees do their jobs. Ohio Veterans Home could be coming under a new administrative arrangement as the state develops its own Department of Veterans Affairs. Stakeholders in the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation/

Developmental Disabilities have been meeting monthly to come up with a blueprint for how services will be delivered in the future, including the services provided at the state's 10 developmental centers. A study ordered by a federal judge shows reforms are needed in the Department of Youth services, including

more staff. A commission created by the General Assembly is meeting to determine the use and feasibility of re-opening the Lima Correctional Institution.



State Rep. Bob Hagan (left) and Lima mayor David Berger discuss the future of the Lima Correctional Institution during a meeting of a legislative committee.

VETERANS HOME

Two Ohio Veterans Homes would fall under the auspices of a new Department of Veterans Affairs, according to a report released in January of this year. The governor put together a task force a year ago to look at creating a cabinet-level agency in order to 1) better serve veterans coming back from overseas with disabilities, 2) to improve Ohio's ranking in getting resources to veterans and 3) to increase the status and visibility of veterans in Ohio. Ohio is ranked 43rd in funding for veterans.

In addition to serving hundreds of veterans in residential facilities in Sandusky and Georgetown, according to the report,

the new agency would serve as a central clearinghouse for personnel services and benefits to vets.

OCSEA, in general, is supportive of the move to create an independent agency, but has one caveat: Veterans' employment services be maintained separately, as they are now, in the Department of Job and Family Services. Currently, about 80 OCSEA members serve as veteran representatives in the state's One-Stop employment offices. The current set-up allows vets to access more than just employment services. For example, for veterans who have disabilities or multiple barriers to employment, other partners and agencies within that one-stop can be accessed.



DR&C

During first year of the new administration a lot of discussion has focused on Ohio's escalating prison population and severe shortage of staff in the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. While Gov. Strickland has no commitment to any changes, he does see the overcrowding as a significant issue.



OCSEA has been monitoring the committee's monthly meeting and last November, union members testified at a hearing in Lima. A consulting firm commissioned to do the study will release its findings in March of this year. The commission will then forward its recommendations to the General Assembly in April.

Meanwhile, OCSEA is awaiting information about the creation of a separate panel that would create additional recommendations about the prison system. The union has been mentioned as one of the stakeholders that would be involved.

MR/DD

The MR/DD Future's Committee has been meeting for the last six months to develop recommendations for the future of MR/DD services.

OCSEA MH/MR/OVH Assembly President Monty Blanton and Regional Vice President of the Ohio Association of Public School Employees Davida Russell serve as the two labor representatives appointed by Gov. Strickland on the panel. A total of 21 stakeholders serve on the committee and include representatives from the county boards of MRDD, ARC, the private providers, the League for

the Mentally Retarded, ODMR/DD, parents and others.

OCSEA is making recommendations to the committee that include the creation of intake units at each developmental center to protect long-term residents from those admitted on a crisis basis; alternative residential programs at each DC; and regional programs in each of the seven DC areas using DC staff and resources.

The Future's Committee is taking recommendations through February. To submit recommendations, email Blanton at wmb0001@yahoo.com.

MH/MR/OVH Assembly President Monty Blanton (right) is one of the labor representatives on the MR/DD Futures Committee. Facing the camera is ODMR/DD Director John Martin who chairs the committee.



DYS

Ascathing, court-mandated head-to-toe review of the Department of Youth Services issued early January describes the juvenile system as "dysfunctional" and verifies complaints OCSEA has been making for years.

The report was compiled by a team led by independent fact finder Fred Cohen, a nationally-known consultant on juvenile corrections appointed by U.S. Magistrate Kemp. Kemp called for the report in response to a class action case filed in 2004 on behalf of youth in DYS because of an array of poor conditions within DYS facilities including lack of safety, education, health treatment and rehabilitative programming.

"Most DYS facilities were found to be overcrowded, understaffed and underserved... Juvenile Correctional Officers (JCOs) bitterly complained about the excessive use of mandated overtime, a practice at least partly driven by understaffing, which we estimate to be 188 [full-time equivalent],

JCO positions," Cohen wrote in the report's executive summary. "Reduction of overcrowding, addition of staff, and richer programming is in the best interests of the youth and often overwhelmed staff." Cohen also called for a complete overhaul of DYS operations and services including improved training,

employee retention and pay, reporting and management.

Court officials are now expected to issue an injunction that would ultimately call for DYS officials to begin making major changes throughout the department. DYS officials have indicated support for some but not all of Cohen's recommendations. □



Members of the Lima Correctional Institution Study Committee composed of four state senators, four state reps and chaired by DRC Director Terry Collins meet to discuss the future of the facility.