



CSOR

*Though I have fallen,
I will rise. - Micah 7:8*

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The Pandemic and the Colorado Legislature **Susan Walker**

This year, a lot of progress was supposed to happen related to sexual offense issues. Both CSOR and AFC were active at the Colorado Legislature, testifying multiple times on a variety of issues from November 2019 through February 2020. Then the virus shut everything down, including the Legislature here in our state. What we worked so hard to accomplish came to a roaring halt as legislators left the law-making arena for safer locations – e.g. home. As they return, the biggest issue they will deal with is the Colorado Budget which is severely strained by the prolonged presence of the virus.

It is our strong hope that issues we raised and the presentation of the findings of the most recent Sunset Review, will not be lost in the effort to keep this miserable virus under some control and thus save lives. We believe that what was on the table for discussion and review before the Pandemic hit will not be lost as the next legislative session takes off during late 2020 and early 2021. An e-mail to Representative Mike Weissman, Co-Chair of Senate and House Judicial, confirmed what we believed to be true, that further work on sexual offense legislative issues would not continue this year, but hopefully will be taken up next year.

Because of Governor Polis' desires to decrease the number of incarcerated persons in Colorado, reduce the costs related to operating prisons, close the two private prisons that remain over the next few years, as well as his hiring of Executive Director Dean Williams as the head of prisons, we believe and have faith that these and related goals will be pursued in earnest. In addition to bringing down the numbers of those incarcerated in general, questions and concerns related to sexual offense issues in particular, especially the high costs of keeping people in the Colorado Department of Corrections so long waiting for S.O. treatment, the return of so many to prison for technical violations (a common one being "termination from treatment"), the overuse and abuse of the polygraph in determining if and when people can get out and other issues as well, are likely to be discussed.

One of the concerns brought up by the Sunset Reviewer was that people who had committed a sexual offense ought to be able to choose among all treatment providers in their area, where they wanted to go for treatment. Right now statute says that they can have a choice of two. We believe this is wrong and that people ought to be able to choose among all SOMB Providers within a reasonable distance from them – because the SOMB Reviewer felt this way as well, he did make this one of his recommendations. We will discuss other suggestions for change in a later newsletter.

There was a concerted effort made by an AFC member and financial supporter of CSOR, to bring about an audit of the Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB). There had not been an audit of the SOMB for many years, and various concerns from advocates, it was felt, needed to be brought forward for the legislature's review and consideration. It is our hope that the audit, which was to be completed this year, will be finished and available for review and consideration when the legislature re-convenes in 2021.

The polygraph continues to be an overused and believed in “assessment tool”. In reality, a recent study showed that its primary claim to fame is that it causes confessions regarding victims who may have actually existed, and victims that therapists believe are there but may not be there in reality. 80% of men interviewed in the prison treatment program Outside Evaluation in 2014 stated that they were coerced into admitting victims they never had. We look to the legislature for their insights and decisions as it affects our population during the 2021 legislative session!

This Too Shall Pass

Susan Walker

Who would have thought that the country that we love, that many of us grew up in, that is usually a reasonably nice place to live, would join the rest of the world in an event that has rocked our socks off in a sad sort of way! I for one, had not carefully perused future days, weeks and months, and considered all the people and things that would be lost to us due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. Sadly, too many have died and too many have been terribly ill. Too many of us have lost jobs or been quarantined for fear that we might have the virus and be spreading it around to others. This has been true both inside and outside of the prison population.

As we wait for the passing of this virus, it may be appropriate for us to carefully evaluate and give thanks for the life that most of us live when there is not a major Pandemic underway. For many places in the world, there are a variety of tragedies happening all too often. When I think of the Philippines and Puerto Rico, it is hard to think of their beauty before being reminded of all the weather tragedies that have happened to them over and over again. A number of African countries experience constant food shortages and sadly, starvation. Even the most routine prison food has to be better than starvation, but how does one even make such a comparison!?

My heart goes out especially to Sterling Correctional Facility and Crowley County Correctional Facility as the staff and folks who are incarcerated there are currently having to face the virus head on, at least in certain sections of their complex/buildings. As I have talked to the Deputy Executive Director of Prisons, and a variety of Case Managers, there is a continued work ethic committed to getting folks out of prison that are in poor health, are close to their MRD etc. Jan Hunsaker and I have worked very hard with prison staff, family members and Deputy Executive Director Travis Trani to solve problems such as: finding housing for those ready to get out; helping older spouses get hooked up with the people that may be able to help their also aging husbands who have a variety of health concerns get out sooner rather than later; assisting people who have lost property while being moved from other facilities to find missing property and see that it is returned to them, and so on. Through all of the transactions and inquiries, wardens and the various case managers we work with have been amazing in spite of being understaffed, overworked and just plain tired. At one point, meals and medicines were being delivered to the cells at Sterling to limit the mixing of too many people in the rest of the facility.

Inmate concerns regarding quarantines and Covid-19 testing as well as other issues, have been discussed with staff and leadership, and while answers are not always as satisfying as those incarcerated and their families would like, there has always been the willingness to discuss and look at specific situations of concern.

Please help us support staff in all of our Colorado Prisons and those incarcerated in those prisons as well, remembering them with our prayers and hands outreached to assist as we can. Any of you who have ideas regarding landlords that might rent to the sexual offense population, please let me know, as we never have enough housing! We will ask the tough questions if you can help us locate potential rental properties!

“And one has to understand that braveness is not the absence of fear but rather the strength to keep on going forward despite the fear.”-Paulo Coelho

**A Conversation with the Colorado Department of Corrections'
New Deputy Executive Director of Parole and Outside Operations**

Susan Walker

It was with great pleasure that I had a chance to meet via phone and talk with Ruth Coffman, who is new to the Department within the last few months. Ruth, originally from Boulder, went to Chicago for a while where she went to school, and developed an interest in public policy issues. After some time in “the windy city”, she saw the ad for the position with Colorado’s Department of Corrections (CDOC), applied for the position and got it, and is happy to be back in Colorado. Ruth has agreed to be our presenter and our “answerer of questions” at the next CSOR Meeting scheduled for Wednesday September 2, 2020. We have cancelled the June Meeting because of Covid19 and our inability to gather together in a large group.

Ruth is eager to learn more about our parole and treatment systems here in Colorado, and it appears that she will be a fast learner. She and I talked for a little over an hour today (May 12), and while we just discussed the “tip of the iceberg”, we are both a bit more aware of current challenges with parole and treatment (e.g. the CST – Community Supervision Team), recidivism and housing issues, communication issues and potential training areas, and how we as advocates can work together with the Department’s parole programs and officers as well as with treatment to create a better chance for success while on parole!

Ruth has not experienced the historic advocacy road we have traveled in terms of getting changes made to statute - saying official goodbye to “the no known cure” in statute, the outside evaluations of the sexual offense treatment programs both inside prison and in the community and the changes they brought to the SOMB Standards and Guidelines. I suggested that she peruse both evaluations on the CSOR website to get a sense of where we started and where we are now in our drive to make improvements to a sexual offense approach here in Colorado. We talked about the no known cure philosophy which was rampant when my son was convicted of his offense, and the harsh approach it brought to the treatment and supervision process.

We talked about the fact that treatment goes on seemingly forever. There is constant regurgitation required as to the particulars of each person’s offense(s), the harm done to the victim, and the requirement to do class after expensive class following a client’s error in thought or action. We did not have enough time to talk in depth about the Lifetime Act, but did touch on the fact that we are just now coming to the point where we will have to decide how long folks with a 20 year parole sentence under the Lifetime will be handled in terms of parole and treatment. It is all way too long!

It will be interesting to see how things progress as new ideas are considered regarding treatment and supervision here in Colorado. I am excited that Ruth has joined us and look forward to working alongside her and the Department as a whole in making much needed changes!

Great steps in human progress are made by things that don't work the way philosophy thought they should. If things always worked the way they should, you could write the history of the world from now on. But they don't, and it is those deviations from the normal that make human progress. - Charles Kettering

Days and Data – CSOR’s Housing Efforts Jan Hunsaker

As I see it, two declarations have suddenly had a big impact on the need for housing within the past few months:

1. Prison Population Reduction & Management Bill (HB20-1019) and related bills
2. Governor Polis’s March 25, 2020 Executive order to temporarily suspend certain regulatory statutes to prevent potential spread of COVID19 in our prison facilities.

Since then, inmates or “clients” as we refer to them, are contacting Susan and I at CSOR for housing on a daily basis. Case Managers from many facilities contact us almost as often. Susan gathers a history and then often passes them quickly to me while she carries on, wearing many different hats: SOMB committee meetings, NARSOL responsibilities, client court negotiation, parole issues, family situations and other commitments.

Today, as I work at home from my “active” notebook, I have 35 men to help fill the basic housing need. The efforts and hard work of therapists, case managers, parole board members, and adult parole have speeded the need as clients have suddenly become eligible to leave prison. Many are not prepared. But generous donations from CSOR supporters frequently help with a deposit or first month’s rent.

In order to locate available transitional, apartment and family housing, we need to become acquainted with each individual client. We learn therapist’s and case manager’s names then obtain a release of information to allow communication. Next we JPay a questionnaire: SOTMP treatment level if indeterminate sentence, Veteran, SVP status, employment prior to incarceration, jobs held in CDOC, potential roommate inside DOC, are there family members to connect with and ask for funds, and finally clothing sizes. (Often, the landlord asks the offense and past drug use).

Family dynamics can play a big part if clients have not mended the fences necessary to ask for the help needed to leave prison. Those clients who have held a paying job inside CDOC or have some funds being held outside have a big advantage. Those who do not, we are often asked to communicate and help build some bridges with those family members. Oftentimes, family members are willing to assist but do not have the resources. Some have not had family connections for years. A few have had a would-be successful Interstate Compact plan fail.

We have grown our housing list from a few to many in these areas: Adams County, Aurora, Colorado Springs, Denver, Greeley, Henderson, Lafayette, Lakewood, Littleton, Longmont, Pueblo and Wheat Ridge. Recent “dwelling restrictions” enforcement have limited availability to house more than one registrant per address in Aurora.

My “inactive” notebook of 31 clients includes many who have been released, some who were deferred, a few who do not have a sexual offense, one female, and some who are now making their own way. We will continue to work with our clients as needed.

“I think when someone steps into your life and changes the course you are on for the good, they are an angel. These deeds may not always be earth-shattering deeds that open the heavens. They could be a small gesture or a word.”

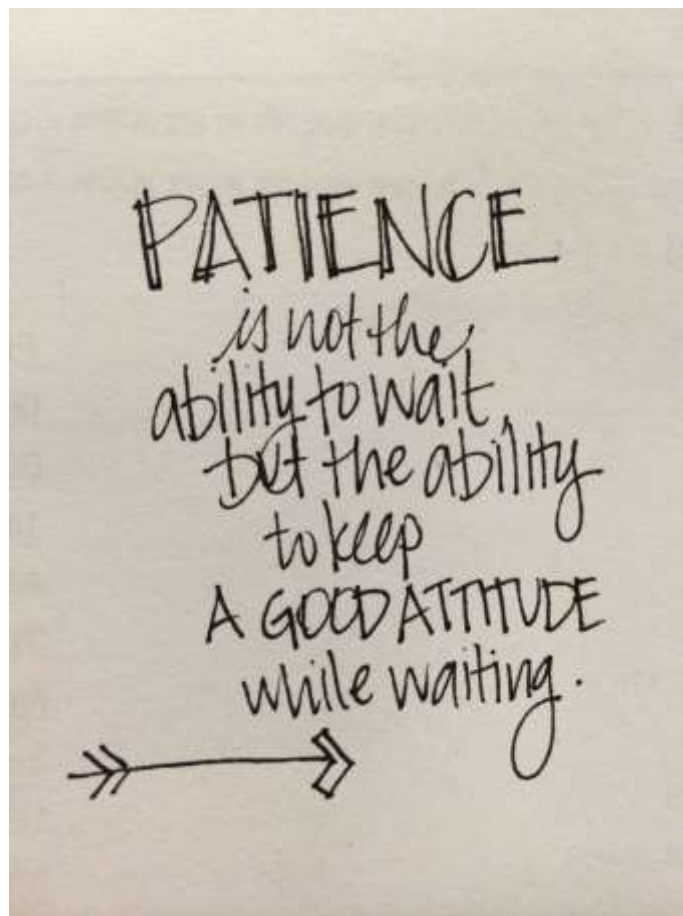
– Helen C. Escott

“Just a Little Patience”
Susan Walker

I am not a big Guns and Roses fan. However, I was told by a man who spent time inside with my son that the two of them used to sit in the cell and play the above-mentioned song by Guns and Roses. It’s not just a little patience that is needed when one is inside a jail or any department of corrections – it’s a lot of patience! Daily I hear from many of you that patience and hope for the future has turned into despair – SOTMP treatment is elusive; men are around you who consider themselves “holier than thou” because they think they committed a more righteous offense than yours, and months turn into years and decades. You may be convinced that you will never leave prison – we pray that is not the case.

Whether you are a Bible person or not, it can’t hurt to quote the Apostle Paul, who spent a lot of time behind bars way back there in time. He said (paraphrase) “Wherever I am, I have learned to be content.” The Jewish people and others who were contained in concentration camps during Hitler’s regime continued to make beautiful music, write poetry, and do good to their fellow camp inhabitants in spite of the most extreme and dangerous conditions.

It is my hope and prayer that you will find beauty and hope where you can in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. When the time comes for you to leave the confines of prison, there will be quite a number of us waiting for you with open hearts as you get ready to “exercise patience” for the next segment of your life, which for many will be parole and yes, more treatment! For those of you who have determinate sentences, treatment will be a new experience and one that you may not understand or accept because you have had no preparation for it. We are here to help you through it if you will just call on us! We look forward to the opportunity to meet many of you as you eventually come out the prison door!



News Tidbits

1. CSOR as most of you know is a 501c(3) federal tax exempt non-profit organization that exists entirely because of the gifts that we receive from people who believe in our mission and appreciate what we do. Up until our March Meeting, we have never had more than \$10,000 in the bank at one time – usually around \$7,000 to \$8,000. The March Meeting was a great time for a couple of big surprises in the donation area. We had invited members of the Parole Board, including Chair Kristen Hilkey to attend. A total of four Board Members came, two who have had specific and in-depth experience working with our particular population. It was a great meeting from that perspective, as the Parole Board was incredibly open and willing to talk about our attendees' concerns regarding Parole Board issues. After the meeting, I was first handed a check from a woman I got to know through many letters while she was at DWCF (Denver Womens' Correctional Facility). I picked her up and got her into an apartment when she was released a number of years ago and we remained friends – she actually lived with me for a few weeks in between apartments. Her mother passed away and left her an amazing inheritance. She had always told me she would be giving me a gift for CSOR from that inheritance. To my amazement, she handed me a check for \$10,000.00 at meeting's end! Wow. I then sat down as people were leaving with a man who had traveled from out of state to see his son who is in prison in Colorado. He had talked with me extensively on the phone and I invited him to the CSOR Meeting. He came to the meeting and planned to see his son the next day before returning home. As we sat at a table talking while people were leaving, he got out his checkbook and handed me a check when we were finishing our conversation. When I got home and looked at the check, I was shocked to find it was for \$5,000.00. He did not, sadly, get to see his son, as the doors to the prison were shut the next day due to the virus. We are most grateful for this incredible financial blessing as well as for the smaller checks that came in that day!

2. We have been blessed with a number of people who have volunteered to help me answer letters from CDOC. Three of them are already writing to folks which is helping me immensely. One will be starting to write letters soon. They are learning as they go, and while they may not know all the answers to all the questions you ask, they can check with me for answers if they don't know them. This is not an attempt to get rid of any of you – it is rather, a life saving measure for me, as I just can't keep up with the hundreds of pieces of mail that come in to CSOR. Thanks to all of you for understanding that I cannot answer all of the letters that come in and still attend court cases as requested, revocation hearings as requested, talk with your families and friends on the phone, attend important meetings at the Legislature and the SOMB etc. The more people we have doing this important work, the better. I am not going to live forever, and the education of other advocates is crucial to ensure that this work is continued. We expect more of you to join the "troops" as you get out of DOC.

3. I am happy to have men call me from inside DOC, as long as you have money to cover your call. Because of my incredibly busy schedule, I am requesting that you call just once a month. It is necessary that I have some down time, especially in the evenings and on the weekends to do things important to the survival and well-being of my family and myself! Exceptions to calling once a month (i.e. every other week or whatever) might be when you are close to getting out and need to chat with me about issues specific to your housing, who is picking you up or whether you are riding the DOC Bus, what your first day out will look like etc. There may be times when I will have to ask you to call back another time, as there are also guys and ladies that I need to chat with on the phone that are already on the outside.

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed in this newsletter are CSOR's. Any concerns about overall content may be sent to: Susancwalker1@gmail.com.