



CSOR

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

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A NEW VERSION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION FOR PAROLE

AR 250-48

Jessica Bertolas, new manager of the SSU (Specialized Supervision Unit) passed out the new “AR” (administrative regulation) for parolees recently. Several of us have been given the chance to go through the document and make suggestions for changes/corrections. While I sent this document to my whole mailing list, I have received just two responses back. It is a big job to go through this document and suggest changes. I am through page 6 of 10 pages (there are also numerous pages of forms which I will not be reviewing) and wanted to share a few of the things that I am suggesting be re-looked at, re-considered or clarified.

The document starts out by suggesting that guidelines will be established that promote a “supportive” (my parentheses) transition into structured community-based supervision programs....

I am asking for a defining of the word “supportive” – what are the characteristics of a supportive program delivered by parole officers on behalf of parolees? I have asked parole leadership to consider using a greeting phrase to a new parolee such as “We want you to succeed”. While I have suggested that a number of times to different leadership staff, I have never had any kind of positive response back to that suggestion indicating that parole would consider starting off with that phrase and then going on to explain strictures and prohibitions. I believe using such a phrase to start out, and stated in a sincere way, could make a lot of difference in the way the parolee responds to the parole officer! Couldn’t hurt to try it and find out!

Start by doing what’s necessary, then do what’s possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.
St. Francis of Assisi

The word “guidelines” is utilized in the section called PURPOSE in points A., B, and C. One time (under A, it refers to things that will contribute to a “supportive transition”); the next time (under B), it refers to the SOMB Guidelines (not clear if they mean Guidelines or Standards, or both); thirdly, under C, it states – “Provide guidelines for consistent state-wide supervision of offenders with a sexual conviction.” It is important for me to know not only that some kind of guidelines will be supplied, but what those guidelines actually look like. A note like this – “State-wide Guidelines are available on page ____near the end of this AR” would be very helpful.

The next section called DEFINITIONS which defines the Community Supervision Team, the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board, Continuity of Care and SOTMP Community Liaison, uses the word “offender” over and over again. I have made the strong suggestion that another word be utilized besides “offender” such as client, a person who committed a sexual offense, someone who committed a sexual offense (you get the idea). Recognizing people as “people” FIRST and realizing that offending is a behavior and does not have personhood in and of itself, is terribly important not only for the client, but for the Parole Officer as well. This language issue continues throughout the document.

Under Section “I”, the writer lists a consistent supervision model, and collaborative work with treatment providers, as well as SOTMP staff, advocacy organizations and victim advocates to reinforce positive behavior change and successful reintegration to ENSURE community safety. I remember when I was working as a Director of 5 adult day centers many years ago, and was writing a similar document, I too used the words ENSURE the safety of – we were told by insurance advisors of the Center for which I worked that using the word ENSURE was not a good thing to do as safety, public or otherwise, can never be ensured. It can be improved upon, enhanced, and hoped for, but not ensured.

Finally, under IV, PROCEDURES, it states that: a person who is required to register as a person with a sexual offense (my wording), and “determined not to have any offense specific treatment or supervision needs will be supervised by a CPO trained in management of offenders with sexual convictions.” In my mind, there is a need for clarification regarding what such a CPO trained in management of offenders with sexual convictions looks like!

I am pleased that the new Specialized Supervision Unit (SSU) under the lead of Jessica Bertolas, Manager, is making promising strides in moving parole forward. Hopefully taking the time and making the commitment to clarification and “finishing” by further describing issues such as the one presented in the previous paragraph, will assist parolees in a successful finish, and will further tighten up the work of the Parole Department! Kudos for improvements made thus far.

'Ex-Con,' 'Ex-Offender' and 'Ex-Inmate' Are Words That Reduce Millions to Stereotype

Time after time, men and women who are trying to rebuild their lives after serving time are hit squarely with the realization that there’s no clean slate. Ever.

I believe that those of us who have served time in prison should decide what we are called. How do we expect those who are released from prison to succeed if we continue to dehumanize them with these labels?

We need to start lifting our citizens up instead of tearing them down. We incarcerate an individual for 10 or 15 years, give them no training or correction and expect them to return to society and succeed. Then on top of that, we degrade them with dehumanizing language and restrict them with over 48,000 collateral consequences which bar them from housing, employment, occupational licenses and even the right to vote.

*Excerpts from: The Root
5/1/19 Jerry Blassingame*

www.theroot.com

The Onerous Practice of Labeling

Susan Walker

Describing people by something other than their name can have disastrous effects. It is several times daily that I get a call from someone looking for housing or a job who meekly comes on the phone and says, "I am a registered sex offender". Some are hesitant to say the words, and it takes a moment for them to get them out.

I am quick to say to them, "you are not a sex offender. You are a person who at one time committed a sexual offense." You behaved in a certain way, and that does not have to define you for the rest of your life." They are quick to tell me that their therapist and/or their parole or probation officer told them they HAD to tell everyone that they were a "sex offender". This includes while they are looking for housing, applying for a job, or just making a friend. While there are situations where you may need to tell someone facets of your personal history, the way you do it when necessary, can make a big difference in whether you succeed or fail in your attempt to move yourself forward!

The Sex Offender Management Board continues in its Standards and Guidelines to utilize the words "Sex Offender" in its title, and throughout the Standards and Guidelines document. While the Standards and Guidelines for juveniles were changed to say "a person with a sexual offense or a person who at one time committed a sexual offense, adult persons who have committed an offense are still called "sex offenders" throughout the document, in the title of the Board i.e. The Sex Offender Management Board, and sadly as of today, still in Colorado Statute.

There is abundant literature today in many fields of practice, not just in our particular arena, that point out the dangers and disadvantages of labeling a person something other than a person. The very words "sex offender" conjure up in the minds of landlords, potential bosses at work, neighbors, and so on, a picture of a monster, a non-redeemable person, or an inhuman beast.

Vast literature in the fields of mental health, brain injury, sexual offending behavior, ethnic differences and so on continues to point out the damage that using labels to describe people, human beings, as pictures of terribly unpleasant and dangerous entities who are ravaging the earth and its inhabitants in most inappropriate ways, is not only incorrect in the majority of situations, but is most destructive to the healing of human souls.

In a recent Standards Review/Re-write Zoom session with an SOMB Committee, there was argument from some board members that changing the way we say someone committed a sexual offense, whether in the Standards and Guidelines or in conversation while job searching or looking for a place to live, still gives people the same information and thus probably doesn't do much good. I would argue that the words we use to describe each other can make a huge difference in the way that the world sees us. Outrightly calling someone "a sex offender" versus stating that this is a person who, at one time, committed a sexual offense, is demeaning and takes away from that individual's personhood.

Another argument stated that the literature utilized to make the case for not using this label HAD to be explicitly applicable to the sexual offense situation, and that appropriate literature re: the specific "sex offender" label needed to be found in order to encourage changing the Standards and Guidelines language of "sex offender". I disagree. Applicable research in other arenas regarding the negative use of labels can also be utilized to make a strong case for not calling people "sex offenders".

Life is 10% of what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it.

Charles Swindoll

We'll see where this goes, and whether the Board in ongoing review/partial rewrite sessions, agrees to change the blatant "sex offender" language to something that gives men and women who at a time in the past committed a sexual offense, a better chance at not only surviving in this world, but at actually being a successful, productive human being! We have many examples of men who survived way too many years of incarceration, treatment on the inside and treatment on the outside, as well as overdone years of supervision, and still managed to get a Doctoral degree, build a hangar house for airplanes with attached living areas, create other successful businesses and so on.

It will be interesting to see how long this discussion drags on at the SOMB "partial re-write" committee meetings, before there is agreement that language as to what to call our men and women is changed, both in the Standards and Guidelines, and eventually in legislative statute.

INTERACTIONS WITH WAGEES PARTNERS IN NORTHERN COLORADO

An opportunity has presented itself for CSOR, AFC and COLORADO CURE activists to be involved with training WAGEES Case Managers in Northern Colorado regarding issues of sexual offending and the challenges that our men and women face when they get out of prison. The February and March 2021 activities include the showing of the film Untouchable, a panel discussion including yours truly, Roger Kincaid, Mike Dell and Cheryl Cook, and a presentation by me in April regarding issues and answers, historical pieces, and present and future advocacy concerns for our population.

The Untouchable Film tells the story of a young girl in Florida who was molested by her nanny. Her father Ronald Book, filled with wrath and anger over this molestation of his child, went to work with the Florida Legislature to frame some of the most heinous laws that exist regarding our population. The daughter, Lauren, is now a Florida State Legislator, and works with victims of sexual abuse. Her Dad continues his work designed to destroy the lives of men who have sexually offended.

The film shows pictures of men living under the freeways in Florida, and in a trailer park called Pervert Village. At Pervert Village, these men live, have treatment, and are allowed to leave for work purposes only. It is a balanced presentation of the issues for those who have offended and those who have been offended against. While it is sad in many respects because of the difficult situations these men find themselves in, it is a film that is making a difference in the public's awareness of sexual offense issues and concerns, as well as creating opportunities for professionals and the public to become more familiarized with a variety of issues concerning sexual offending behaviors.

As time goes on, how we as activists, and those of you who wish to follow in our footsteps as activists, portray the message, familiarize ourselves with the research showing low recidivism rates, and just generally live our lives, will have much to say as to the public's reaction to us and our ability to live as normal lives as is possible.

This will be my fourth time seeing the film, and each time I see it, my heart goes out to our men and women and the lives that they sometimes live as they move through the paces of the system. My heart also goes out to those who have been victimized. It is sad however, to see a legislature so controlled by hatred against our population, with continued efforts on the part of the Books to make life tougher than it already is.

The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best.

Epictetus

NEWS TIDBITS

1. CSOR, AFC and COLORADO CURE, are working together to potentially change statute regarding a variety of issues that have to do with our particular offense. Laurie Kepros, Director of Sexual Litigation for the Public Defender's Office and Maureen Cain, who also works for the Public Defender's Office now, are using their particular expertise to support changes in the way that Colorado does business with those who have committed a sexual offense. There will hopefully be a couple of sessions at the Legislature with Senate and House Judicial, one regarding the Sunset Review which was cancelled last year because of the Pandemic and the shutdown of the Legislature, and one that discusses the SOMB's yearly presentation to House and Senate Judicial.
2. We received word yesterday regarding a trust called The Lone Star Trust out of Colorado Springs that provides different sorts of benefits for those with a sexual crime. It is a partnership between Lone Star Trust and Woodmen Valley Chapel. Besides basic needs when someone steps back into society at large such as a phone, food, gift cards, backpacks and bus passes, the trust also provides housing. More details will be available in the near future. Hopefully, this is just one of many such "gifts" to our men and women that will appear on the horizon.
3. Denver City Council recently passed a new ordinance stating that 5 unrelated people will now be able to legally live together at one address. This is potentially good news for our men and women for whom we struggle to find housing. The opportunity to legally house more people together in the same house will hopefully offer many more options for housing for our population. Only two council members voted no on the change.
4. Now that Janet Hunsaker is no longer working with CSOR, we have turned to others of our supporters for help with letter writing. If you receive mail from Tami Floyd and/or Rick Ostring, be aware that they are helping me keep up with a huge volume of mail that I receive ongoing! The volume of mail that CSOR receives is huge, and it is good to remember that writing (and calling) needs to be limited to a real need to connect with us. Examples of reasons to contact CSOR include: getting close to the time when you will leave prison and need housing etc.; having been treated inappropriately inside DOC; moving from one facility to another and losing your belongings in the process etc. Remember that CSOR does NOT have an attorney on board, so telling me about your case in a ten-page letter will do no good. I do not have any legal skills and cannot help you with legal issues. In terms of calling, my preference is that folks call just once a month. If you are very close to getting out and need to call more often for a few weeks before leaving DOC, that is okay. Please keep your letters as short as possible and write in a handwriting size that I can see! Small print is discouraging and very hard to read, and I do not have time to read each word with a magnifying glass!

A little kingdom I possess, where thoughts and feelings
dwell; And very hard the task I find of governing it well."

Louisa May Alcott

Denver City Council Spends Hours Discussing Number of Unrelated People Allowed to Live Together

In a past midnight discussion during February, the Denver City Council discussed the issue of numbers of people who were unrelated wanting and being able to live together. This was an issue that started out months ago with a potential proposal to allow something like ten unrelated adults to live at the same address – and at the time of the discussion, those ten related people were going to be allowed to park 17 cars in the vicinity (I think I have those numbers right)!

Well, as you can imagine, this suggestion sparked a great deal of controversy amongst the Denver population. For people like me and organizations like CSOR, it sounded like a pretty good idea (except for the massive number of cars that would displace other homeowners or renters in the area). With the challenges that we face finding enough affordable housing for our men and women coming out of prison, being able to house ten people in a large residence sounded pretty inviting!

When it came right down to the final discussion at the City Council Meeting during the second week of February, the Council had received enough feedback from Denver residents to know that the ten people and 17 cars was not the way to go. There are already huge overcrowding problems regarding vehicles in the City and County of Denver with many residents not being able to find parking when they return from work at the end of the day. The Council started playing with a new number of people per residence. After many final hours of discussion on this issue, the ordinance was passed for five (5) unrelated adults to be able to live legally together in the City of Denver (a smaller number in condos). Good news for us.

I did not hear any discussion specifically around the issue of five people with a sexual offense in their background living together, and I believe this spells GOOD NEWS for our population. The possibility of placing more people in mixed family housing when they first get out of prison is very appealing. Aurora used to be able to do this until it came to light, unfortunately, that there was an old city ordinance stating that only one person with a sexual offense could live at an address. This badly disrupted our plans for placing people getting out of DOC with our offense at least temporarily, in transitional housing where they would have a bedroom (perhaps shared but not always), and shared kitchen, bathroom and living room space. The goal was, for many, to get stable (i.e. job, get into treatment and comfortable with supervision and then look for something more private if desired).

It is definitely much more acceptable these days to have “mixed” families. We for instance, have had “Aunt Nadia” as part of our family for many years! She is not officially my kids’ aunt, but unofficially they love her at least as much as they love me. She is a true family member. We love forward to creating more “mixed” families in our quest to continue to get men and women out of DOC!

Self discipline begins with the mastery of your thoughts. If you don't control what you think, you can't control what you do. Simply, self-discipline enables you to think first and act afterward.

Napoleon Hill.

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