



# CSOR

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

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## LATEST ON THE COLORADO LEGISLATURE

CSOR, AFC and Colorado CURE had been meeting each Monday morning with a lobbyist and former legislator to fine tune arguments for passing the recommendations of the Sunset Reviewer from the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies. The recommendations were given in 2019 for the 2020 session of the Colorado Legislature. Because of Covid, there was minimal legislative activity during 2020, and the bill that we hoped for last year we surmised would become a reality this year.

Issues such as the following were among the possibilities for change to be considered: (1) person first language utilization in the Sex Offender Management Board Standards and Guidelines, (2) standards becoming guidelines only, (3) clients being able to choose between all treatment providers and switch providers one time without permission from their community supervision team; 4) polygraphs being done not because of a mandatory requirement in the Standards and Guidelines, but only because the parole officer and or treatment provider felt it would be helpful; 5) changing the size of the SOMB from 25 members to around 11-13, and creating an “advisory council” of other people who would be able to assist the board with ancillary issues; 6) denial as well as the ability to see one’s children could potentially “soften” as long as a person was making good progress in treatment; 7) the sexually violent predator (SVP) designation would go away (hopefully retroactively) and a new risk/tier based system of registration would take its place.

While this is not a complete list of possible changes, the whole engine came to a grinding halt when the session got too near the end for this year, AND the district attorney’s and victims’ advocates began to spout venom regarding our population not only to other legislators but to the community at large. Negative newspaper articles and t.v. news broadcasts began to appear, and a meeting at the legislature the night of Friday June 4, which by the way, lasted til 1:00 a.m., brought another round of horrific testimony by both D.A.’s and victims.

CSOR, AFC and Colorado Cure got news the next day that our sponsors, Representatives Tipper and Benavidez, as well as our lobbyist team, felt that given the short time (less than a week) before the session ended, we could not gain the ground we needed in time to get the bill passed the way we wanted it to read. The plan is for our two sponsors to “work” with the various parties over the summer to continue to move toward the accomplishment, hopefully, of at least some of these goals.

Alex Garnett, Democratic House Speaker, shared the following thoughts on our bill, HB21-1320, which now reads to extend the SOMB til 2023 without making changes, giving the legislature more time to work through the necessary reforms that the board requires. Here is Garnett’s statement: “While there’s been a great deal of disagreement around the Sex Offender Management Board, the one thing that has become absolutely clear after four separate reviews is that the board and our sex offender management processes are in dire need of reform....I am grateful to Representatives Tipper and Benavidez for their work on this critical issue and remain frustrated that certain key stakeholders in this process, particularly the District Attorneys, chose to obstruct collaborative reforms instead of coming to the table to help find a solution that works for Colorado. I sincerely hope that as these discussions continue into next year, District Attorneys and other interested parties will have an active seat at the table and bring a commitment to work with us on constructive solutions.”

While waiting AGAIN, in spite of the years of evidence that the SOMB has many problems that so negatively affect our men and women in remaking their lives after being convicted, we need to remain steadfast in our efforts to change this system into one that correctly reflects the very low recidivism rates of our population. The vast majority of our men and women are not out in the streets, “raping and pillaging” as the victims and the D.A.’s like to suggest – on the contrary, they are trying, despite years of roadblocks, to move on with safe and productive lives despite the many delays that happen as they move through the system, both inside the Colorado Department of Corrections and in treatment and under supervision on the outside.

## PROGRESS WITH PAROLE

It has been interesting and generally exciting to see that the demeanor of the Colorado Division of Parole seems to be changing both in attitude and practice. While progress on controversial subjects always seems slow, and at times we can’t really tell progress from the way things have always been, there have been some examples recently of parole very intentionally reaching out to us for our input and assistance with people experiencing time on parole.

Whether an individual’s problems started with parole itself, with treatment, or with both, parole is frequently in a position of needing to deal with issues around technical violations. All of you know what those are, and I have addressed them on the News Tidbits page as well – I wanted to give two notable examples recently where parole has clearly worked very hard to help a client (parolee) “save the day” and give them an ongoing chance to move forward. Here are those examples!

1. A disturbed person (parolee) called me one evening to let me know that his parole officer had told him that IF he did not pass his polygraph, she would personally take him in her car back to prison. As you can imagine, for a man who was working very hard to do what was right to be told that by his officer was quite shocking. This man had a particular goal in mind for doing well overall, which was to be able to finally meet his child. It is a noble and lofty desire and hope, and I could sense the heartbreak in his voice when he told me the story. I approached Jessica Bertolas, the Manager of the Specialized Supervision Unit (parole for our population), and she listened to what I had to say but asked me if I heard the parole officer say that. I said no, but encouraged her to talk with the parole officer about it to see if she would admit having said it. She did, and the next morning, this man called and told me what had happened as a result of my suggestion that Jessica talk to the officer herself and get her version of the story. The officer called this man the next morning and asked him how it made him feel to hear that she had said she was going to personally take him back to prison in her car if he didn’t pass his polygraph. He stated, of course, that it was a heart-wrenching thing to hear, and that it hurt him immensely. By the end of their conversation, she told him that there were only 2 people on her 60 person parolee list that had her e-mail address, and that he was going to be #3. She did ask him questions regarding whether he had seen his child, even in passing, and he gave an emphatic no. I was so pleased with the way this turned out, it encouraged me to interact with parole in these kinds of situations to enhance our ability to turn potential negative consequences into positive accomplishments!

2. I was recently asked by one of the parole managers to come to one of the parole offices to sit in on a discussion with a man who had recently gotten out that was having some problems. Since the parole officers involved knew that I was familiar with and somewhat involved with this man's situation, they thought I might be helpful in encouraging him and supporting them as the man tried to move forward. For the first time ever, I was invited to sit in on this discussion with the man, a parole supervisor and his parole officer. The meeting was very much a "give and take", profitable and pleasant meeting to be at. No-one was shot down – everyone reached out to try to assist in the situations that were causing this man problems. I was not only allowed to speak, but my knowledge of his situation was truly appreciated.

While Parole continues to struggle with the challenges of a new approach which is focused on trying to keep people from going back to prison, as well as having enough trained officers to handle the numbers of parolees, especially those who have had technical violations, it is most pleasing to see that a serious attempt is being made to change the "back to the revocation hearing" approach to "how can we help this person succeed?" The language being utilized is "no longer a referee, but a coach". Rick Raemisch had earlier defined this approach as ¼ cop and ¾'s social worker as he spoke in front of the judicial committees of the legislature a number of years ago. At last, the real change is being seen! It will take time for it to develop universally across the whole Division of Parole, as does any attempt at making significant change. For now, we are grateful to see these signs of a serious effort to change the parole culture to one that sees people who have offended sexually as individuals that will one day be members of society who are hopefully not looked upon in a negative way!

## The Challenges of Housing

The numbers of challenges for those with a sexual offense in their background as it relates to housing are growing. A huge blow to successfully placing people in Aurora happened when the City Council, specifically the Mayor was questioned regarding the possible planting of a new housing opportunity for those with a sexual offense in Aurora proper. The Mayor took the question to the City Attorney who proclaimed that in 2001, a city ordinance was written stating that only one person with a sexual offense could live at an address. Up until this time, we had been placing people in apartments as roommates, and had been using transitional housing that accommodated up to 6 or 8 or even more folks in one building. Now that is not possible, and we can only place one person in an apartment in Aurora.

The Denver City Council has decided that they will require, in the fairly near future, landlords/landladies, to have a license which will supposedly ensure that their buildings are clean and safe for habitation. In reality, IF this does not cause them to sell their buildings and the land they are built on to developers who will put up more of the expensive to rent, cubicle apartment buildings that are taking over Denver's skyline and will not be open to or affordable for our population, they will continue to own their rentals and rent them out at a much higher cost which will cover the increased cost of their requirement to be licensed in the City of Denver. This new requirement (not yet instituted) will likely eliminate many if not all of our current options for housing for people coming out of CDOC in Denver. Denver is, by the way, the only major municipality in the area that allows more than one person with a sexual offense to live in an apartment or other residence (i.e. townhome, condo, house). There are a few, small unincorporated areas throughout the metro that will allow more.

YESTERDAY IS NOT OURS TO RECOVER, BUT TOMORROW IS OURS TO WIN OR LOSE.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

The words of prophets in history have all too frequently been ignored. We know via excellent and abundant research that those with a sexual offense who are: 1) housed; 2) have a job; and 3) have pro-social support (family, church, community friends) are much less likely to reoffend than those who don't. The propensity of a society, country, city, village that wants to exclude certain populations from living near them will continue to be its own destruction. As more and more people, including those coming out of prison with a sexual offense, have no place to live and add to the number of persons experiencing homelessness on the streets of our cities, we will see MORE crime and not less, all because of the arrogance of the general public when it comes to shunning those who have committed this offense, who have paid their dues, taken their years of therapy and supervision, and deserve a chance to become law abiding citizens.

The three major apartment complexes that we now utilize the most are full. We have people who have been "tabled" for housing by the Parole Board and are waiting in prison for a place to live. While we have smaller landlords who frequently charge "an arm and a leg" per week for people to live in their dwellings, they tend to be very selective regarding who they will accept. Some prefer older men who they think will get in less trouble than younger men. Some prefer those with a lot of available money who can pay higher rent prices. Others demand that for people under a certain age, parents or others supporters co-sign. Some want a ton of money up front to ensure that they will be paid. There is no easy and straight pathway to making sure housing is going to work.

For about ten years now, we have been housing women and men at my house who have come out of prison or jail with a sexual offense. Since my house is in Denver, I can have two people with a sexual offense living with me and my family. I started out with women, thinking I felt "safer" with them. All four of the women who lived at my house had previous drug and/or alcohol issues. One who had come to us from the Denver Jail had to leave our house due to obvious use of meth. All of the others, while they had some problems, were very good folks to have around and eventually were able to get on their own feet and move on with their lives. On top of that, there have been another eight or so men who have worked at my house doing a variety of needed house repairs, painting putting up backsplash in the kitchen etc.

Other current models of housing support include a couple of options in Littleton where the Littleton Police will not allow anyone who has offended against a child to live in their city. Neighboring Englewood and Greenwood Village are totally closed to those with a sexual offense in their background. Englewood allows people to shop in their city, work in their city, and walk or drive through their city, but not to live there. Does that make any sense at all? In my mind, it is idiocy!

Many of our men and women have gone on after surviving years of therapy and supervision, to buy or even build their own homes. R M has built a cabin in the mountains; L R has built a hangar-house in the mountains which will house small planes coming through the area as well as allowing pilots and their families to stay in the built-in Air B & B. While waiting for final permits and finishing touches on his building, he is housing a man who came out of the Colorado Department of Corrections and he has room for one more. Unfortunately, the second man who wanted to come there has the SVP designation which desperately and immediately needs to go away, and the neighborhood surrounding his place would not likely allow that designation nearby, at least not when it came to light. Many more stories of successful purchasing of their own properties exist – my son Mark was able to purchase a townhome in Westminster quite a number of years ago -lots of others have successfully done the same.

What models might work to get this population on their feet when they are eligible to get out of prison? Here are a couple of ideas.

1. The Colorado Department of Corrections could create 4 – 8 plexes that would house people until they could get settled, employed and steady on the outside. There are already a number of houses in Denver called "parole houses" where 6 – 10 people stay with permission from the city to house more than two people. Once steady on their feet, i.e. a solid job and progress in treatment and supervision issues, people could begin to look for their own home, either rental or purchase. With the money CDOC will gain by closing private prisons and getting prison numbers down, these housing options would soon pay for themselves.

2. More advocates for this population could take people into their homes. This gives people just coming out, more of a chance to succeed. I would look to churches and a variety of non-profit organizations to take this “bull by the horns” and get the job started and done. Oh yes, we can all sit back and say that these are people who have at one or more times victimized a family member or in rare cases a stranger, and they might hurt us. I will only say that yes, that could happen – it is about as likely to happen as a plane falling on your house or your furnace exploding – i.e. possible but not probable.

We are not far from crisis for this population IF we don't do something now. The other significant issue is that we are spending so much money incarcerating people, supervising people and requiring therapy and polygraphs with people that there is no money left for prevention of sexual offending behavior. The vast majority of sexual offenses take place right under our noses – in our families, our schools, our churches, our political organizations etc. and in our communities at large. It would be great if a nice “education campaign” would solve all the problems for men and women with a sexual offense background, but education is not the main issue. Landlords are afraid that if the community at large finds out they are housing someone with a sexual offense or a number of someones, they will lose whatever non-sexual offending tenants they have. Two huge, real life examples of this came to light recently. One landlord asked us not to place anymore of our men and women with their property until September of this year, as “other” tenants were complaining about “sex offenders” in the building. Another woman almost lost her apartment because her son was put out of prison unexpectedly and ended up temporarily living with her while probation decided what the court really meant to do with him. Many hours of work by two of our CSOR Board members and myself, as well as a Colorado Springs Probation Officer, have finally resulted in at least a good temporary resolution for this man.

Providing the examples necessary for lifetime success for folks coming out of prison is something that we must all do. It is true that some reading this may have been so hurt and embarrassed by their family member's offense that they can't imagine doing anything to openly support them. God doesn't see sin (any wrongdoing) in compartments – we all participate in things we shouldn't – none of us is perfect. It will take all of us working together to help this population of men and women get back on their feet, and moving forward in a positive way. Think and pray about what your part might be in this particular battle.

## **A BIG FIRST for CSOR!**

It is not easy for organizations that support those with a sexual offense to get grant money. Donations from faithful friends and family come in sporadically, and once in a while, there is a larger donation that comes from someone incredibly appreciative for what we do at CSOR to help their friends and/or family members.

However, I decided to take a chance that my church, Bear Valley Church, which has a “Move the World” Grant Program, might consider giving to our population for the specific purpose, not of me or anyone else getting a salary, but to help with housing costs for men and women coming out of prison.

I approached our missions pastor, Pastor Rich Peterson, and he agreed to bring this issue, need and concern to the group of people who make decisions regarding Move the World monies. Since we have always had people with sex offense convictions attending Bear Valley over the years, it was definitely not a new idea for the group of people considering this. Pastor Rich intimated to me that there were questions and concerns raised, but he stated that by the end of the discussion, the group decided to grant CSOR \$7,500 toward housing costs for those with a sexual offense!

I truly believe that everything that we do and everyone that we meet is put in our path for a purpose. There are no accidents; we're all teachers - if we're willing to pay attention to the lessons we learn, trust our positive instincts and not be afraid to take risks or wait for some miracle to come knocking at our door.

## HERE COMES A BIG POSSIBLE SECOND!

Today, June 7, I received an e-mail from a granting organization in California called Serving USA. It is also a faith-based organization, working with people in prison and/or coming out of prison. They have a very special interest in working with veterans which is something we do fairly frequently at CSOR. They are already funding a number of faith-based organizations in Colorado, including my son Mark's program. We do not actually have a grant award amount at this time, as we still have work to do to finish the application process. However, any amount that this organization may decide to give us will be much appreciated and will hopefully be instrumental in placing at least ten to twelve people coming out of the Colorado Department of Corrections in housing.

The next step for me is writing the actual grant and getting it back to them as soon as possible. As soon as this newsletter is finished, I will be turning my attention to the grant, and returning the information that they need, to hopefully make a final commitment to us for grant funds to assist with housing men and women who have committed a sexual offense.

The stories in the news that we hear all too frequently, like the one that came out on Channel 4 recently regarding a "vigilante" in Westminster who is chasing down men who are attempting to prey on teenage girls and boys against the wishes and advice of the police via a "sting operation" of his own making, would not likely influence grantors in a direction of wanting to assist our population, which is very sad. It is my belief that the majority of you are committed to changing your lives for the better, and never committing another sexual offense! It is my hope and prayer that none of you will return to the world outside prison and commit another sexual offense, or any kind of offense for that matter. Life is too short, and what we each have left of it should be cherished and lived in the way that God intended us to live it!

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

## HABITS OF POSITIVE PEOPLE

- **Positive people don't confuse quitting with letting go.**

Instead of hanging on to ideas, beliefs, and even people that are no longer healthy for them, they trust their judgement to let go of negative forces in their lives. Especially in terms of relationships, they subscribe to The Relationship Prayer which goes:

"I will grant myself the ability to trust the healthy people in my life ...

To set limits with, or let go of, the negative ones ...

And to have the wisdom to know the DIFFERENCE!"

- **Positive people don't just have a good day – they make a good day.**

Waiting, hoping and wishing seldom have a place in the vocabulary of positive individuals.

Rather, they use strong words that are proactive and not reactive. Passivity leads to a lack of involvement, while positive people get very involved in constructing their lives.

They work to make changes to feel better in tough times rather than wish their feelings away.

- **Rather than being stuck in their limitations, positive people are energized by their possibilities.**

Optimistic people focus on what they can do, not what they can't do. They are not fooled to think that there is a perfect solution to every problem and are confident that there are many solutions and possibilities. They are not afraid to attempt new solutions to old problems, rather than spin their wheels expecting things to be different this time. They refuse to be like Charlie Brown expecting that this time Lucy will not pull the football from him!