

NOROLK INMATE COUNCIL

Massachusetts Department of Correction

MCI-Norfolk

Substance Use Disorder
(Mental Health Factors)

TREATMENT OVER PUNISHMENT (T.O.P.)

(Suggested Steps Forward)

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Treatment Over Punishment (TOP)

Suggested Steps

The continued efforts of a culture of punishment within the Massachusetts Department of Corrections (DOC) has only caused Substance Use Disorders (SUD's) to increase over the past decade. Increased Visitation restrictions and mail restrictions (copying) has only harmed support networks and hamper the overall efforts of rehabilitation. Trying to decrease supply has not worked, therefore why not try to reduce demand.

Crisis proportions of drug addiction cannot be ignored in spite of a lack of data tracking. In the first 2 weeks of August 2024 at MCI-Norfolk there were a suspected 14 overdose episodes. Thefts of personal property continue to increase which increasingly escalate into violence. The sense of Community continues to be eroded by the lack of progress.

Now is the time to stop pointing fingers at one another in which everyone who lives or works within MCI-Norfolk can take a share of the blame. We are all stakeholders in this. It is time to act on collaborative solutions to help those suffering with SUD's. Below are some concepts to begin a process of treating the disease and not punishing it.

Suggested Steps Forward :

The approach being suggested is to curb the demand for the substances (K-2) plaguing MCI-Norfolk in a Treatment over Punishment (TOP) system. This would need to be approached in a holistic treatment method of the disease. Such an approach requires to look at the individual and true collaboration between prisoners and staff will accomplish this. The steps suggested are prevention and intervention methods :

- 1) Bring all stakeholders willing to engage in this process to the table. Not by threats of taking quality of life items but by creating safe, clean and positive places to live, thrive and grow. No longer to see those suffering addiction as throw aways but part of the same community inside prison, deserving of support and opportunities to live better. Remembering where we all came from and encourage others on their journeys and letting them know they are not alone.
- 2) Encourage mentorship (sponsorship) in a ROPE style program. Have those who have progressed in life, developed themselves encourage and provide incentives for others struggling. Better housing, canteen, property items (quality of life improvements). Provide clear prison designed lap tops for easier creation of content, curriculum and record keeping. This will also serve as an example as to what to strive for. Those involved in ROPE based housing and given such incentives the theme has to be: "With opportunity come responsibility". Such as: accepting mentees into their Personal Accountability Unit (PAU) and devoting a certain amount of time to these mentees. Therefore becoming positive role models in their lives. Creating active prisoner engagement in the SUD crises.
- 3) Creating new options: Allow prisoners to request "clean" cell placement for a period of 1-2 weeks in order to dry out and detox. Such as the BAU and be allowed to bring a ditty bag, tablet radio etc. This must be only voluntary and not

weaponized requiring a request from the prisoner. During this process those engaged in TOP should send 1-2 representatives to meet with the person and find out what structure or help does the individual need from the community to live a sober accountable life. This request for a clean cell placement requires assurances from the administration to not target the individual seeking placement after release and return to housing and no effects on current or future job placement or substance testing.

4) Structure: Many addicts lack a structure in life to see their way out of the situation they have found themselves in. They need structure and a ROPE type program is key to developing a team from all areas of the prison to combat this disease. Easier program access; immediate access to self improvement groups, not to be removed from rosters in event of disciplinary / behavior action. Also being allowed access to certain spaces with their mentor.

5) Disciplinary Process: is meant to educate the prisoner in a given action that is not acceptable. However at this time there is no engagement of a program aspect for the individual in this process. Many times sanctions include reduced contact with family and friends (support network), such as: loss of phone, visits or contact visits. The fact that addicts with a disease are being fined and buried in fees creates another level of financial hopelessness and creates another stressor in their mental health struggles. This process should include both the carrot and the stick approach. When the individual seeks a different path? If so then engage the ROPE team to speak with the individual as to a structured contract of actions for the individual and for the possible mentee. Delay disciplinary proceedings for an extended time 6 months first offense, 12 months second offense, 24 months third offense. Upon successful completion of the ROPE mentorship conclude the d-report as a CWOFF.

6) Personal Accountability Unit (PAU) : Once this shows success with residents and mentees expand to 2nd unit and 3rd etc. This is a means to slowly recreate the Community Prison experiment while addressing the new challenges staff and prisoners face today. However nurturing the collaboration aspect. The PAU unit would accept up to 10% of the unit as mentees being voted in by the unit for support.

7) Programs require inside facilitators and additional open times for programming and development. This can be accomplished by opening the CSD from 8:30 - 11:30 AM 7 days a week (2 staff, 3 hours a day, 52 weeks a year) less than 2000 hours staff time. If opening the CSD is not an option then seek approval from town officials to open the basements as program space. This will open up untold resources of space and time for positive, productive activities.

8) Implementation of a work (picking up trash in the yard, cleaning units, painting etc.) component to reduce fines and testing fees. This element will reduce fines and fees which weigh on negative decision making and provide a means to reduce or eliminate the burden of fees and fines. Provide monthly work reports as to progress of fees deducted to provide encouragement and incentives for the individual to continue their efforts.

9) Reorganize the prison as to have increasing privileges at each level of development. Create a spectrum from 8 Block to Quad Units. Work with Keefe to create different levels of canteen items for each level of development (property & canteen items).

10) Create more community based events to bring people together and reduce idle time; RAP Battles, sporting Events, Table Games each weekend or monthly.

11) Harvard / Norfolk Inmate Council Project: The NIC has been trying to collaborate with a Harvard professor for months to have classes engage in an inside out program for the NIC. Fast Track this to provide students / mentors and help provide resources to better address create content and curriculum to make this available to other facilities across the Commonwealth.

12) Medical Marijuana: There is currently a product called Delta 8 which the NIC believes on advice of counsel does not violate Federal Law and would allow those who need medical assistance in their struggle to thrive in life should be provided the option. Currently the Massachusetts Parole Board (MPB) allows parolees to obtain a medical marijuana card which should be duplicated in some form. This practice should be mirrored in prison to provide a smoother transition into society. This should be viewed as no different than the current MAT program and designed similarly with a dispensary (3) times a day or so. The MAT (Methadone) program already exists at MCI-Norfolk but not for this particular SUD.

Summary:

The Department (DOC) has to begin to move away from a one size fits all solution to this crisis. Prisoners need to begin to take our part in helping those struggling and understand and embrace the idea that: With Opportunity Comes Responsibility. Service to and engagement in community needs to be encouraged and barriers removed to begin to properly and effectively address the SUD crises at Norfolk and in all prisons. The idea to make MCI-Norfolk like other facilities and not capitalize on the spirit of the community is a great disservice to the Commonwealth and those who came before us. The NIC respectfully seeks support of the ideas contained within and request approval from DOC Central Office, The Department of Public Safety and other stakeholders immediately.

The NIC respectfully submits this proposal to begin a path forward.

Respectfully Submitted,



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