



THE COOK COUNTY COMMISSION ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

INCARCERATED FEMALES: BREAKING THE CYCLE

Public Hearing Report
By the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues
From the October 18, 2012 Public Hearing

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A very sincere thanks to all the Cook County Women's Issues Commissioners for thinking ahead of the curve and shining a light on issues of importance to the women of Cook County. Many thanks to all of the staff members of the Department of Human Rights, Ethics and Women's Issues for their knowledge, insight and hard work on the compilation of this report. Finally, a very special thanks to the speakers for their input at the hearing and for all the work that they do for the residents of Cook County.

A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear President Preckwinkle, Members of the Board of Commissioners and Friends,

On behalf of the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues, I am pleased to present to you the Commission's 2012 *Public Hearing Report: Incarcerated Females: Breaking the Cycle*. For over eighteen years, the historic Cook County Commission on Women's Issues has been at the forefront of being compassionate and passionate advocates for girls and women of Cook County. I have been honored and humbled to be the Chair of this Commission, and to work hand in hand with such a dedicated group of women. The County's Women's Commission has sponsored hearings focusing on various issues affecting women and girls in Cook County and presented recommendations to the President and County Board Commissioners to implement in terms of public policy and programming in County government. The Commission continues to work both on its own, and collaboratively with other governmental and non-governmental agencies, to highlight and support the advancement of women and girls in Cook County. There has been no issue too sensitive or too difficult for this Commission to tackle. The Commission has brought to light such topics as Economic Empowerment of Women, Human Trafficking, and, of course, the subject of this year's Public Hearing – "Incarcerated Females: Breaking the Cycle."

The Cook County Commission is responsible for being the voice for those women and girls who cannot speak for themselves and bringing their concerns directly to the attention of the President and Cook County Board Commissioners. Although the Commission has had success, there is the realization that this is a never-ending fight for justice and parity. We, the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues, will continue on task, providing information and education, urging our elected leaders to take action and fighting for justice and parity for the women and girls of Cook County; and like women everywhere, we will stay the course until victory is ours!

Peggy A. Montes

Chairperson, Cook County Commission on Women's Issues (1995 – Present)

BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE COOK COUNTY COMMISSION ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

Background

In August 1993, Cook County Board Commissioner John H. Stroger met with Peggy A. Montes and requested that she develop a Women's Committee. At that time, Ms. Montes was a respected and recognized advocate in the community who fought for the cause of equality and parity for women. Ms. Montes was also known for coordinating the Women's Network that assisted in electing Harold Washington as the first African American Mayor of Chicago. Under Mayor Washington, Ms. Montes was the first Chairperson of the newly established City of Chicago's Commission on Women's Issues. Ms. Montes agreed to develop and coordinate a Women's Committee for Commissioner Stroger, with one caveat that upon election to Cook County Board President, Commissioner Stroger, recognizing the unique needs and challenges affecting women in Cook County, would establish a Cook County Women's Commission – a first for Cook County Government. Commissioner Stroger responded positively to Ms. Montes' suggestion. On October 5, 1993, he sponsored a Cook County Board resolution to establish the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues.

Formation of the Cook County Women's Commission

On March 4, 1994, a resolution was passed unanimously by the Cook County Board of Commissioners that created the first Cook County Commission on Women's Issues. The first Women's Commissioners were appointed in 1995. There were seventeen Commissioners; one representing each county district. Ms. Peggy Montes was appointed Chairperson and Fourth District Commissioner. In 2007, Cook County Board President, Todd H. Stroger, sponsored a resolution to reorganize the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues. The resolution was passed by the Cook County Commissioners; and, on April 9, 2008, the "new" Cook County Women's Commission was established. Under the new resolution, the Women's Commission now consists of twenty-one members; one from each Cook County Board District, and four at-large members appointed by the President of the Cook County Board, with one of these at-large appointees also serving as the Commission's Chairperson.

Annual Public Hearing History

One of the powers and duties that the Resolution imbued to the Commission on Women's Issues was the authority to convene a public hearing in order to gather information on issues affecting women and girls. Each October, the Commission on Women's Issues sponsors a public hearing on a topic of particular interest or relevance to women and girls. The Women's Commissioners select a topic and invite professionals, advocates and other experts to present testimony and to identify recommendations for action to be taken by the Women's Commission, members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and other interested stakeholders.

Since 2005, the Commission has brought to light and made recommendations for action on the following topics:

- 2005: Girls and Aggression
- 2007: Human trafficking– The sex trade in Cook County
- 2008: Economic empowerment of women: Challenges and obstacles
- 2009: Housing- A basic human right: A woman's ability to attack and retain housing in Cook County
- 2010: Women and Girls – Sex and Sexuality: Health and Harms
- 2011: The Mature Woman: Navigating Life's Challenges to Live, Survive and Thrive

In 2011, for the first time since the Commission began holding public hearings, the Commission, with assistance of Women's Commissioner's from a number of Cook County Districts, in partnership with experts culled from the public hearing presenters, held a number of educational forums which spun out of the 2010 Public Hearing Topic.

Below are the educational forums and workshops that have been held throughout Cook County since 2010:

- "Hurting in Silence – A Discussion on Teen Bullying and Suicide"
- "Girls on the Wall – A Film Screening and Discussion Focusing on Incarcerated Teen-aged Girls"

- “Young Women’s Healthy Choices Forum – A Discussion on Healthy Choices for Young Women and Men”
- “Human Trafficking - a Community Forum”

INTRODUCTION

On October 18, 2012, the Cook County Commission on Women's Issues held its annual public hearing on the topic of Incarcerated Females: Breaking the Cycle. In order to break the cycle, the Commission decided to look closely at repeat offenses and incarcerations among women. The Commission analyzed the cycle by looking at the circumstances that lead women to engage in the behavior for which they were either detained or incarcerated, and how the women were treated while they were detained or incarcerated within our criminal justice system.

The Commission also analyzed the challenges that women faced when they were released from jail and detected the signs of women who were at risk for recidivism. In addition, the Commission identified support services and programs that assist women in **BREAKING THE CYCLE**.

PRESENTERS

The Commission recruited speakers to answer the questions about the cycle. Speakers included formerly incarcerated females, researchers and professional from government agencies, universities, and non-profit organizations:

Sharon McDaniel, Program Specialist, Chicago Women’s AIDS Project
My Journey after the Cycle

Christine Devitt Westley, Manager, Data Clearinghouse and Analysis Center,
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Before Incarceration: Lifetime Victimization and Trauma Among Female Prisoners

Darlene C. Williams, Chief-Markham, Assistant Public Defender, Law Office of the
Public Defender
It’s Just Another Case

Judge Rosemary Grant Higgins, Circuit Court of Cook County WINGS Court
Felony Prostitution Court: WINGS/Feather

Jan Russell JD, Director, Violence Against Women Policy Project, Cook County
Sheriff’s Office, Sheriff’s Women’s Justice Programs
Battered Women in the Criminal Justice System

Gayle Nelson, Executive Director, Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated
Mothers (CLAIM)
Building a More Efficient and Effective Criminal Justice System

Caron Jacobson, University Lecturer, Criminal Justice Department, Governors State
University
*Focusing on the Harm Done Rather than the Rule Broken: How Incarceration
Could Reduce Recidivism*

Hon. Dorothy Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Cook County
Making the Most of a Second Chance in Life

Gipsy Escobar, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, **and**
David E. Olson, Ph.D., Professor and Graduate Program Director
Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology Loyola University Chicago
*A Profile of Women Released Into Cook County Communities from Jail and
Prison*

Rebecca Janowitz, Special Assistant for Legal Affairs, Justice Advisory Council
*The Justice Advisory Council's Perspective on the Pretrial Detention of
Women and Girls*

Doreen D. Salina, PhD, Associate Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences,
Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine
*Achieving Successful Community Re-entry: Unmet Needs, Barriers and
Solutions*

Colette Payne, Chicago Legal Advocates for Incarcerated Mothers CLAIM-Visible
Voices Member
My 2-Cents; Grasping My Dignity and Self Worth

KEY FINDINGS: What is the Cycle?

- Research has found that the majority of incarcerated women have experienced sexual or physical abuse at an early age.
- The incarceration rate for females increased during the 1990s and early 2000s for several reasons; the Chicago Police Department arrest rate for felony-level drug-law violations increased and the number of females arrested for other crimes such as property crimes and violent offenses also increased. In addition, in 2000, an Illinois law was amended which established felony-level prostitution offense for individuals convicted of prostitution a second time. This resulted in a significant increase in admissions to prison of women from Cook County from 2000 to 2005. (Gipsy Escobar, Ph.D. and David E. Olson, Ph.D., Loyola University of Chicago)
- Fast forward to 2011 and we learn that there were more than 9,100 females admitted to the Cook County Jail. The average age was 34 years old. The oldest female admitted was 85 years old and youngest female was 17 years old. Two-thirds of the females were African-Americans, 12 percent were Hispanics and 20 percent were whites. (Gipsy Escobar, Ph.D. and David E. Olson, Ph.D., Loyola University Chicago)
- In 2011, the top five offenses for women admitted to Cook County jail were felony possession of a controlled substance, domestic battery, retail theft, prostitution and driving on a suspended license. (Gipsy Escobar, Ph.D., and David E. Olson, Ph.D. Loyola University Chicago)
- The Cook County Judicial Advisory Council was renamed the Cook County Justice Advisory Council, with a new purpose. President Preckwinkle directed the Justice Advisory Council to focus on reducing the jail population, ensuring fair and equal access to the legal system and improving public safety in all neighborhoods. Central to Justice Advisory Council mission is a commitment to reduce the numbers of girls and women involved in the criminal justice system. Too many girls and women, especially members of minority groups, are arrested and detained every year in Cook County.
(Rebecca Janowitz, Cook County Justice Advisory Council)
- Women with criminal records may find it difficult to re-enter society. In Illinois, employers may not hire an individual with a felony conviction, landlords can

refuse to rent to individuals with criminal records, and a person with a felony conviction can be barred from receiving cash assistance from the government. (Hon. Dorothy Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County)

- Research has identified that the majority of the females released from jail and prison in 2011 will return to thirteen zip codes in Chicago's west and southwest side communities. The thirteen adjacent zip codes incorporate parts of the following communities: Armor Square, Auburn-Gresham, Austin, Brighton Park, Cicero, Englewood, North Lawndale, Roseland, West Garfield Park and Woodlawn. (Gipsy Escobar, Ph.D. and David E. Olson, Ph.D., Loyola University of Chicago)

CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LEAD TO INCARCERATION

PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED FEMALES

Sharon McDaniel of Chicago Women's AIDS Project described the circumstances that led her to incarceration:

We need to get to the root of why women commit crimes. We need to find out what happened in their lives prior to them committing crimes. I don't come from a broken family. I had both parents in the household. I had both working parents in the household. I come from a middle class family. But there were so many of us in the family there wasn't enough attention for me. So I went to the streets and I got all of the attention. So I started committing crimes. At the age of 15, I called it manslaughter. I did not have family support. My mother didn't come and get me out of jail.

Colette Payne of (Chicago Legal Advocates for Incarcerated Mothers) CLAIM -Visible Voices described what circumstances led her to incarceration:

I grew up in the Chicago Ida B. Wells Housing Project on the South Side of Chicago with both parents and five siblings. My parents struggled trying to feed and clothe all of us. We were evicted from our home. My mother, who worked as a legal secretary, struggled with mental illness and was hospitalized a few times throughout her life. Then my older sister became mentally ill, and was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. From the time I was about ten, my sister would beat me, and her unpredictable and often violent behavior was very scary to me. As I got older I decided I would rather live in the streets. The conditions of poverty and street culture led me to practice criminal behavior along with drug use. My brother and I stole food to survive. There were no services, no adults who would really work to uplift you, no one who really seemed to care. I did my first prison sentence in the Warrenville Juvenile Prison at the age of 16. During that time I felt lost and somewhat alone. My mother had reached out to the court system but found that the court system wasn't any help. Resources to help her struggling teenager were scarce.

Sonovia Petty of (Chicago Legal Advocates for Incarcerated Mothers) CLAIM-Visible Voices described what circumstances lead her to incarceration:

At the age of 16, I had two small children of my own and was homeless. I had to learn how to survive at an early age on the streets of Chicago. I was placed in numerous group home facilities with my children. I went to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to get some help for me and my children. Before long DCFS removed

my children from my custody because my housing wasn't stable. Instead of helping me they took my kids and put them in the foster care system. They broke up my family.

I started hanging out with a cousin of mine. Shortly after that she handed me a joint of marijuana laced with crack cocaine and told me to smoke it. She told me I would feel better.

At the age of 18, my criminal activities began and my life took a turn for the worse and would spiral downhill fast. I had started to sell drugs so I could afford to use them. I was arrested and thrown into jail.

- The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority randomly selected 163 female prisoners from the three Illinois Department of Corrections' women's prisons to help understand the nature and extent of prior victimization of women who are in prison and the effects that abuse had on them. The study revealed that 98 percent of these women have experienced some type of physical abuse where the average onset was 10 years old; 75 percent of the women have experienced some type of sexual abuse where the average onset was 11 years old; and 85 percent of the women have experienced some type of stalking or emotional abuse by an intimate partner where the average onset was 21 years old. Many of the women who experienced severe sexual child abuse are currently incarcerated for a violent offense. (Christine Devitt Westley, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority)

- As a result of domestic violence, battered women enter the criminal justice system as defendants in several ways:
 - ✓ First, the abuser will file false allegations of abuse against the victim in court. Many times, including this case, the victim has never filed any charges of abuse against her abuser over the years. Therefore, she will look like the abuser.
 - ✓ Second, women are arrested when they use violence as a method of self-defense when they are being attacked by their abuser.
 - ✓ Third, women who engage in retaliatory violence when they reach the point where they refuse to be abused anymore. These women anticipate an attack so they attack their abuser before they have a chance to attack them. (Jan Russell, Cook County Sheriff Women's Justice Programs)

- Women who are victims of domestic violence are often forced into prostitution by their abusers who claim that the women need to contribute financially to the household. (Jan Russell, Cook County Sheriff Women's Justice Programs)

- It is difficult for public defenders, prosecutors, and judges to recognize a domestic violence case due to the high volume of cases in bond court. Therefore, battered women who are arrested for self-defense without proper counseling may sometimes admit to their own actions without explaining that they acted out of self-defense. They were also brainwashed and manipulated by their abuser into thinking that their actions warranted their abuse. Lastly, they plead guilty in order to get back to their children when they can't immediately make bond. (Jan Russell, Cook County Sheriff Women's Justice Programs)

- When I originally started 27 years ago as a public defender, there were less than 500 women arrested and they were all in the sex trade industry. Currently, women are committing financial crimes because they are trying to support their families or because the men in their lives want the money and are forcing them to steal, forge checks or commit identity theft. (Darlene Williams, Cook County Law Office of the Public Defender)

- Single mothers living in poverty who cannot support their children will often commit crimes such as prostitution, theft, and fraud to provide for their children. (Darlene Williams, Cook County Law Office of the Public Defender)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM – WHAT HAPPENS DURING INCARCERATION?

PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED FEMALES

Sharon McDaniel of Chicago Women's AIDS Project described her experience in the Criminal Justice System:

Every time I came to court in front of Judge Fox, he was always concerned about what I was doing. Instead of sending me to prison, he sentenced me to 18 months of probation through the TASC program (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities).

I want to stress how effective the TASC program was for me. Without the TASC program, my life probably wouldn't have changed. It really gave me a different perception about life. I wanted more. It made me want to be a productive member of society again, instead of being a number.

Everybody I worked with was very concerned and compassionate. They helped me set goals and helped me try to accomplish those goals. As part of TASC, I went to an outpatient program where we talked about substance abuse, life skills, parenting skills, and anger management. These groups gave me the opportunity to talk about unresolved issues. This was important because so much pain was bottled up inside that I was carrying around. That played a big role in me using drugs, because I had stuffed all that pain and because I kept using drugs, the end result was incarceration.

Colette Payne of CLAIM-Visible Voices described her experience in the Criminal Justice System:

As an inmate, we spent a majority of our time watching TV, playing cards, and numbing ourselves. There is no fresh air, and there are many bad smells.

When I was in Cook County Jail's Division 4 Annex (general population), we did not have our own underwear or uniforms, they would be washed and then redistributed to anyone in the division. When you came in with your own underwear, they would take it and not replace it so you were just wearing the uniform that others had worn, against your skin. If you were menstruating at the time, no accommodations were made.

Breakfast was at 3:30 in the morning, lunch around 11:30, and dinner at 4:00 p.m. I particularly remember the horrible baloney sandwiches. I would try to get assigned as a kitchen worker just for something to do.

Overcrowding made things much worse. When there are many women in one cell, it can make you feel like you are back in slavery days. You learn to adapt and to stay in survival mode because you're under stress at all times.

Sonovia Petty of CLAIM-Visible Voices described her experience in the Criminal Justice System:

While I was incarcerated, I wanted to see my kids but it never happened. My children were being moved around from one foster home to another.

My children went through a lot during our separation. When my son was ten years old, he was psychiatrically hospitalized in Grant Hospital. The therapist recognized how much my son talked about me in his sessions. The Doctor asked me if I could have weekly phone calls with my son while he was in the hospital. I jumped at this opportunity. Every week, I was able to call collect to the hospital and talk with my son. After six months, my son showed signs of healthier behavior.

My children were taken from me because I did not have a stable place to live. They needed me and I needed them. The separation affected all of us and we are still struggling with it today.

Just before my release from prison, three of my children were adopted. I didn't understand what was going on because I was going back and forth to court trying to keep my parental rights.

- In 2011, Chief Judge Timothy Evans and Judge Paul Biebel established WINGS court (Women In Need of Gender-specific Services), a specialty court for women charged with felony prostitution and all cases were assigned to Judge Rosemary Grant Higgins. The women enter a two-year treatment program instead of receiving a prison sentence where they receive substance abuse counseling, trauma counseling, job training, rape counseling, and assistance in finding safe housing.

WINGS court was developed as a response to a community based initiative led by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless because there were over 100 women incarcerated in Cook County Jail for prostitution with less than a \$1,000 D bond and with no monetary means to post the \$100 bail to be released.

(Judge Rosemary Grant Higgins, Circuit Court of Cook County, Office of the Chief Judge)

- We had a young lady, with a low IQ. She was living with a man. She has children. He sexually abused her, and put her out. She commits a crime. She gets arrested. He takes her back in. He sexually abuses her. He hits her, puts her out again. She commits another crime. This is the cycle that she is caught up in.

We have a young lady who comes through the domestic violence courtroom. She is charged with a crime, but she is the one that's being abused. These are just two examples of the cases we see everyday in the Public Defender's Office. (Darlene Williams of Cook County Law Office of the Public Defender)

- I visited bond court a number of times over the last couple of months. I observed a twenty year old mother who was accused of violating an order of protection. She was a very petite young woman with no criminal background. Her stature made it hard to believe she could scare anyone. The order stopped her from seeing her child who was in the custody of the father. The State had no proof that she received service of the order. She was lost and had no idea how to proceed or get to see her child.(Gayle Nelson of Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM))

- In Cook County, many women who are charged with nonviolent offenses in bond court are detained until their charges are dropped or until they are released on probation. Women are unable to pay their bail because their bond is too expensive and they do not have the cash deposit. (Rebecca Janowitz, Cook County Justice Advisory Council)

CHALLENGES WOMEN FACE UPON RELEASE FROM JAIL

With increased limitations on their opportunities for unemployment, housing and education, some formerly incarcerated women get ensnared in a cycle of jail, unemployment, and jail again.
(Hon. Dorothy Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County)

PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED FEMALES

Sharon McDaniel of Chicago Women's AIDS Project described challenges she faced when released from jail:

I must also let you know my kids got taken during my drug use. I was a drug addict for over 30 years of my life. I'm 47 years old. Do the math.

And I need to let you all know that in 2007 I got reunited with my kids. Okay. I also need to let you all know I had a lawyer. I fired my lawyer. Yes, I did. A drug addict firing a lawyer. My kids have been adopted. I fought the system by myself and I got custody of my kids. That judge overturned that adoption and my kids are in my life right now today.

Colette Payne of CLAIM- Visible Voices described challenges she faced when released from jail:

We need more high-quality recovery homes for women returning to the community. Grace House is a great model, but it is small and does not allow children to live there. A mother needs structure and programs, and enough time to really work on yourself and get on your feet. Many recovery homes just want to take what little resources you have, such as food stamps, and provide little programming.

It was through my stay at Grace House that I first became a part of CLAIM's Visible Voices Program. The program empowered me to tell my story and to partner with other mothers to fight for systemic change.

Sonovia Petty of CLAIM-Visible Voices described challenges she faced when released from jail:

I was released from prison and I immediately called Catholic Charities to set up a date to see my children. On October 6, I met up with my first two children, Detrick, age 11 and Latoyre, age 9 at the Catholic Charities office but my two youngest children were not there. DCFS had split them up a long time ago. But what was so amazing is that when my daughter saw me she called out and said "mama!"

I asked about my other two children. The case worker had no knowledge of the other siblings. The counselors working with my children had changed so many times that they were not aware of my other children.

Sadly, my children had been stolen from me legally and there was nothing I could do. I think that it's very important for families to maintain contact particularly if there is no abuse or neglect. Children don't understand separation no matter what's going on in their lives.

- During 2011, a total of 9,464 females were discharged from the custody of the Cook County Jail. The detainees were discharged for one of four reasons 1) they posted the bail ordered by a judge prior to trial (37 percent of the female discharges), 2) they remained in jail until their criminal case resulted in their conviction and sentenced to prison, probation or supervision (47 percent of female discharges), 3) they remained in jail until the charges in their criminal case were dropped or they were found not guilty (16 percent of female discharges), or 4) they were released after serving jail sentence (13 percent of female discharges).
(Gipsy Escobar, Ph.D. and David E. Olson, Ph.D., Loyola University of Chicago)
- A National Institute of Drug Abuse Study was conducted by Doreen Salina, Ph.D. and the Sheriff's Women's Justice Programs on 283 female inmates at the Cook County Jail. When the women were released from jail into the community, they were asked what their primary needs were. Housing was number one with only 38 percent reporting stability housing. Job training, substance abuse treatment, money, education, medical care, mental health treatment, ID services and transportation finished out the list which still remained a concerned one month after release from jail. (Doreen Salina, Ph.D., Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine)
- Battered women in jail do not acknowledge they have been abused because they will not be released from jail if the only place they have to go is back to their abuser. Therefore, they withhold the information, do not get help, and when they are released go back to an abusive situation. (Jan Russell, Cook County Sheriff Women's Justice Programs)
- Criminal records create barriers to resources such as employment, housing, custody and parental rights, immigration, education benefits and public benefits eligibility. Criminal records are frequently permanent and can have consequences for the women's entire life. A woman who is an exemplary employee for years can be fired if her employer discovers that she has a criminal record. (Hon. Dorothy Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County)

- Illinois allows women to get their felony, misdemeanor, or municipal ordinance violation records in criminal and traffic cases expunged or sealed by the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County.
 - ✓ **Expungement** is when the arresting agency and/or the Illinois State Police physically destroys an individual's criminal records or returns the records to the individual. Additionally, the Clerk's Office erases the individual's name from the Clerk's Office's electronic docket from that day forward.
 - ✓ **Sealing** is when an individual's records are physically and electronically maintained, yet are unavailable without a court order, except that the law allows police agencies and prosecutors certain access to the individual's record. If a person's record is sealed, his or her name will also be erased from the Clerk's Office electronic docket system from that day forward.
(Hon. Dorothy Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cook County should support the development of specialized services for incarcerated females

The County should support the development and implementation of specialized social services for incarcerated females including substance abuse counseling, mental health counseling, family/children reunification counseling, employment training, and education training.

The County should provide both family and individual counseling while the women are incarcerated to help them deal with the separation and make reunification easier for the women and their families.

The County should provide adequate funding, resources and staff to the Empowerment Center, a collaboration between the Cook County Sheriff's Office and the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. The Empowerment Center's goal is to provide trauma informed treatment, case management, peer support, reduce mental health symptomology, reduce substance use and relapse, and provide case management services to reduce community reentry needs.

The County Board should provide adequate funding, resources and staff to the Women in Need of Gender-specific Services (WINGS) Court. The funding will help provide inpatient and out-patient substance abuse treatment programs and housing for the women.

The County should provide funding to the Housing Authority of Cook County to provide safe housing to women released from jail.

The County should provide adequate funding, resources and staff to the Clerk of the Circuit Court to increase public awareness of the expungement/sealing processes, make the expungement/sealing process more accessible, educate businesses about citizens' rights regarding expunged/sealed records, encourage Cook County vendors to hire ex-offenders, allocate a specific number of Cook County jobs for ex-offenders, urge the Governor to speed up the process of review of Illinois Prisoner Review Board recommendations, and grant pardons where appropriate.

Conduct public outreach and education

The County should conduct innovative outreach strategies and awareness campaigns that encourage the communities to partner with the jail to create cooperative working relationships with female offenders are released to the community.

APPENDICES

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It's Just Another Case

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My 2-Cents; Grasping My Dignity and Self Worth