

## York County Jail Board of Visitors Annual Report for 2024

### Board of Visitors 2024

Mr. Robert MacCormack – Retired law enforcement/corrections officer with extensive experience transporting inmates in need of psychiatric care. Assisted in the establishment of policies at the Cumberland County Jail to ensure the safe care of inmates being transferred to secure mental health facilities.

Ms. Susan Wiswell – Retired Nurse who has lived in York County for the past 40 years. She is active in county operations and is a member of the

- Animal Response Team
- York County Bicentennial Committee
- York County Budget Committee
- York County BOV since 2019

Reverend David Corbett – Former Corrections Officer, College Instructor, and full time Pastor. Reverend Corbett is interested in county and state operations and recently ran unsuccessfully for the state legislature. Has experience in court mediation and in security. At present, he proudly admits that he has a daughter and son in law currently employed in the corrections field.

Ms. Janet Drew – Retired Nurse who is very interested in county affairs. Ms. Drew attends county commissioner meetings in York and follows other counties, specifically regarding operations in its respective county correctional facilities. She is an active member of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition as well as groups advocating for human and civil rights.

Ms. Cheryl Dearman Mills – Retired educator who has served in three communities and three county jails. She is a member of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition as well as Welcoming Immigrants as our New Neighbors and has been a York County BOV member since 2019.

Ms. Sarah Johnson – Volunteer educator with experience working in correctional settings. Ms. Johnson has volunteered for 17 years in Maine and New Hampshire Correctional Facilities and was employed for four years at a women's prison in New Mexico.

The board would like to recognize the recent loss of Mr. Robert MacCormack. He was an integral member of our team and a lifetime friend to the community.

### BOV Overview

YCJ is well run with a professional, engaged, and empathetic staff. Several residents spoke well of the jail and staff experiences, reflecting their respect and appreciation for the level of care and professionalism. Their programming includes the largest MAT program of any jail in the state as well as many types of educational, personal growth and volunteer programs. The staff resources are exhausted administering these programs as well as focusing on the overall safety and well-being of all residents.

The Board held five meetings in 2024, on 1/29, 4/8, 7/9, 10/8, and 11/12. All meeting minutes are attached to this report. They visited incarcerated residents on 6/15 and 9/14. The planned visit and concert on 5/11 were canceled and planned projects with St. Theresa's did not materialize.

After the visit on 9/14, three members of the Board attended a recovery fair at Sweetser in Sanford and networked with community-based services. Two members attended a Massabesic adult education class at the jail, entitled "Behind the Walls," on 10/28.

Sheriff King and one Board member attended a zoom meeting on 3/27 with Volunteers of America. The purpose of the meeting was to form a partnership and seek grant funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice to start a program to strengthen the bonds between incarcerated parents and their children and decrease recidivism. This program will address concerns and implement ideas brought up in a zoom meeting held on 2/25/2021, based on research conducted at University of Southern Maine. The grant proposal was approved and funded at \$690,000 over three years beginning 10/1/2024. The Board met with Rich Hooks Wayman, CEO of VOA Northern New England, on 11/12 to discuss the project.

Current jail programs include Smart Recovery, Kids Free to Grow, Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), HiSET (high school completion), college prep., work prep., and enrichment classes, N2 work programs, AA, NA, and peer recovery coaching.

#### **Data from Meeting Minutes**

April: 87 residents in the MAT program, the highest enrollment ever., many of whom have mental health problems. Smart Recovery classes

June: 103 residents in the MAT program.

October: 119 residents in the MAT program. Other programs include Kids Free to Grow, AA, NA, & peer recovery coaching. Diana visits pods weekly & is working on treatment plans.

Education – HiSET (high school completion) program currently has 17 enrolled, 23 have completed individual tests. Other programs include college prep, work prep, & enrichment classes. 194 residents have attended at least one enrichment program this year. N2 work program taught by Aramark.

#### **BOV Observations from direct visits:**

##### **Communication:**

- Staff note that the first days in jail are most difficult for people incarcerated. It takes time for staff to learn the needs of new admissions and meet the needs of all those incarcerated.
- New individuals are often frustrated as they struggle to learn about jail procedures, in addition to dealing with their larger legal issues. BOV requested copies of the "handbook" distributed during intake. Residents stated they did not possess a copy of the handbook . How do they find it?
- Most people were not familiar with Pretrial services, its guidelines, contact information or their eligibility
- When people are arrested and imprisoned, their history is often unknown in the first days. This causes potential safety issues for ALL at the jail.

### **Intake and Pretrial:**

- Residents claim that they do not know what to expect during their first 72 hours after admission and do not understand grievance procedures or the re-entry process, despite these issues being covered in the Resident Handbook. This could be due to the stress of the intake process, as well as mental and physical health conditions at the time.
- Dispositional Hearings - They do not attend or get transcripts so have no basis for appeal

### **Reentry support Needed:**

- Release is not coordinated. When court orders, or their bail comes through, they may be released without medication, prescriptions or a known destination.
  - Coordination of community resources is needed: programming, housing, transportation, food, clothing.
- One man said probation had been his biggest help in the past. The required structure expectations were good guidance.

### **Infection Control**

- Concerns about frequency of obtaining clean and dry laundry.
- Concerns about procedure to adequately disinfect mattresses (“alternate products being evaluated”)
- Concerns about mold in showers (“showers on smaller units treated. Difficult to move all the people out of large B pod” for maintenance work)

### **Nutrition**

- Contractor is Aramark: Men report still being hungry, incidents where the kitchen ran out of food. BOV needs to review menus and to follow up on this issue.

### **Healthcare:**

Contract staff responsible for healthcare and MAT (medication assisted treatment)

- People with significant mental health issues may have no other treatment choice than jail. Correctional Officers and some other staff are not trained to manage behavioral health patients. Maine mental health facilities can refuse to accept a YCJ transfer.
- YCJ’s MAT funding is inadequate. In addition they received less opioid settlement funding than other counties.
- 2 MAT providers: (individuals housed from another county) were on different MAT maintenance protocols, creating diversion concerns for both YCJ staff and people in the recovery journey.
  - Drugs entering the facility and diversion of medications such as Suboxone persist.
- Response to healthcare requests is often delayed or absent, even after a grievance is submitted. Reports of unexamined, untreated open / infected wounds, dental issues and pain. Skin lesions on several men. Note: Bandages, OTC remedies are largely unavailable; many self-remedies are banned at YCJ (e.g., cloves or tea bags...)

### **Homeless Crisis: An Indictment of Communities**

- Noteworthy: YCJ staff identify people who have self-offended in the winter in order to have indoor housing and food.

## Conclusion:

The Board of Visitors met during January 2025, to reflect on our year's experience, and to plan for next year.

We identified issues impacting the jail residents, the staff, families of both, and our communities. Some state and county issues were identified. Many were identified in 2023 and are ongoing.

1. Unfunded mandates from DOC & legislature (e.g., MAT) strain jail budgets and staff.
  - a. Need access to Opioid funds for recovery center operations. (Facility built with ARPA funds)
  - b. Lack of outside resources for those in need of advanced mental health care. Need to provide detox at a rehab facility instead of in jail.
    - i. Obtaining mental health services for chronically mentally ill residents in a timely manner remains a challenge due to a shortage of beds and staffing in the few facilities in Maine, and some residents are sent back on medications not on the jail's formulary.
  - c. Jail staff are not trained medical professionals . Communities need opioid funds to support more community resources, especially for coordinated housing and support and mental health facilities. (YCJ has experienced 4-5 month wait lists.)

*Note: Maine's legislation allows behavioral health facilities to refuse to take in people from jails. Housing people in inappropriate care settings creates risks for the facility staff, residents, and the larger community.*

- d. Public needs to know that they can NO longer get community referrals to Layman Way. They have stopped taking referrals in preparation for their closing in June 2025.
2. The largest housing unit has shower facilities that are difficult to keep clean
  - a. On our first visit in 2024 residents shared concerns about keeping mold out of the shower area and the lack of a process to properly sanitize mattresses when someone leaves.
3. Need to improve transition from jail to community, coordinating programming with more community-based resources, including case management, jobs, peer support, second chances, transportation, transitional housing, and ultimately permanent housing.
  - a. On our 2 visits with residents during 2024 many voiced concerns about not understanding the reentry process, application process for rehabilitation centers, or what they are eligible to apply for and when.
4. Need to improve resident understanding during the intake process and first weeks at the jail.
  - a. On our 2 visits with residents during 2024 there were concerns about not understanding when arraignments would be, if they could contact Pretrial Services, if they were eligible for Pretrial Services.
  - b. The BOV recommends some standardized documentation and follow up information be compiled for residents within (10 days / 2 weeks?) of intake. The intake process is stressful and a person could be in distress for a period of time and be unable to understand or remember information shared during intake.
  - c. BOV should understand what is available on tablets and Kiosk to be able to answer resident questions.
  - d. BOV should understand types, availability, eligibility requirements and limits for YCJ programming (for example, the MAT waitlist process).
5. The BOV did not visit with the residents the minimum times as required by legislation, and meeting schedules need improved communication and lead time.
  - a. Lack of followup by the BOV regarding resident's concerns

- i. Residents were concerned about the MAT dosages and potential for misuse, as well as the decrease in group time. BOV was unable to follow up and explain these were medical contractor issues and that we had at least raised them to jail administration.
  - ii. Residents were concerned about food, specifically running out of items at times, about turnaround time of the grievance process and medical requests
6. Legislation requires training for the BOV which has not happened yet and will be a goal for 2025.
7. BOV did not follow up on the 2024 resident death at the jail

YCJ is well run with a professional, engaged, and empathetic staff. Several residents spoke well of the jail and staff experiences, reflecting their respect and appreciation for the level of care and professionalism. Their programming includes the largest MAT program of any jail in the state as well as many types of educational, personal growth and volunteer programs. The staff resources are exhausted administering these programs as well as focusing on the overall safety and well-being of all residents.

They are in critical need of more state facilities and a faster referral process for residents in mental health crises. There are limited beds at Riverview, Dorothea Dix and MDOC IMHU, so often a person must suffer in crisis at the jail, which can lead to trauma for the staff and unsafe conditions for all. Jail staff are not trained medical professionals and should not be required to handle these situations. Jails are also not equipped or allowed to administer the medical care needed in a crisis situation.

Everything does come down to a budget, but at some point, we should acknowledge that our state budget reflects our values. We are risking the safety of all residents of county jails when we burden the staff with medical care and crisis situations that they are not trained or equipped to handle. We are also risking the safety of the staff whose limited resources need to be concentrated on a few individuals. This is also a traumatizing situation for the staff, and they pay a mental and physical price for being put in a situation they are not equipped for. These are severe human costs that do not appear in any budget, but greatly affect the safety and success of York County Jail residents, staff, and community members.

## **BOV Goals 2025**

The BOV identified areas of focus for the upcoming year. To meet BOV legislative responsibilities in reviewing the management of YCJ and to better assist residents in preparing for reentry, the BOV used the document “Detention and Correctional Standards for Maine Counties and Municipalities *published January 20, 2021*” (<https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/03/201/201c001.pdf>) as a guideline for our 2025 goals.

These include communications with residents to ensure their understanding of “their basic rights and entitlements” in areas including communications with family, friends and legal counsel, medical care and expenses, programming, food, hygiene, safety, disciplinary and grievance processes. Our goal with these efforts is, as the document states, “to protect the rights and safety of the residents, staff and community.”

Recommendations include requesting assistance from state resources.

- LD 1975: “An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs” would have helped address Maine’s substance use crisis as a public health issue. It was amended to become a Task Force to study the issue but still died in the Senate. It is clear that lack of substance use disorder treatment including medical, mental health, peer support and related harm-reduction services are the most critical safety and

financial stressors for YCJ residents and staff. Note that First County Foundation is raising funds for the new treatment center.

- Communicate issues and needs to the Maine Recovery Council as they disburse funds within the Maine Recovery Fund (<https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/statutes/5/title5sec203-C.html>).
  - The York County Regional Recovery Center would provide observation and detox beds as well as residential and outpatient treatment enabling county residents to obtain critical services before entering the carceral system. It is currently severely underfunded.
  - Community Recovery and Peer Support organizations such as Access Direct Recovery Network, Enso Recovery and the Portland Recovery Community Center need funding to continue their successful work. YJC Staff depend on their expertise and commitment, but these are often volunteers who should be paid for their services. Increasing staff and services at these organizations will reduce the number of people entering the jail system who need treatment that jail staff is not trained, nor should they be responsible, to offer.

## MEDICAL

1. Obtain data on the number of inmates staff would like to have in treatment if beds were available.
2. Speak with medical staff regarding individual inmates' needs.
  - a. Understand process and eligibility of the MAT program and general medical needs.
3. Discuss individual inmates' stories and how those individuals' needs are taxing staff.
4. Better understand the procedures and policies in regards to medical events and/or death of inmates.
5. Obtain data for the number of inmates with mental health diagnosis.
6. Understand and address the language and literacy needs of inmates and the resulting impact on mental health.

## PRE-TRIAL AND REENTRY SERVICES

1. Connect with pre-trial service providers to try to determine why inmates are telling us that they aren't aware of the service or have no contact with the providers.
2. Follow up on reentry applications
3. Determine if VOA staff can help with the reentry process

## OTHER

1. Participate in VOA Grant as appropriate
2. Develop realistic processes to better follow up with residents' issues
3. BOV training to be provided per legislation
4. BOV meeting and visitation schedule
  - a. Understanding that occasional inmate-on-staff assaults occur due to the jail housing some violent offenders, work with jail administration to determine required arrangements for scheduled visitations to meet the legislative requirements.
5. Better understand the YCJ's process in response to a death and other serious occurrences.
6. Complete BOV membership, and recognize Bob McCormick's contributions

# YCJ BOV Minutes 2024

Minutes for Board of Visitors meeting 01/29/2024

Participants: Sheriff King, Maj. Thayer, Lt. Marks, Sarah Johnson, Janet Drew, Bob McCormick, Susan Wiswell.

We did not tour the jail due to 5 staff members testing + for COVID over the weekend.

Discussion of BOV reporting requirement – The act passed in July and took effect in October, but the annual report is supposed to cover all of 2023. Unsure whether it is required by 2/15 this year, but will try to submit one, even if it is late. BOV will send to Jail Administrator, Sheriff, and County Commissioners. Sheriff will send to the appropriate legislative committee. Sarah is reviewing upcoming legislation that may impact the jail. We will include in our report current and planned programs, challenges that we and the jail staff have identified, and our recommendations.

### Concerns expressed during joint meeting -

1. Need to increase BOV-resident contact.
2. Need more outside resources, especially mental health facilities (4-5 mo. wait lists).
3. Public needs to know that they can get community referral to Layman Way.
4. Need smoother transition from jail to community services.
5. Unfunded mandates from DOC & legislature (e.g., MAT) strain jail budgets.
6. Need detox at rehab instead of jail.
7. Need to access opioid funds for recovery center.

## Other updates –

Sweetser has a new emergency service for mental health & substance use in Sanford, open 10-3 Mondays & Wednesdays for walk-ins, on call otherwise.

Jail awards ceremony 2/9 at 3 p.m. & chili cook-off at noon.

Female residents from Aroostook & Cumberland counties returned to their counties on 1/8.

15 CO's are at MCJA, including 5 "new Mainers." Some are just learning English.

Several new educators are on board.

Staff will meet tomorrow w/Jack Murphy from St. Theresa's to decide on projects for residents to build for their children for Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Classes include nurturing & parenting, survivors of human trafficking, substance abuse & peer recovery training.

The state has \$50 million in opioid funds. York County gets \$1.2 million/year from Slacker settlement.

4 BOV members met separately after the joint meeting to discuss our observations from our tours of the jail. Sarah will focus on legislation and Susan will focus on current & planned programs for our report.

We will also look at standards. BOV is requesting copies of the “inmate handbook” distributed during intake and statistics on the numbers of people involved in each of the programs.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Wiswell

[illegible]

Minutes for Board of Visitors meeting 04/08/2024

Participants: Sheriff King, Maj. Thayer, Lt. Marks, Carla Petarkis, Bob McCormack, Janet Drew, and Susan Wiswell in person, Cheryl Mills & Sarah Johnson via zoom.

Sheriff King and Susan Wiswell attended a zoom meeting with Volunteers of America to form a partnership to seek grant funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice for \$250K/year x 3 years to expand





Susan Wiswell

The jail did not purchase the equipment to seal property since the state prison will not take the large quantities of inmate property which accumulates while inmates are exhausting their appeals prior to transfer.

Respectfully submitted,  
Susan Wiswell

Respectfully submitted,  
Susan Wiswell

- Procedures for cleaning showers and sinks, laundry procedures and schedules for clothes, and linens

- Procedures for disinfecting mattresses and cells on release of residents?
- Access to MAT / procedures for assessment and management of people requiring psych medications

9/14/24, Cheryl, Sarah, Janet, Susan

- Food quantity, protein
- Reentry (education on process, access to program applications)

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