

Johnson Suggests New Directions And Goals For Correction Department

By Secretary Aaron J. Johnson
Special To The Post

As Secretary of Correction I feel a responsibility to the citizens of North Carolina to let them know what the priorities and goals for the Department are under the Martin administration.

I believe that the citizens of North Carolina would appreciate a better understanding of the correction system and how it operates.

First and foremost, our primary responsibility is to ensure the public's safety.

According to public opinion polls, the fear of crime is as great as it has ever been. The public must feel that we are protecting it against those individuals who pose a threat to society, we must have an accountable criminal justice system in North Carolina. There must be among judges, jailers and victims a clear knowledge of how long a prisoner will serve behind bars.

To date, we have been dealing with short term solutions to long term problems. At Governor Martin's request, a comprehensive study of criminal justice is under way. The study will focus on sentencing practices, prison overcrowding, alternatives to incarceration and victim restitution. All too often we tend to forget the victim. It is my opinion that this study will give us clearer guidelines within the criminal justice system with which to operate and reflect in North Carolina a truly consistent system.

In the past, attempts to deal with issues involving sentencing have resulted in confusing sentencing practices lacking direction and accountability. Again, I use the word, accountability. We must show the citizens of North Carolina that we, in the criminal justice system, are truly committed to a fair and accountable system.

Sentences must be just and effective so that they will serve to discourage those who leave our prison system from ever returning. The public and the courts are demanding longer sentences for offenders. This, obviously, causes the system to expand in population.

We must have adequate facilities to house this rising population. Longer sentences for offenders doesn't mean that we as a society should tolerate inhumane conditions in our prison system.

When a person has been sentenced to prison, he or she should be able to do his or her time, without fear of attacks, without being turned out of prison, in a worse shape psychologically, or mentally, or in terms of their attitudes toward society than when they went in.

In North Carolina, we have to have more facilities; this is a fact of life. We cannot have conditions where



Aaron J. Johnson
.....NCDC secretary

as new prisoners are brought into one end of the system while other serious offenders who should remain in prison have to be pushed out because of overcrowding. I have asked my staff to study ways to build and run more cost effective prisons.

Private sector involvement in the building and running of our minimum security units may be one

alternative. Some states have already done this and we are evaluating how successful they have been.

We will not sacrifice security for cost, but we will, at every turn, look for ways to save the taxpayer money.

We agree with Attorney General Ed Meese that there is no reason why a prison facility should cost \$100,000 per prisoner in one state and \$30,000 per prisoner in another. Our department intends to work with the National Institute of Correction to look into ways to streamline our prison design and building plans.

As I mentioned earlier, our first goal is to ensure the public's safety.

Our second goal for the Department of Correction is to have a strong rehabilitation program. Over 90 percent of the inmates in our system will one day return to society.

We must do our utmost to prepare these individuals to become productive members of society.

We would like to expand our Prison Enterprises program.

We have two reasons for that:

1. We are hopeful that by expanding this existing program that we can offer the inmates a wider variety of opportunities to develop

marketable job skills.

2. By expanding Prison Enterprises, we can generate more revenues which will lighten our overhead without interfering in the private sector.

I have always believed that if a man had a skill that he was proud of, and a chance to perform that skill that there was less likelihood of him running afoul with the law. We would like to see the private sector become more involved in helping train our work-release inmates develop meaningful jobs.

I am calling on the business and community leaders across the State of North Carolina to offer to train some of these individuals.

The Department of Correction has one of the finest educational, vocational and behavioral programs for inmates. One way my staff and I would like to strengthen these programs is through stronger public and private sector involvement.

Finally, let me say I am aware of the challenges we face in Correction. We are given people who society and the courts have given up on.

With the Governor's leadership and hard work and the public's support and involvement, we believe we can have a safer, more humane and more cost effective prison system.

I welcome thoughts of the citizens of North Carolina as we deal

with the complex set of problems that comes with running the North Carolina Department of Correction and its prisons.

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Amay James School

Hosts L.A. Workshop

The Amay James School will be the site of a dance and drama performance by the Los Angeles Workshop on Tuesday, July 9, at 7:30 p.m. The L.A. Workshop is composed of 23 Baha'i Youth from various races and nationalities who live in the Los Angeles area. They are coming to Charlotte directly from performances at the Baha'i International Youth Conference which was held in Ohio last weekend.

The group will also attend a one-day conference during the day at the school. Speakers to the conference will include Dr. Sara Pereira, visiting professor of Spanish at Johnson C. Smith University, Carey Murphey, Director of the Baha'i Regional Teaching Office of South Carolina and Robert Cadwalader from Shelby.

The Los Angeles group members are friends who work, study and play together as well as perform various dance exhibitions, including break dancing, street theatre, and plays. We hope to share this group's 10 years of theatre and dance experience with the Charlotte Baha'i Youth and their friends," reported Charles Hicks, Chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Charlotte. "They address the issues of negative peer pressure, racial prejudice and educational and career choices. These are the concerns which young people struggle to address at this critical stage in their development as maturing adults."

For more information about the Workshop and conference, call 366-1713.

Police Volunteers

The Charlotte Police Department is accepting applications for volunteers to serve as police reserves, citizen patrol officers, and technical-clerical volunteers. Police reserves are sworn officers with powers of arrest who assist the Patrol Division. Citizen patrol officers are trained as observers and assigned to areas of the city requiring high visibility patrolling. The technical-clerical volunteers provide assistance in areas such as data processing and research. The Police Department provides training, uniforms and equipment. Applications are available in the volunteer office of the Charlotte Police Department, 625 East Fourth St., Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. For information, call 336-2167.



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