

Testimony for the Hearing of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons
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All Americans want a safe, humane, efficient, effective correctional system that yields offenders better prepared to be responsible citizens when they return to society. Regardless of legal codes and other requirements, correctional professionals work ultimately to achieve a "crime-free environment" for every person in every community. That "crime-free environment" also includes those who are confined in secure facilities. Moreover, what we want now is not very different from what our forefathers wanted. As early as the Walnut Street Jail and the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia, 1787 and 1829 respectively, penal reformers were concerned about safe, humane conditions for those who were imprisoned.

By 1870, many international and United States advocates and penal reformers joined with Rutherford B. Hayes, future U.S. President, to establish what would later be named the American Correctional Association (ACA). Even then there was an on-going struggle to identify the practices and procedures that would predict safe, humane conditions in facilities where incarcerated offenders could acquire the skills necessary to be law-abiding citizens. But at that time through today, obtaining the resources necessary to guarantee a safe, humane, efficient, effective correctional system has been a "hit or miss" proposition. In spite of sporadic support over time at jurisdictional levels, the men and women who work in this field have chosen the ACA as the organization that can help to professionalize corrections. Besides bringing some consensus around operations and policy over the past 135 years, ACA has become the premier voice for corrections in this country. ACA is also the internationally recognized authority on standards and operations within the profession.

ACA Policies and Resolutions have a prescribed process for creation, review, and expiration. At certain points in the process, any ACA member may comment on proposed policies and resolutions or those that are presented for review. To date, ACA has 51 policies and 14 resolutions covering an extensive array of issues facing or concerning corrections. A few examples include the following:

- Calls for separate housing of juvenile offenders from adult offenders.
- Establishing guidelines for staff when the death penalty is the law.
- Endorsing full funding of correctional programs for inmates.
- Supporting the need for adequate, proper training of staff, including screening.
- Advocating for equal protection of women, minorities, and other protected classes in hiring and promotions.

In an attempt to keep decision makers informed, *ACA Policies and Resolutions* are sent to members of Congress, the judiciary, state governments and the press. The *ACA's Code of*

Ethics enjoins its members to “honor the public’s right to information and to share information...”.

ACA has a distinguished history of speaking out on issues that affect the quality of life of offenders. ACA was one of the first organizations in the nation to call for an end to medical experimentation on inmates. More recently, ACA has been an advocate of restoration of voting rights under certain conditions. But perhaps the most noteworthy contribution has been and continues to be standards and accreditation--called by some the greatest single step in improving correctional operations in the 20th century. ACA has been involved with this effort for more than three decades. ACA is the first organization in the nation to develop performance-based measures/standards for medical/healthcare. In time, every set of standards will most likely become performance-based. An arm of ACA, the Commission on Accreditations for Corrections, works intensively to include the input of members and other professionals in the accreditation process and field-testing. ACA has to carefully respect the needs of the field while maintaining the integrity of the process. States and jurisdictions generally choose to enter the process to achieve an objective assessment of the quality of their effectiveness. For correctional staffers, there is a great deal of pride associated with achieving accreditation and maintaining it over time. The entire adult correctional systems in Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio, Tennessee, and New York are fully accredited. In Louisiana, accreditation is required by federal court order. In Nebraska, state law requires accreditation.

In terms of fostering the professional development of members, ACA has instituted a rapidly growing Certification Program. This program grew out of a need to supplement, and in some cases provide, quality training for selected correctional positions. ACA currently offers certification designations for executives, managers, supervisors, correctional officers, medical staff, and many other disciplines. An elected commission composed up academicians and practitioners reviews and approves a rigorous test for each designation. Nearly 200 persons have been certified during the past 4 years. In addition, through a grant with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), ACA sponsors a “leadership development course” for mid-level managers to prepare them for the next step in their careers.

On-line Corrections Academy (OCA) allows ACA members to be trained on various subjects in corrections from their own classrooms, offices, homes, or other places. Examples of these courses include, but are not limited to, such topics as Basic Correctional Practices, History of Corrections, and Blood-Bourne Pathogens. OCA courses are accepted for college credit, thus members are assisted in obtaining an undergraduate degree. Some courses have also been accepted for graduate credit.

ACA has developed several products to reach out to those who are interested in and who work in corrections. The award-winning *Corrections Today* magazine is printed seven times per year with a theme and sub-theme for every issue. Each issue is read by over 50,000 persons. ACA is one of the best sources for contemporary correctional theory, operations, and news in the world. A smaller newsletter, *On the Line*, is printed the remaining five months and features

Capitol Hill issues that are related to corrections. *Corrections Compendium* is a research publication that is often cited by others for news stories and research.

ACA also solicits authors for books and other publications covering a number of topics that pertain to the field. Many ACA books cover self-help for offenders as well as topics for staff development.

Besides supporting more than 80 State Chapters and professional affiliates in their conferences and workshops, ACA holds a Winter Conference in January of each year. This conference is attended by an average of approximately 4,000, including a number of international representatives. In August, the Congress of Correction draws an average of about 5,000 persons. These meetings feature from seventy (70) to one hundred (100) sessions for professional development. Nationally recognized speakers are featured at the major sessions. A few past speakers have been Attorneys General Meese, Reno, and Thornburg; former First Lady Barbara Bush; General Anthony Zinni; Martin Luther King III; Oliver North; and Hugh Downs. In addition, more than fifty (50) Standing and Ad Hoc committees work on issues and topics that are important to improving the field. This strategy provides an additional avenue for identifying emerging issues. Many affiliates such as the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA), the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA), the North American Association of Wardens and Superintendents (NAAWS), the American Jail Association (AJA), and the International Community Corrections Association (ICCA) meet in conjunction with ACA's Winter Conference and/or the Congress of Correction.

Correctional services have withstood tremendous criticism. Some of it is justified, much of it is not. Public opinion is not always clear about our mission. Some say that it is to punish; some say that it is to rehabilitate. Others say that it is both. In short, ACA has been a tireless advocate for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of corrections, given a mixed mandate. ACA has not used sensationalism to call attention to issues. Rather, ACA has invited to this work those persons who have a genuine interest in making improvements. ACA has tried to provide for an array of different realities from each state and territory, taking into account that increasing resources for corrections will not be a top priority with many appointing officials.

This nation, similar to most in the world, has inherited a punitive correctional system. Corrections advocates and reformers have played a key role in helping it to evolve to where it is today. Notwithstanding, the next level of assurances with regard to safety, humane treatment, and rehabilitation cannot be generated from within the correctional system without help. Appointed officials, the U.S. Congress, legislatures, and other decision makers must become better students with regard to their own systems' operations, how these systems are led and managed, offender needs--and especially special populations, victims' needs, reentry, and other related issues. A safe, humane, effective, efficient correctional system must be engineered over a period of time with the necessary leadership, resources, and commitment from professionals and other key decision makers to making improvements. The American Correctional Association is doing its part to achieve the results that every person in every community wants.

If we are to achieve more, it will be done by partnering with advocates and others who wish to build upon the work that we are doing. They will value the results that come from quality correctional care.

The American Correctional Association wants to be recognized for its contributions to ensuring public safety. We want to be recognized for caring for staff--in uplifting them to a respected professional level, with adequate pay and benefits, proper training and work conditions. We want to be recognized as a voice of change--that offenders in our facilities deserve to be treated with dignity. We want to be consulted when issues affecting corrections are debated in Congress, in national commissions such as this one, and in other venues. We believe that we have been good stewards of our responsibility, in spite of the lack of resources. We stand for the values that have made our land the Home of the Brave and the Land of the Free.