
**Community Safety, Justice, & Reentry
Committee**

HB 2287

Brief Description: Creating an advisory board to the office of the corrections ombuds.

Sponsors: Representatives Farivar, Goodman, Simmons, Chopp, Nance, Street, Davis, Ortiz-Self, Ramel, Peterson and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates an Advisory Board to the Office of the Corrections Ombuds.

Hearing Date: 1/22/24

Staff: Lena Langer (786-7192).

Background:

The Office of the Corrections Ombuds.

The Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) was created in 2018 as an independent and impartial office to:

- provide information to inmates and their families;
- promote public awareness and understanding of inmates' rights and responsibilities;
- identify system issues and responses for the Governor and the Legislature; and
- ensure compliance with relevant statutes, rules, and policies pertaining to corrections facilities, services, and treatment of inmates under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections (DOC).

The OCO may initiate and attempt to resolve an investigation upon its own initiative, or upon receiving a complaint from an inmate, family member, or other representative of an inmate, an employee, or others, regarding abuse or neglect; DOC decisions, administrative actions,

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inactions, or omissions; policies, procedures, and rules; or alleged violations of the law. Correspondence and communication with the OCO is confidential and must be protected as privileged correspondence in the same manner as legal correspondence or communication.

The OCO must annually report to the Governor, the Legislature, and the statewide Family Council the number of complaints received and resolved by the OCO, significant systemic or individual investigations or outcomes achieved by the OCO, and any outstanding or unresolved concerns or recommendations of the OCO.

Summary of Bill:

By December 1, 2024, subject to appropriations, the Governor must convene an Advisory Board (Board) to the Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO). The Board must work with the OCO to create and participate in a priority setting process. The OCO must provide the Board with briefings or reports relating to deidentified data, trends, and other relevant issues. The Board does not participate in any OCO investigations and is not authorized to receive confidential records. The Board may issue its own annual report to provide the Governor and the Legislature with recommendations regarding the OCO's performance, budget, and changes in the law that would enhance the OCO's effectiveness.

While the Board is being created and when there are subsequent vacancies, the OCO may provide the Governor with recommendations for appointments to the Board. The Governor may consider these recommendations when making appointments.

The Board consists of the following 11 members:

- two currently incarcerated individuals, one from the men's division and one from the women's division, who have served at least five years of incarceration and have at least five years left on their sentences;
- two formerly incarcerated individuals, one from the men's division and one from the women's division, who each served at least five years of incarceration;
- two family members who have been affected by incarceration;
- a community member with knowledge and experience in issues related to racial, ethnic, or religious diversity within the correctional system;
- a community member with knowledge and experience in the accommodation needs of individuals with disabilities;
- a community member with knowledge and experience in reentry support or reentry programming;
- a community member with a medical background; and
- a community member with a gender responsive background.

After full membership is attained, the Board must develop a process for replacing members. Board members serve a term of two years. The Board must create and implement a system of staggered terms, and no member may serve more than two consecutive terms. The Board will designate two cochairs by vote, and one chair must be currently or formerly incarcerated. The

Board must convene at least quarterly.

Eligible members of the Board, including incarcerated individuals, must receive stipends. The DOC must work with the OCO to develop a process where currently incarcerated and eligible board members may be paid stipends for their participation.

The Board is subject to the Open Public Meetings Act. The OCO must provide administrative and clerical assistance to the Board. Board members must complete training to utilize an antiracist lens in their duties as members.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2024.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.