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## **PREA Review Panel – Hearings on Sexual Victimization in Jails – 1/8/14**

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**The American Jail Association (AJA)** is a national, nonprofit organization that supports the professionals who operate our Nation's jails. It is the only national association that focuses exclusively on issues specific to the operations of local correctional facilities. We carry out our mission through educational training at conferences and workshops, through publishing our award winning magazine *American Jails*, our weekly e-newsletter *AJA-lert*, our website, webinars and working closely with our collaborative partners.

As an organization focused on local corrections, we realize our responsibility to provide the knowledge, tools and training to jail professionals to assure their success as PREA is implemented.

Briefly, here is how we have leveraged our presence in the local corrections field to educate corrections officers and jail administrators (topic #1):

### **WEBINARS**

Shortly after the final rules were published, the American Jail Association sponsored a free webinar to bring the field up to date on the standards. We offered this at no charge. More than 700 professionals registered for the event.

On Wednesday, October 9, 2013, AJA sponsored another webinar, focused on implementation as jails work through the standards in their facilities. Pre-registration neared 1,000, numbers unheard of for a webinar.

### **AMERICAN JAILS MAGAZINE**

American Jails magazine is distributed, free of charge, to every jail in the United States, regardless of whether there is a member at the facility, or not. This gives us tremendous reach as we work to advance our mission.

Since 2010, here is what has been published regarding PREA:

- Executive Director's Remarks  
Gwyn Smith-Ingley  
"Status of PREA Standards and Data Collection Activities"  
January/February 2010, p. 7
- "AJA Responds to Proposed PREA Standards"  
July/August 2011, pp. 35-37
- Executive Director's Remarks  
Gwyn Smith-Ingley  
"AJA Values Clear Message on PREA Standards Implementation"  
July/August 2011, p. 7

- Guest Editorial  
Michela Bowman  
"Mobilizing Against Sexual Assault"  
September/October 2011, p. 5
- "What Do We Do About PREA?"  
Connie Clem  
November/December 2012, pp.8-14

### **AJA-lert**

The AJA-lert has wide distribution in the jail community. It is published 52 times annually and is distributed to AJA members via email on Tuesday afternoons. Since January, when AJA began publishing AJA-lert, we have had nine mentions of the PREA standards in the publication. Many of the mentions hyperlinked to other resources to help corrections officers as they work through implementation.

### **TRAINING WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS**

In 2013, AJA sponsored six regional workshops on PREA, the final 2 were on Nov. 18th in Las Vegas and on Dec. 12th in Charleston, SC. All of our workshops have been strategically located to draw as many jail directors and corrections officers as possible. So far, all of our training workshops have been filled to capacity. In 2013, at the AJA Annual Training Conference and Jail Expo, we sponsored a two-day PREA seminar, in conjunction with the PREA Resource Center. We offered the training a no-cost to anyone wishing to attend. More than 150 corrections officers and jail administrators participated.

### **AJA.ORG (topic #2)**

On our website, we have attempted to provide relative and timely information to the jail community as the PREA standards are implemented. This has included linking to news articles about the standards, a prominent link to the PREA Resource Center on our home page, and other resources on the topic. In addition to the aforementioned AJA resources that we provide for the corrections industry, we have directed everyone who seeks even more information to the PREA Resource Center website. The PRC, operated by the BJA under the Department of Justice offers assistance on PREA issues related to legal, policy and practice, resources, news coverage, research and standards.

### **COLLABORATION**

The American Jail Association has been proactive in its approach to helping the industry understand the standards, and in providing the tools necessary to do so. For example, our Executive Director regularly sits in on hearings and meetings on PREA, and is a member of the PREA Resource Center's Communications Advisory Group.

### **Topic #3**

The most effective way for facilities to protect offenders who may have mental health problems or who have a non-heterosexual sexual orientation is to implement a behavior based, objective jail classification system. This type of system classifies inmates according to the totality of the risk factors presented when the individual is interviewed by a counselor or classification officer upon intake. If an inmate

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presents in such a way that it is evident that he/she will become a victim or intended target, based on individual behaviors and the (non)conformity to acceptable behaviors for general population, that inmate will be placed in protective custody and be segregated from the rest of the inmate population. It is important to note that segregation in this case does not equal isolation and that all of the rights and privileges afforded to the general population will be afforded to an inmate in protective custody. In addition to the initial classification, reclassification at regular intervals should occur every 30 to 60 days.

Some of the most common objective factors that a jail should take into account are:

- Severity of current charges/convictions
- Serious offense history
- Escape history
- Institutional disciplinary history
- Prior felony convictions
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Stability factors (e.g. age, employment, length of residence)
- Likelihood of victimization

The AJA recommends any screening instrument for inmate classification that utilizes objective criteria as opposed to subjective models. Subjective models tend to rely on informal criteria that often lead to inconsistency and error in staff decision making. Conversely, objective systems depend on a narrow set of well defined legal factors (e.g. severity of current offense, prior convictions, etc.) and personal characteristics (e.g. age, marital status, etc.). These items are weighted and assigned differential values within a well-defined instrument that is then used to assess an inmate's level of risk or program needs. Objective systems place greater emphasis on fairness, consistency and openness in the decision making process.

Another effective method to protect at risk inmates is to utilize the Direct Supervision inmate management system. This system places an officer directly in the housing unit with the inmate population so that there is a minimal chance of attacks, crime or damage occurring while the officer is constantly present. So even if an inmate presented in a way during initial classification that made him/her appropriate for general population, Direct Supervision allows officers continual opportunities to monitor behavior and to remove inmates who are no longer appropriate for the setting. This proactive inmate management system is preferable to the intermittent, touring management system that leaves the inmate population alone for periods of time.

Also, while nothing takes the place of human interaction and presence, another supplemental step is the use of video/audio recording devices. If monitored appropriately, they can be an effective proactive tool for crime prevention or an effective tool to bring perpetrators to justice.

Yet another protective measure that should be considered is specialized training for staff members, such as the LGBT sessions offered by the American Jail Association and other organizations. Just as specialty training is necessary to appropriately deal with mental health inmates in a correctional setting, inmates who present a non-heterosexual sexual orientation should also be placed in units where the officers have received this specialized training.

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Specialized training for staff regarding dealing with inmates with mental health issues must include the following components:

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- Mental disorders
  - Personality disorders
  - Guidelines for effective IPC with inmates with these disorders
  - Crisis intervention techniques, adapted from the advent of CIT's (Crisis Intervention Teams) in the 1980's. Commonly used model is the Memphis model, however, many variations have emerged and many communities have partnered their mental health and law enforcement communities to more effectively interact with individuals going through crisis situations.
  - If the facility has a special management unit for inmates with mental disorders, typically assign specially trained staff there and keep them current with continual in-depth training on mental health issues and unit management procedures.

Specialized training for inmates who identify as other than heterosexual must include the following:

- Orientation session that includes information on the inmate's classification level, rules of the facility, the referral system, seeking assistance in emergency and non-emergency situations and reporting mechanisms for passing on information regarding victimization, abuse or assault of themselves or other parties.
- Orientation can be group initially but then it must include a face to face with each individual so that they can be a part of the classification process and ask clarifying questions regarding the process.
- Inclusion, to the fullest extent possible in any classes offered regarding mens and womens issues, mental health issues and dealing with their own (and others) emotional intelligence levels.
- Continuous video loop on television in housing areas that plays the facility orientation video (if one exists).

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

We realize that, as jails work to comply with the PREA standards, unanticipated questions and issues will surface. AJA is preparing to meet those challenges by sponsoring more webinars and workshops in 2014. In addition, we have been researching web-based tools that will enable us to reach the jail community in an interactive manner. We hope to be able to launch that feature in January on our website. And, as always, we will continue to be involved with the PRC and support its mission for PREA implementation.

Esteban Gonzalez  
American Jail Association President: 2013-2014  
Chief Custody Deputy, Onondaga County Sheriff's Office (NY)

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**Future Conference Site | DALLAS, TEXAS • APRIL 27–30, 2014**

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