



## CGR Jail Expansion Study & URO Meeting Notes

On Thursday March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 Don Pryor from CGR visited the URO Development Group held at 516 W. MLK Jr. Street, in Ithaca. This weekly meeting is open to formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Within URO we refer to all formerly incarcerated individuals that we work with as Transformative Society Builders (TSBs).

Fifteen people attended the meeting, seven women and eight men, in addition to Don Pryor. Twelve of those fifteen were formerly incarcerated, including some URO Staff and the rest TSBs. The following bullet points are paraphrased points and quotes made during the conversation regarding whether or not to expand the Tompkins County Jail.

### Information from Don Pryor:

- Mr. Pryor informed the group that the study would be concluded in two months and that the study was looking at various social services in Tompkins County and how they serve people affected by incarceration.
- CGR looks at population trends, growth in crime, substance abuse rates, etc.
- The recommendations made by CGR in the past have been to not expand jails, find ways to reduce jail populations and increase services.

### Questions to Don Pryor from URO & TSBs

- Are there non-punitive ATI's being considered in this process that can be recommended?
- What is the feedback you are getting from your interviews and how will you be making your recommendation?
- What are the alternatives to jail expansion that are being suggested?

### Comments from URO and TSBs

- "A jail expansion is not beneficial to any of us. The bigger the jail, the more people you are going to put in the jail".
- "I am against a jail expansion because too many of the people who will be affected by this are black and brown people. I am against putting services in the jail because then people have to go (be sent) to jail to get the services".
- "I think we do need programs in the jail. Especially GED programs are needed in the jail. If you've got to do that time, you should utilize it."





- “It costs way more money to incarcerate someone then it does to educate someone! They need to expand the library and education services in jail and improve education out of the jail”.
- “For youth under 21, parents and guardians should be able to sign youth out of the jail.”
- “We need options like Drug Court for other crimes, like for anger management or violent felons, not just for drug treatment”.
- “Different people have different levels of support systems. A lot of the programs around don’t look at the different support systems that people put in place which is where the notion of pulling yourself up by the bootstraps is flawed. We need to be looking at restorative justice. A lot of the programs are also not able to properly service individuals that are from different races or ethnicities. There is a cultural competency problem. They need to look at how different people learn and express themselves. People of color share the experience of racism and that shows up in programming in a very systemic way. “
- “We need more stages to bring people back into society, like half way houses, parole houses, etc. People need these stages to be successful. If you are just released from prison, you need to ease your way back. These options helped me a lot, instead of being thrown back into society with no support”.
- “If you are really going to change the system you need to find something else that will work. How can we change these things to work more effectively for everyone?”
- “Everyone has a different definition of restorative justice; but to me this means that capitalism has to go; this means that white supremacy has to go. We need to start with one basic unified idea to create restorative justice.”
- “Restorative justice refers to the way that the criminal justice system is just one sided. Right now, people are treated as guilty first and they need to prove their innocence. In the current criminal system, we are protecting “victims”. In the process of trial and conviction in the criminal justice system, victims get hurt just as again by being forced to relive events. It’s not serving victims and it is not serving defendants. It is too punitive”.
- “We haven’t talked about why we have the (current criminal justice) system. There is so much history behind it.”
- “I went to prison for something that I shouldn’t have because I am a black woman and I committed a crime in a white town and the jury was all white. I got 5 years in state prison for a misdemeanor. If I took it to trial, I was going to get 20 years. Racism is the big big deal in the criminal justice system.”
- “The closest thing that exists in this (Ithaca) community to restorative justice is “Collaborative Law”. There are a few dozen lawyers in town who practice this. It is a service that avoids the court system by working things out among lawyers. This service is only available to people who can afford it and not to people with less resources. It is not there as an option for people who cannot afford it. It’s not meant for us (people of color)”.





- “Can more money be put into prevention? Can we put money into something like a halfway house instead of the jail? Why aren’t we investing in figuring out ways to keep people from entering or returning at all. Period.”
- “Jail expansion should not even be the discussion. The discussion should be how to put the money into the things that they need to support people from not going to jail on the first place. Job creation, affordable decent housing.”
- “A cultural shift has to happen.”
- “We need to throw this out there, the mentoring program is super important, but the main piece is that URO has been working on a collaborative process that actually incorporates formerly incarcerated individuals and puts them at the center of the work. We are creating a pipeline where these individuals are driving the work being done and they are informing the solutions that we are proposing.”
- “I want to go back to go back to economics and how the education system feeds into an unsustainable model of employment. We are focused on two similar educational systems. The educational system is punitive, just like the carceral system. Many people of color ask themselves what did I learn in high school that prepared me for my life today? The answer is nothing. We should model our education system after that of Finland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden who have technical education track and a college educational track where both lead to gainful employment and where jobs and skills are matched in an organic way. The American system of meritocracy ignores the fact that not every citizen is cut out for college because when individuals are faced with this reality, they become disengaged and the result is alternative activities to survive”.
- “We hear the same things over and over in regards to making improvements for people for people who are returning. There is a trifecta of housing, employment and transportation that is critical for a successful reentry. You can’t get an apartment if you don’t have a job. You can keep a job if you have no transportation. Most affordable housing is located outside of town and in rural areas, which makes transportation even more important. More affordable housing and employment opportunities within the city limits and increased transportation to many of the rural areas would not only help formerly incarcerated, but many many people struggling in poverty and marginalization or society”.

