

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONS OMBUDS

January 16, 2023, our country and our state celebrate the life and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; and we at the OCO observe his prophetic witness " . . . to find voice in a whisper."

I've seen those six words misquoted many times on positive wall art or in a hopeful social media post as "find a voice in a whisper." Rarely is the quote accurately published in its entirety. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., writing in 1964 about the previous year and describing it as the start of a revolution, declared:

Just as lightning makes no sound until it strikes, the Negro Revolution generated quietly. But when it struck, the revealing flash of its power and the impacts of its sincerity and fervor displayed a force of a frightening intensity. Three hundred years of humiliation, abuse, and deprivation cannot be expected to find voice in a whisper. [Why We Can't Wait, p. 16](#)

He doesn't say *to find A voice in a whisper*. He rejects the idea that Black people should be content to proceed on an incremental and quiet path toward full equality under the law and, more broadly, in society. He was steadfast in his conviction that no one should wait and whisper while inequities and injustices remain. He told everyone not to expect or demand those suffering from injustice to whisper their requests. At the OCO, we receive complaints from people shouting about their pain and frustration. We meet their demands for recognition with a simple question – how may we be of service?

OCO Negotiations

Negotiation theory suggests that we should focus on interests and not positions; that if we ask, "what if?" instead of "why not?" there is a better chance of securing favorable and, sometimes, even, self-enforcing agreements. A just, anti-racist, gender-responsive, trauma-informed, and equitable negotiation must factor in the perspectives of the people "at the table" while also integrating the diversity of stakeholder needs and wants.

At the OCO, we are busy negotiating just and ethical outcomes for the incarcerated people we serve. By talking between agencies, our goal is to make sure that the state of Washington is doing the best for the people living and working inside our state's prisons. Our Monthly Outcome Reports include summaries of every complaint resolved each month, and are posted on our website [HERE](#).

OCO's Input on DOC Policies

In addition to our casework, we provide input on DOC policies throughout the year. Our most recent public input is available on our website [HERE](#), and we are particularly concerned about many of the proposed changes to DOC 700.00 Work Programs in Prisons.

Requiring supervision by custody staff for programs to be held will have a devastating impact on the many volunteer-led and peer-led programs that exist within DOC. Programs like these promote skill development across several domains and enrich participants' social and emotional wellness. After nearly three years of no or minimal programming due to the pandemic, the OCO urges the DOC to forego the imposition of this requirement. Additionally, the OCO is concerned that the adverse ripple effects of these proposed changes

on related policies are considerable. Many of the policies in the 500-series ("Programs") and the 700-series ("Work Programs") will be impacted. The OCO urges the DOC to postpone changes to this policy until the impact on all related policies can be fully understood and commented on by the public.

Engagement with Legislative Session

Last week the legislative session started, and we are actively engaging in the people's work. Already, in just the first week of the session, we presented an OCO 101 to members of the Senate Human Services Committee (video, agenda, and documents available [HERE](#)). As a member of the [Governor's Small Cabinet](#), the OCO Director does not have a position on bills that are not part of Governor Inslee's proposed budget. The purpose of the OCO is to:

- Provide information
- Promote public awareness & understanding
- Ensure compliance with relevant statutes, rules, & policies
- Identify system issues and responses for the governor & the legislature to act upon

1/16/2023

Community Members Public Meeting

Next week we will share the agenda and materials for our January 26th Community Members Public Meeting. We hope you will join us from 4-5:30 PM in the Ground Floor Conference Room of the [Helen Sommers Building](#) (106 11th Ave. SW, Olympia, WA 98501) to make connections between people and organizations working for positive change in corrections and join in the conversation about the good work of the OCO.

Governor Inslee ended his 2023 State of the State with –

We have a special state.

We have a special moment.

Let us realize both. So, let's get to work!

At the OCO, we are following Governor Inslee's lead and adding Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to action –

We must realize that the time is always ripe to do right!

click [HERE](#) to listen to MLK

Onward–



Caitlin Robertson, PhD
Director