

Psychiatric Security Review Board

At a Glance

Executive Director: Vanessa Cardella, LCSW

Established: 1985

Statutory Authority: Connecticut General Statutes, Section 17a-580 - 17a-603 inclusive

Central Office: 505 Hudson Street, First Floor, Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Number of Employees: 3

Recurring Operating Expenses: \$ 332,556.00

Organizational Structure: One Administrative Unit

Mission

To protect the safety of Connecticut citizens and certain individuals by ordering appropriate treatment, confinement or conditional release of persons accused of crimes but found not guilty by reason of mental disease or mental defect.

Statutory Responsibility

The Psychiatric Security Review Board (the “Board”), determines the level of confinement and treatment, for those individuals found not guilty of a crime by reason of mental disease or defect, necessary to protect society. Acquittes are committed to the Board by the Superior Court. The Board orders confinement to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services or to the Department of Developmental Services and orders the appropriate level of supervision and treatment. The Board also determines the conditions under which an acquittee may be released into the community. The Board orders confinement in a maximum-security facility, approves temporary leave from a hospital setting, grants conditional release into the community and provides recommendations to the Superior Court in the matters of discharge from the Board and continued commitment to the Board’s jurisdiction.

Public Service

The general public is the beneficiary of the agency's work. During fiscal year 2022-2023, there were 3 superior court dispositions that resulted in commitments to the Board; the commitment term for 3 individuals expired and 4 individuals were discharged by the court prior to the end of their commitment.

As of July 19, 2023, 141 individuals remained under the Board’s jurisdiction. Of the 141 individuals, 16 are ordered confined in maximum-security at the Whiting Forensic Hospital; 90 individuals are ordered confined in a non-maximum-security setting at the Whiting Forensic Hospital; 26 of the individuals in non-maximum security have temporary leave privileges; and 33 individuals held Conditional Release status. In addition, 1 acquittee is confined to the Connecticut Department of Correction on sentenced status and 1 acquittee remained on AWOL status since June 1991.

During this fiscal year, the Board held 115 hearings and 43 Board Conferences, resulting in 142 Memoranda of Decision and 20 Reports to Court regarding the matters of Continued Commitment or Discharge from the jurisdiction of the Board.

There were no arrests of acquittees on Conditional Release status while under the Board's jurisdiction during this fiscal year.

Improvements/Achievements 2022-2023

- On-boarded a new Board Member for a vacant position of Public Member with Victim Advocacy Experience after the resignation of Kai Belton.
- Successfully coordinated and facilitated hybrid hearings to ensure a timely schedule
- Started to pivot back to in person hearings with option for hybrid hearings as requested, as best practice
- Enhanced PSRB training for Community Providers
- Facilitated trainings specific to Family members who are taking supervisory roles for acquittees on Temporary Leave
- Provided testimony regarding SB926
- Administrative staff pivoted back to in-office work
- Coordinated hybrid hearing(s) with our court reporting agency
- Collaborated with the DMHAS Legislative Liaison to address matters regarding proposed statutory changes
- Met with representatives of the Chief Public Defender's Office, Chief State's Attorney's Office, the Judiciary Branch and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to discuss legislative bills and agendas
- Maintained zero percent criminal recidivism of conditionally released acquittees, as reflected by no criminal convictions
- Apprised the public of all Board hearings and conferences via timely posting of information to agency website
- Conducted agency procedures as required by law within statutorily mandated timeframes
- Updated statistical information related to acquittee confinement and movement into the community
- Maintained regularly scheduled meetings with the administration of Whiting Forensic Hospital to improve collaboration and address system issues
- Maintained regularly scheduled meetings with Community Services Liaison via DMHAS to enhance care for acquittees on Conditional Release
- Facilitated regularly scheduled community provider meetings with the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services regarding conditionally released acquittees
- In collaboration with Whiting Forensic Hospital, provided training to new employees and post doctorate candidates regarding the Board history and procedures
- Developed standard work procedures for administrative procedures to increase efficacy and enhance operations

- Benchmarked with Executive Director of similar Board in Canada to ensure best practices as compared to international standards
- Executive Director attended the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law Conference to ensure Agency practice is consistent with National standards
- Updated Conditional Release Manual
- Made updates to the PSRB Access database that tracks our acquittees information
- Completed site visits to the towns of Torrington, New Haven, New Britain, Cheshire, Torrington, 60 West, and Waterbury
- Physically met (in person) 11 PSRB acquittees
- Held meeting with the Public Defender to discuss process improvement for Acquittee facilitated applications
- PSRB Coordinator became a Notary Public to increase efficiency and help with office procedures
- Several updates to the access training database (completed and on-going)
- Met individually with new 6 month reporters on 3 separate occasions to assist with on-boarding and explain Board and PSRB procedures
- Facilitated 14 training sessions/4 in person and trained 294 new staff members for community partners
- Updated website to increase access and improve transparency to Board process and reflect Boards updated mission to ensure that it considers the wellbeing of acquittees
- Diversified Board with attrition

Strategic Planning/Business Planning

The Board's strategic plan includes:

- Collaboration with the Office of Attorney General, relevant state agencies and the Board's Legislative Liaison to implement modifications and additions to the Board's statutes, as needed.
- Continued partnership with other state agencies to ensure collaboration and communication among the various stakeholders
- Cross-training of agency employees to effectively manage continuity of operations
- Collaborative planning with the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services and the Department of Developmental Services to address service systems issues and best practice protocols
- Maintain outreach to community agencies and the public regarding the Board's mission of public safety
- Collaborative planning with State Judicial Branch to address system issues and improve processes
- Condense paper files and/or send to storage to create room for new documentation
- Explore the utility of an alternative data management platform, other than ACCESS with the support of IT
- Continue benchmarking with like Agencies to ensure best practices as compared to national standards
- Fill vacant seats on Board, exploring opportunities to diversify the Board
- Continue with adjustments and fixes to the Access database as needed to improve tracking

- Develop a more comprehensive manner of receiving feedback on the training materials (survey)
- Migrate from Power point to another more interactive platform
- A more official looking certificate of completion for training
- Streamlined way to notify people of training dates and schedule for training
- Increase access to training for persons working non-traditional hours
- Improve processes for recruitment and retention of Board Members
- Standardize and create templates for MOD modification applications
- Continue visits to community sites and residential programs

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Board members, as of July 19, 2023 were Sheila Hennessey, Esq., Chairperson, Cheryl Abrams, M.S. (expert in parole/probation), Renesha Nichols, PhD, LCSW member with victim advocacy experience (vacant as of July 5, 2022), Mark Kirschner, Ph.D. (psychologist member), and John Bonetti D.O., (psychiatrist member).

The Board is assisted by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services in meeting the Affirmative Action requirements of the statute and follows such regulations of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.