

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: \$ 358,388

Organizational Structure: One Administrative Unit

Mission

The Board's primary concerns are the protection of society and the safety and well-being of the acquittee. The Board accomplishes this by ordering treatment, confinement or conditional release of persons acquitted of a crime by reason of mental disease or 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. Acquittees 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 public is the beneficiary of the agency's work. During fiscal year 2023-2024, there were 2 superior court dispositions that resulted in commitments to the Board; the commitment term for 6 individuals expired and 5 individuals were discharged by the court prior to the end of their commitment.

As of July 19, 2024, 133 individuals remained under the Board's jurisdiction. Of the 133 individuals, 12 are ordered confined in maximum-security at the Whiting Forensic Hospital; 66 individuals are ordered confined in a non-maximum-security setting at the Whiting Forensic Hospital; 24 of the individuals in non-maximum security have temporary leave privileges; and 30 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 159 hearings and 49 Board Conferences, resulting in 146 Memoranda of Decision and 19 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 2023-2024

- Partnership with Office of Victims Services to better support victims of NGRI acquittees
- Met with State Representatives to improve awareness and understanding of the Board and its processes
- Developed information packets for the Board due to having several new Board Members
- Collaborated with State's Attorneys office to develop a statewide training for State Attorneys to increase understanding of the Board and its processes
- On-boarded two Board Members for the vacant positions of Chair and Public Member after the resignations of Silvia Cancela and Sheila Hennessey
- 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 HB5509
- 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
- Executive Director participated in Work Group established to examine the Board and its practices as a result of PA 22-45
- PSRB Coordinator maintained Notary Public status to increase efficiency and help with office procedures
- 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
- Modified Access database to improve tracking and reliability
- Developed a more comprehensive manner of receiving feedback on the training materials (survey)
- Updated certificate of completion for training
- Streamlined way to notify people of training dates and schedule for training
- Increased access to training for persons working non-traditional hours
- Migrated select reports from paper only to include electronic document storage
- Explored alternative data management systems

Staff Training Improvements

- Developed an entirely new training database to include:
 - Better tracking of participants
 - More robust statistical tracking
- Increased PSRB training sessions from 6 trainings in calendar year 2023 to 14 trainings in calendar year 2024 (134% increase)
 - Completed training for 253 total staff members
 - For 28 state or PNP organizations
- Created an abridged “refresher” training presentation for community providers to include:
 - ASL training
 - Updated statistics
 - New and updated socially sensitive language
 - Recorded video version of training

Administrative Improvements

- Improved efficiency in corresponding with agency staff
- Initiated development of new standard forms for Temporary Leave and Conditional Release applications
- Created a new template to streamline and clarify the community providers’ intentions to modify a Memorandum of Decisions
- Made several improvements to Conditional Release quarterly report form template
 - Checkboxes
 - Modernized application
 - Ease of use
- Updated, modernized, and streamlined out of state travel request form

Acquittee/Staff interactions

- Made face to face contact with
 - 13 acquittees and their assigned CR Supervisors
 - 6 community therapists
 - 4 residential managers
 - Visited 11 of 16 residential programs (69%)
- Conducted 114 All Provider Meetings in total

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
- Continue to 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
- Improve processes for recruitment and retention of Board Members
- Standardize and create templates for MOD modification applications

Staff Training

- Develop a survey to identify training needs and expectations
- Develop pre and posttest survey to be completed by training attendees
- Increase in-person training sessions for agency staff upon availability and need

Administrative improvements:

- Complete and implement Temporary Leave and Conditional Release application forms
- Increase capacity and accessibility to electronic document storage
- Improve data collection and statistical reporting capabilities

Acquittee/Staff interactions:

- Meet 90% of Conditionally Released acquittees and their Conditional Release Supervisors in person
- Visit 75% of residential programs
- Attend 25% of all APMs in person

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Board members, as of July 19, 2024 were Michael Pepper, Esq., Chairperson, Cheryl Abrams, M.S. (expert in parole/probation), Renesha Nichols, PhD, LCSW (member with victim advocacy experience), Mark Kirschner, Ph.D. (psychologist member), Wakana Hirota, LCSW (public 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.