

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: \$324,824

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. 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 general public is the beneficiary of the agency's work. During fiscal year 2020-2021, there were zero superior court dispositions that resulted in commitments to the Board; the commitment term for 5 individuals expired, 1 individual was discharged by the court prior to the end of their commitment, and 2 individuals died, while under the Board’s jurisdiction.

As of June 30, 2021, 144 individuals remained under the Board’s jurisdiction. Of the 144 individuals, 13 were ordered confined in maximum-security at the Whiting Forensic Hospital; 93 individuals were ordered confined in a non-maximum-security setting at the Whiting Forensic Hospital; 65 of the individuals in non-maximum security have temporary leave privileges; and 34 individuals held Conditional Release status. In addition, 1 acquittee remained in federal custody serving a concurrent sentence with his Board commitment, 2 acquittees were 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 109 hearings and 125 Board Conferences, resulting in 123 Memoranda of Decision and 14 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 2020-2021

- On-boarded a new Executive Director in February 2021 following the retirement of the previous Executive Director in February 2021
- On-boarded a new Program Coordinator in May 2021 following the retirement of the previous Program Coordinator in April 2021
- Successfully coordinated and facilitated virtual hearings to ensure a timely schedule
- Development of a pivot plan for hybrid hearings in coordination with CVH/WFH
- Trained staff in new procedures to update agency website information
- Provided testimony and information about the Board and hearing procedures to the CVH/WFH Task Force
- Due to the COVID pandemic, Board staff transitioned to teleworking, when possible
- Administrative staff pivoted back to in-office work
- Coordinated virtual hearing(s) with a new 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, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to discuss potential legislative proposals
- 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
- Facilitated regularly scheduled community provider meetings with the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services regarding conditionally released acquittees
- In collaboration with the Hartford State's Attorney's Office, provided training to state attorneys from various offices across the state regarding Connecticut's insanity defense
- Provided regularly scheduling training, in partnership with the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, regarding Board history and procedures to treatment providers and interested parties. Provided on-site training to a variety of community providers

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
- Update agency Continuity of Operations Plan
- Explore training and benchmarking opportunities to ensure best practices as compared to national standards
- Collaborative planning with State Judicial Branch to address system issues and improve processes
- Collaborative planning with CVH/Whiting Forensic Hospital to enhance and develop training for families of acquittees regarding temporary leave
- Implementation of Hybrid Hearings
- Update conditional release manual

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Board members, as of June 30, 2021, were Sheila Hennessey, Esq., Chairperson, Cheryl Abrams, M.S. (expert in parole/probation), Susan Blair, M.S., L.P.C. (member with victim advocacy experience), Sylvia Cancela, M.B.A. (member of the general public), 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.