

An Overview of the Felmers Chaney Advocacy Board
Presented by R.L. McNeely to the Barristers
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1. So, what is the Felmers Chaney Advocacy Board, otherwise known as FCAB? It's the organization that was kicked out of its affiliation with the Department of Corrections as of March 3, 2015.

So, how did that happen?

2. The Felmers O. Chaney Pre-Release Center, originally known as the Men's Correctional Center, opened in June of 2000.

The Center houses about 100 adult male minimum-risk and minimum-security offenders who are close to being released back into their communities after having served most of their prison terms elsewhere. These offenders have been screened before ever being placed at Chaney by Department of Corrections' officials as being reduced-risk offenders who are likely to make a good adjustment back into society.

The men are eligible for work release once they complete a number of orientations and educational modules; e.g., how to obtain community-based services, GED/HSED preparation, community service expectations, etc.

3. The facility's construction had been authorized by SPCA (*Sherman Park Community Association*) contingent upon an agreement with DOC that the facility would have a citizen's advisory board. [*Located at 2825 N. 30th St.*] (**Hand out history**)

(James Hall was part of the group working with the State regarding the architectural design of the facility.)

4. But that wasn't the only agreement that was made. Tommy Thompson, in order to secure Mr. Chaney's permission to use his name for the Center, promised Mr. Chaney that the facility would be the premier re-integration facility in the State.

So, who was Felmers Chaney?

5. Felmers O. Chaney was an icon in Milwaukee's Black community. ["O" for Oscar.]

Born in Spooner, Wis., in 1918, WWII veteran, second lieutenant, Chaney, had a distinguished 36-year career in the Milwaukee Police Department. He gained fame, in the 1940s and 50s, as the "Walnut Street Cop" because beat-cop Chaney always abided by his personal rule to treat others fairly. After fighting a long personal battle with MPD against racially discriminatory policies, Chaney became a sergeant and, later, a detective. He was the first African American promoted to the rank of sergeant in the MPD, and he was promoted during a time-frame when African Americans had not been allowed to drive squad cars or operate police motorcycles. (*Worked during Chief Harold Breier's reign.*) After retirement in 1983 he helped to create North Milwaukee State Bank and became its first president. Later, he also became president of the Milwaukee Branch of the NAACP during which he participated in redlining litigation (*charging higher rates for insurance in Black neighborhoods*) against American Family that resulted in a fifteen-million-dollar settlement. (James Hall helped to litigate the case.)

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6. Despite the promise made to Mr. Chaney, the Center, early on, started to eliminate certain programming that was designed to make the Center the state's premier re-integration facility. By 2003, practically all of the re-integration mechanisms employed by the Center had been eliminated or sharply constrained.

- **COMMUNITY SERVICE** e.g., community bonding activities such as lawn cutting, and snow and trash removal for elderly or incapacitated area residents

- **STEP** (Specialized Training and Employment Program) a special program that teaches and assists inmates in seeking and maintaining employment.

- **AODA AFTERCARE** is a ten-week drug treatment program operated by Genesis Behavioral Services designed for inmates needing aftercare. (*Continuing program of rehabilitation after AODA treatment.*)

- **ON-SITE COUNSELING** provided by Chaney social workers designed to increase inmate recognition of the impact of their crimes on victims, and in regard to family/marital counseling including counseling with wives and immediate family

- **MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY** visits, allowing inmates twice-monthly access to reading materials, was accomplished via volunteer assistance from Project Return, and via escorting provided by Chaney security officers.

- **FAMILY VISITATION** once allowed family members to visit Chaney inmates for 17 hours per week.

- **FAMILY DEVELOPMENT** funeral visits for immediate family and emergency home visits conducted on an as-needed basis.

- **RELIGIOUS AND RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING** community escorts approved by Chaney Center staff and administration as being authorized to accompany inmates on off-site visits to churches (Sunday worship services) and to recreational activities, where bonding contacts with church and community members could be established during incarceration.

- **HOLIDAY VISITATION** family-member visitation with inmates on the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas including family members being allowed to bring holiday food to inmates.

- **SHOPPING TRIPS** allowing inmates to purchase canteen items from off-site vendors accomplished via escorting provided by Chaney security officers.

- **HAIRCUTS** allowing inmates to obtain services from off-site barber shops, regarded as facilitative of community re-integration, was accomplished via escorting provided by community volunteers approved by Chaney Center staff and administration and by Chaney security officers.

- **OFF-SITE COLLEGE** enrollment whereby inmates could attend classes offered at MATC or local four-year institutions.

FCAB recommended to DOC restoration of the re-integration mechanisms with a particular emphasis on implementing, restoring or augmenting the following:

- BIRTH CERTIFICATES
- STATE IDENTIFICATION
- SOCIAL SECURITY CARDS
- DRIVER'S LICENSES
- JOB PREPARATION
- JOB PLACEMENT

- PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO JOB SITES
- HSED, GED PREPARATION
- ACCESSING THE COMMUNITY AND ITS RESOURCES
- PRE-RELEASE INCARCERATION PERIODS OF APPROX. 150 DAYS (*RATHER THAN 30-DAY PRE-RELEASE PERIODS SO RE-INTEGRATION PROGRAMMING CAN BE INTERNALIZED.*)

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7. But FCAB did not catch on to these deficits until 2004 partly because, when FCAB first started up, it was meeting only twice a year and also because there was internal debate within FCAB as to whether FCAB should be a guild or an advocacy organization.

Out of this internal debate, FCAB developed a set of by-laws and a mission statement.
(Hand out bylaws)

The object and purpose of this Board is to identify and encourage adoption of correctional policies, procedures, and programs that enhance the rehabilitation and community re-integration of inmates; to identify and encourage policies, procedures, and programs that harmonize the Pre-Release Center's relations with indigenous neighborhood residents; and to identify and promote policies, procedures and programs with businesses, schools, churches, and other organizations that serve to enhance the attainment of desirable inmate rehabilitative and community re-integrative goals.

Did you note "encourage the adoption of correctional policies"? This precipitated DOC's ire, leading ultimately, to the dis-affiliation.

Of course, this mission changed after FCAB was divorced from the Chaney Center.

The object and purpose of this Board is to advocate in behalf of reducing recidivism, enhancing ex-offender re-integration, and lowering state budget costs due to incarceration. Additionally, FCAB is dedicated to disseminating to the lay public and to decision-makers pertinent information that can assist in achieving those goals, and it serves as a contact point with the community at large to share information and respond to issues that are brought to the Board's attention. FCAB seeks also to be vigilant in its cognizance of the safety, needs, and related concerns of residents of the Milwaukee metropolitan community, in particular, and to promote policies and procedures that are harmonious with all of FCAB's aforementioned goals. More ire from DOC!

8. But, what were some of FCAB's accomplishments when it was affiliated with the Chaney Center? **(Handout article)**

From "Warehousing" to Rehabilitation

Programming was restored consistent with the promise that the Chaney Center would be the state's quintessential re-integration facility rather than a "warehouse" for soon-to-be released ex-offenders.

Oversight Function

A system was set in place that helped to mitigate the possibility of untoward staff/inmate interaction. This helped to protect the prison from horrid practices and gruesome public relations blunders.

Protection from Sensationalizing Media Attacks

When the Center was attacked by a local newspaper story that conjured up images of something akin to an Alcatraz-style prison escape, the story was completely diffused by FCAB's speedy response. That response was the release of a reply, quickly drafted by FCAB, titled "Reporter's 'Spin' Confuses Prison's Real Purpose."

Delegated Function

Another benefit recognized by many DOC staffers was the fact that FCAB could take public positions on matters pending before the state legislature whereas DOC, as a public bureaucracy, often could not. FCAB not only occasionally opposed such proposed legislation in print and

broadcast media, it also mobilized various organizations to oppose certain initiatives. Many DOC staffers would thank FCAB anonymously for its efforts inasmuch as they felt they could not voice their own opposition. [E.g., *Denial of employment to ex-offenders based on having committed a felony unrelated to the nature of the work for which the felon is being considered.* (S.B. 207)]

Improved Organizational Milieu

But there was something even more important occurring within the milieu of the prison that escaped the attention of most board members for quite a while. The presence of a multi-racial metropolitan community board composed of men and women from varied walks of life who visibly met every two months within the facility signaled to inmates that there were unknown people of means who were concerned about them. Importantly, inmates were aware of the concessions that FCAB had been able to wrest from a largely sympathetic (*at least at the time the concessions were granted*) DOC leadership. Thus, the typical, unhardened, minimum-security inmates of the Chaney Prison almost always met FCAB members with broad smiles. What is important here is that there were evidence-based outcomes. Comparatively, for example, very few of Chaney's inmates were returned to higher security prisons either for rule violations or new offenses and Chaney's measured recidivism rate ended up being very low.

Walk-Aways

During an observation period spanning 2005 – 2011, there was a steady decline in the number of walk-aways, from a high of thirty in 2005 to a low, in 2011, of three. This amounts to a ninety-percent reduction.

9. These accomplishments were due to FCAB's advocacy (and to the superb administrative skill of the superintendent) but there was more to FCAB's relationship with DOC than FCAB merely being an advocate and DOC being an advocacy target.

Let me ask you a question. Would you suspect that a school would operate better and be more likely to achieve its mission if the parents of students enrolled in the school were actively involved in reinforcing the educational goals of the school?

What do you think about the police? Would law enforcement be more likely to achieve goals of crime detection and crime prevention if operating in neighborhoods where the norm was for people to cooperate with the police by providing tips to the police about suspicious situations?

Similarly, FCAB seeks to provide this sort of complementarity to DOC. After all, as a voluntary organization, FCAB can respond to unexpected situations more flexibly and more rapidly than can a large bureaucracy such as DOC, as was the case when FCAB penned its response to the newspaper reporter's assertion that Alcatraz-style jail breaks were occurring at the Chaney Center. Too, another benefit was that FCAB's response was viewed by neighborhood residents as being more credible than any response by DOC. So, resultingly, they were largely not alarmed by the walk-aways.

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10. One of the innovative programs FCAB is seeking presently to promote is the Bard Prison Initiative. Is anyone familiar with this initiative? Do you remember when a prison debate team beat Harvard's debate team about a year ago? Those inmates were enrolled in the Bard Prison Initiative. This program offers the possibility of earning a first-class liberal arts degree while in prison. Prisoners involved in the program take classes ranging from physics to philosophy to health administration and more. FCAB is working to promote implementation of this program here in Wisconsin. (**Handout proposal**). This is just one of FCAB's efforts.

11. Additionally, because the members of FCAB have professional backgrounds, FCAB is capable of detecting existing programs and policies that are antithetical to DOC's mission, it is capable of alerting DOC of these failures, and it is capable of recommending Best Practices programs to DOC. Then, if DOC fails to respond, FCAB can utilize the broadcast media and print media to trumpet the deficiencies. As such, FCAB also seeks to help DOC achieve its mission by being a whistle-blower, when necessary. THANK YOU.

