

Presidential Message



There is a place for each member to teach and learn — to make his or her voice heard.

An Open Letter to the ACA Membership

By **Gwendolyn C. Chunn**

President

American Correctional Association

Dear Colleagues:

It has been an ACA tradition to invite the president whose term is ending to address the membership at the Opening Session of the Congress. I plan to continue that tradition, but there are many of you who will not be in attendance. It is very important to me that you stay connected to this organization. *Corrections Today* is one of the tools that we use to strengthen that connection. Although you will have pictures and other information that is provided about the conference, I thought it advisable to provide a summary, from the president's perspective, of the issues that were tackled during my term. More detailed information will be available to you via ACA's Web site.

At the forefront of every member's mind is the acquisition of the new headquarters at 206 N. Washington Street in Alexandria, Va. I certainly cannot take credit for this accomplishment; it represents the efforts of many hard-working, dedicated professionals. The ACA staff, led by our very capable Executive Director James Gondles Jr., the ACA Executive Committee, many correctional organizations and agencies, and many friends have made sure that our new home represents all of us well. By now you probably know the many features that are designed to make the building "member friendly." We welcome you to drop by to see our operations when you are in the Washington, D.C., area.

ACA staff and leadership regularly handle routine requests from the media on various topics related to corrections; however, the Vera Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons and the federal legislation regarding the implementation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act have dominated our policy affairs agenda this year. ACA provided an array of perspectives to support both initiatives.

Charles J. Kehoe, ACA's immediate past president, has continued to guide the 21st Century Workforce for America's Correctional Profession project and has moved to extend the outcomes that were achieved during his term as ACA President. By providing workshops and training within and outside of ACA, the Human Resources Committee and the Work Force Steering Committee have called attention to the staff recruitment and retention issues that we are beginning to see among our ranks. Their goal is to help us to begin to prepare now for the changes that will come.

The Presidents' Council has continued to provide feedback and suggestions for how to invigorate commitment to ACA and its goals. While the chair, John Braithwaite, has chosen to share the leadership of this group's work through its committee structure, the council continues to provide valuable guidance, especially in matters pertaining to the Board of Governors and the Delegate Assembly, as well as suggestions for helping to orient new attendees at the Winter Conference and the Congress of Correction.

The President's Field Advisory Committee (special issues identified at the president's discretion) emphasized the president's priorities of dealing with retirees and disproportionate minority confinement. Past President Bobbie Huskey developed special guidance for those who are interested in helping to support more community corrections programs. Her document helps to explain ways to overcome the apprehension that prevents constituents from fully embracing these sanctions. This material will be made available in its entirety on ACA's Web site.

Past President Helen G. Corrothers has developed a way to capture the talents of those among us who may be retiring. She and her committee have surveyed practitioners and leaders, providing a number of

strategies that can be explored to help retiring staff continue to support the field. This report will be made available on the Web site as well.

Ralph Kelly, former commissioner for Kentucky's Department of Youth Services, has tackled the difficult issue of advising ACA members regarding disproportionate minority confinement with a plan for calling attention to an issue that continues to plague our communities. His committee devised a number of strategies that will help the correctional community provide insight into how to reduce this growing problem. In addition, the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCJ) and the Prison Project of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) have agreed to share information with us on their progress with this important issue.

Of particular importance is the work of the Research Council. It has proposed a Memorandum of Understanding between ACA and the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. The council has also extended an invitation to other ACA committees to seek and use the council's expertise as needed.

While ACA standing committees have their charges set forth in the ACA constitution and bylaws, ad hoc committees accept presidential charges and work diligently to accomplish those objectives. The work is not, however, limited to the president's charges. Committee members are encouraged to identify emerging issues that are important to the field. The following are a few of the recommendations that have come from randomly chosen committees that recently submitted written reports:

The Adult Local Detention Committee wants to see more jail-related workshops at ACA, along with attention to timing regarding their presentation.

Women Working in Corrections, in collaboration with the Association of Women Executives in Corrections, has taken the

lead in framing a policy that represents professionalism, work ethic and equality.

The Probation and Parole Committee has several objectives concerning projects relating to the correctional work force, facility design, workshop topics, and exemplary projects practices. They are exploring resources that may be available from the National Institute of Justice and the National Institute of Corrections.

The Council on Professional Education refined a number of workshop issues for the Congress in Charlotte, N.C. Council members also made note of persons who may be interested in serving on the council.

The International Relations Committee welcomed attendees from outside the United States and reviewed the status of the donation (container) projects, the scholarships for attending ACA congresses/conferences and the workshop presentations.

The Military Affairs Committee discussed the impact of Iraq on the corrections field.

The Children's Initiative discussed plans for the congress; however, much conversation centered around the future of the committee and its interest in having a new charge/name.

The Community Corrections Committee is working on ways to bring attention to the value of using objective and validated-risk/need-assessment instruments to determine those offenders who will benefit most from community correctional programs. The committee would also like to see ACA take a stronger stance in endorsing the use of community corrections programs.

The Health Care Committee has a number of critical issues on its agenda. Besides performance-based standards, interest in the "Healthy Institutions" of the Centers for Disease Control, workshops, feature articles and the possibility of creating a certification program, the committee is also beginning to review guidelines for pandemic flu and "end of life care" for offenders.

The Youthful Offender Reentry Task Force continues its work on recommending an ideal program. Emphasis on objective assessments and evidence-based practices are being solicited and reviewed.

Volunteer Services is also working toward ways of responding to reentry issues. Information was presented on how to get more volunteers involved at the local level.

The Student Affairs Committee is organized into subcommittees. While the interest in a permanent, reduced rate for students was not supported by the ACA Executive Committee, the subcommittee has not abandoned its interest in finding ways to attract more students to ACA meetings. Poster sessions have provided a beginning, but other strategies need to be explored.

The Staff Safety Committee is concerned about future directions and safety preparedness of the field, as well as the

continuance of the committee. The consensus was that renewed emphasis should be placed on this issue by ACA.

The Mental Health Committee has chosen a number of issues — from ethics to exemplary practices. Noteworthy is the idea of a mentoring program for young professionals working in corrections.

The Facility Design Committee had already completed considerable work toward making recommendations to Past President Kehoe. This committee has standing liaison reports with constituent representatives such as the American Jail Association, the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators and others as a means of addressing the unique needs across the field.

The Ethics Committee has developed a broad-based action plan to call attention to ethics throughout corrections. Beyond workshops, the committee would like to integrate this value into everything that is done every day.

The Membership and Affiliates Committee is one of my favorites. The best part of my time as ACA President has been spent at the local chapter meetings across the country. Those people who commit themselves to bringing together the seasoned and unseasoned workers to nurture and teach do a great service to this organization. Keep up the good work.

There are many other committees like the Standards Committee and the Awards Committee that could have been mentioned in this letter. I have stopped at this point because I do not wish to overload you with volume. I do wish to invite you to be a part of what we do. There is a place for each member to teach and learn — to make his or her voice heard. If you cannot attend the Congress of Correction or the Winter Conference, call the ACA office and contact the committee chairs to provide your input. This work belongs to all of us.

Sincerely,



Gwendolyn C. Chunn
ACA President
Raleigh, N.C.