

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

PREAMBLE —

In 1870, leaders in American and international corrections, met in Cincinnati, Ohio and developed principles stating the beliefs and values underlying the practice of their profession. As a result of this meeting, the National Prison Association was founded, an organization that has subsequently evolved into the American Correctional Association, representing all facets of corrections. The foresight of these leaders' thinking over a century and a half ago is evident in this brief excerpt from the series of propositions that formed the basis for the Declaration of Principles adopted by the 1870 Congress:

“The treatment of criminals by society is for the protection of society. But since such treatment is directed to the criminal rather than the crime, its great object should be his moral regeneration. The state has not discharged its whole duty to the criminal when it has punished him, nor even when it has reformed him... Having lifted him up, it has further duty to aid in holding him up. In vain shall we have given the convict an improved mind and heart, in vain shall we have imparted to him the capacity for industrial labor and the desire to advance himself by worthy means, if, on his discharge, he finds the world in arms against him, with none to trust him, none to meet him kindly, none to give him the opportunity of earning honest bread.¹”

Although this language may be antiquated, the message is contemporary. The role of corrections is to enhance public safety by assisting in the prevention and reduction of delinquency and crime. Ultimately, the prevention of criminal and delinquent behavior depends on the individual as well as constructive elements in our communities: family, education, faith, health and government.

As members of the American Correctional Association, we continue in the spirit of our founders by ensuring that these principles continue to guide sound corrections practices, make our philosophy and aims clear, and inspire cooperation and support from leaders of local, state, national and international communities and organizations.

We believe that the principles of **HUMANITY, JUSTICE, PROTECTION, OPPORTUNITY, KNOWLEDGE, COMPETENCE** and **ACCOUNTABILITY** are essential to the foundation of sound corrections policy and public protection.

Guided by the following principles, the American Correctional Association benefits from the heritage of the past, while planning and preparing for the future.

PRINCIPLES—

HUMANITY: Corrections upholds the dignity of individuals, the rights of all people and the potential for human growth and development.

Social order in a democratic society depends upon full recognition of individual worth and respect for the dignity of all its members; therefore, laws, administrative policies and corrections practices must be governed by this principle and measured against standards of fairness and decency, whether applied to those under corrections care and control, its staff, crime victims or the general public.

Corrections shares with other parts of the criminal justice system the obligation to balance the protection of the individual against excessive restrictions. To this end, the least restrictive means of control and

supervision consistent with public safety should be used. Incarceration should only be used with juveniles or adults charged with or convicted of crimes and for whom no other alternative disposition is safe and appropriate.

Corrections leadership must establish a management philosophy and ensure implementation by monitoring conformance, encouraging a positive environment, promoting positive relationships between and among offenders and staff, and providing opportunities for programming and resources for employees and offenders.

JUSTICE: Corrections must demonstrate integrity, respect, dignity, fairness, humaneness and pursue programs of restoration and rehabilitation.

Unwarranted disparity in sentencing, undue length of sentences and rigid sentencing structures are injustices to society and the offender and create circumstances that are not in the best interest of justice, mercy or public protection, and must be resisted whenever possible.

Sanctions imposed for crimes or infractions should be commensurate with the seriousness of the offense, take into account the extent of participation in the crime or infraction and the criminal history of the offender, and follow impartial fact-finding and due process procedures.

Corrections leadership must also ensure that employees are treated with rigorous standards of fairness and justice, and that victims, witnesses and all other citizens who come in contact with the criminal justice system receive fair, consistent and concerned consideration and assistance including restitution and/or compensation whenever appropriate.

PROTECTION: Corrections has a duty to provide for the protection of the public, staff, volunteers, victims, survivors of crime and individuals under corrections supervision. As well, administrators representing prisons, jails, juvenile facilities and residential community-based corrections must operate safe, secure, sanitary and humane facilities.

Persons have the right to be protected from personal and/or psychological harm, loss of property and abuse of power. The overall protection of society is best enhanced through effective corrections community and institutional supervision, rehabilitation and training programs, compliance with legal mandates, offender and staff accountability and meeting the basic needs of offenders.

Corrections has a special responsibility to protect from harm those who are involuntarily under its care and control; therefore, contemporary standards for healthcare, offender classification, due process, fire and building safety, nutrition, personal well-being, and clothing and shelter must be observed.

Because of the unique power that corrections has over those in its care, special vigilance must be observed to protect them from the abuse of that power. Offenders also must be protected from harming each other, corrections employees, victims of crime and/or the public at large. Prevention of escape, assault and property loss is an important goal of corrections and requires unique and specialized expertise.

OPPORTUNITY: Corrections is responsible for promoting positive behavioral change leading to responsible citizenship through the provision of treatment, educational services, rehabilitative programs and constructive activities.

Opportunity for positive change or “reformation” is basic to the concept of corrections, because punishment without the opportunity for redemption is unjust and ineffective. Hope is a prerequisite for the offender’s restoration to responsible membership in society.

Sound corrections programs at all levels of government require a careful balance of community and institutional services that provide a range of effective, humane and safe options for handling juvenile and adult offenders.

Corrections must provide classification systems for determining placement, degree of supervision and programming that afford differential controls and services for juvenile and adult offenders, thus maximizing opportunity for the largest number.

Corrections leaders should actively engage the community to assist in the restoration and reintegration of the offender.

Offenders, juvenile or adult, whether in the community or in institutions, should be afforded the opportunity to engage in productive work, participate in programs, including education, vocational training, religion, counseling, constructive use of leisure time and other activities that enhance self-worth, community integration and economic status.

KNOWLEDGE: Corrections leadership must be committed to acquiring emerging knowledge, pursuing organizational development, integrating technological advances and promoting evidence-informed practices that contribute to excellence and positive change.

Effective programs, policies and practices are based on accurate information, applied and theoretical research and are guided by professional standards and outcome measures of performance.

Corrections programming successes that are supported by sound research enhance the credibility of corrections and promote professional progress.

For optimum benefit, knowledge must be shared to enhance public awareness and support for effective policies and programs.

Corrections should contribute to and benefit from relationships among local, state, national and international agencies, professional associations and institutions of higher learning.

COMPETENCE: Individuals involved in corrections must be competent and committed to conducting their responsibilities in accordance with ACA professional standards, certifications, agency policies, laws, regulations and other relevant standards.

Selection, retention and promotion of all corrections staff and the selection and training of volunteers must be based on merit, without regard to political affiliation, race, gender or religion.

Staff, contract employees and volunteers must be well-trained to understand the mission of the agency and to conduct themselves according to the agency’s rules and professional standards.

Adequately trained and well-supervised volunteers are an essential element to the effective delivery of services to juvenile and adult offenders at all stages of the corrections process.

Remuneration for staff must adequately reflect the importance of the crucial role of corrections in the protection of society and should be commensurate with job requirements and performance.

Corrections agencies and organizations must promote opportunities for professional development for all employees.

The system of evaluating staff and volunteers must be fair and equitable.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Correctional employees must be held accountable for all decisions and actions including treatment and management of individuals under corrections supervision, selection and evaluation of staff, pursuit and allocation of resources and interface with the community. Correctional employees shall conduct themselves with honesty, integrity and in accordance with ACA's Code of Ethics.

Accountability is a keystone of sound, practical corrections, therefore all persons engaged in corrections activity should be held responsible for their actions and behavior.

Corrections administrators must be accountable for ensuring the humane treatment of offenders, the support and empowerment of staff and adherence to the stated principles.

Staff must be accountable for advancing and implementing the goals and principles of corrections.

Offenders must be accountable for their actions including making amends and restitution where practical.

The initial Declaration of Principles of the American Correctional Association were developed in 1870 at the first meeting of the American Prison Association (which in 1954 became the American Correctional Association). Successive generations of corrections practitioners revised the principles in 1930, 1960, 1970, 1982 and 2002. These Declaration of Principles were reviewed and updated by the ACA Past Presidents during a November 2018 meeting and approved by the American Correctional Association Delegate Assembly at the Winter Conference in New Orleans, January 15, 2019

Endnotes

- 1) National Prison Association of the United States (2018). *Proceedings [for the Years]*. (pp. 174, 176). Hardpress. Retrieved from <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=amgUAQAAMAAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PP2>.