



From the President

Welcome to 2023!

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TO-DO IN 2023

- RENEW APAI MEMBERSHIP
- SERVE ON APAI COMMITTEE
- URGE FELLOWS TO JOIN APAI
- MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND THE 2023 ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE IN KANSAS CITY APRIL 16 – APRIL 19, 2023

MEMBERSHIP FEES*

INDIVIDUAL	\$65
ORGANIZATIONAL	
(UP TO 8 MEMBERS)	\$375
(9 TO 13 MEMBERS)	\$475
(14 TO 20 MEMBERS)	\$575
ALUMNI	\$40
ASSOCIATE	\$40
STUDENT	\$15

*Fees are on a per year basis.

The year came upon us quickly. It is hard to imagine that we are in a new year. It has only been 9 months since you allowed me to take over as APAI President. The past President, David Blumberg, did pave the way and provide excellent leadership during his tenure. I am looking forward to the next few months as we get closer to our Annual Training Conference.

This year, the conference and annual session for the Chair's and Executive Director's meetings will be held April 16–19, 2023. Kansas City is an exciting place to be able to hold our conference. The Kansas host committee has been busy making sure all things are in place to have a successful event. This year's theme, Balancing Hope, Fairness, and Accountability for Stronger Communities, describes the essence of what paroling authorities face with making decisions. The goal of making each of our communities stronger builds confidence among all the stakeholders.

This year will we are bringing back the regional and international breakout sessions. It is important that we take an opportunity to meet each other and exchange ideas, topics, and concerns within our region, as well as just network with those in our regions. This will be a productive time for Regional Vice Presidents to become aware of the resource needs within their area. This session will be held on Tuesday afternoon, be sure to check the program book for where your region will be meeting.

If you did not hear, Kansas City has a football team, who are once again World Champs! The city has lots to offer with a variety of food, sport events, museums, and music. We all know that the BBQ and Jazz is a staple in KC. The host committee will send out a link to see the attractions in the area in the near future, and we will make sure you have plenty of literature in your conference bags to help point you to some excellent places!

I am looking forward to seeing everyone in Kansas City!

Best regards,

Jonathan Ogletree

Opportunities to Build Trust through Transparency

by: Francis Abbott, Secretary, APAI

As tax-funded entities, we are all accountable to the citizens of the jurisdictions we serve.

This accountability is exponential when dealing with public safety in our communities and the liberty rights of incarcerated individuals. In the modern age of transparency, information about our work is disseminated by us, by individuals who are affected by our decisions, and often times by individuals looking to simply shed light on our processes. Dictating this process can mean the difference in controlling the narrative or appearing to hide information. Knowing what is required

from a media frenzy. These events can call every aspect of our work as discretionary releasing authorities into question. Making all levels of staff aware of Open Meetings laws and policies dealing with public records request can help identify potential situations such as high-profile cases being heard before they become an issue. The general public receives news within minutes of an event happening, often only reading the first edition of an article and forming opinions. Having pertinent information ready for release once a decision is rendered in a case can help prevent statements such as “they did not immediately respond for comment” or even worse “no comment” being published.



by law in our respective jurisdictions and being proactive can help build confidence in the methods we employ to perform our duties and overall trust in not only the discretionary release process but the criminal justice system as a whole.

The adage “Hindsight is 20/20” stings when questioning how incidents were handled by your organization. This makes “getting out in front” of a situation very important when at all possible. Each of our organizations is one difficult decision or arrest away

I was recently asked if my Board ever made a bad decision and after thinking about the question I responded with “Every decision we make is bad to someone.” Parole hearings can be emotionally charged events, not only for victims and survivors but also for the family members of the incarcerated individual. Educating these concerned parties about your processes prior to a hearing can assist in easing the trauma that outcomes

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can cause. We must remember that all individuals receive and respond to information differently, so you may consider having multiple options to deliver education. You can start with a robust website; the more information available online can result in less calls in the office. In the event the website has not provided all the answers to information seekers, having Trauma Informed Staff ready and able to respond to question is a plus. Another method to employ is coordinating events aimed at educating the public. A well organized resource fair can provide an opportunity to educate stakeholders, connect them with other resources and promote healing within communities. Sharing the factors considered when rendering a decision can demonstrate the complexity in each decision. Being versed in the evidence of our evidence-based decision making can validate processes used to make determinations. Lastly, distributing the reasons a certain outcome was reached can help in justifying the work of our Boards.

There are a number of ways our organizations can continue

to improve transparency. Identify a single individual as your public information officer to ensure responses to all requests

are uniform. This individual should be well versed in the Board's processes and have access to all relevant information to respond to requests in a timely fashion. Maintain open lines of communication with entities requesting information. Building relationships with stakeholders and clearly defining what information is open to the public and procedures in place to request access to information is a start to building trust. Often times we receive multiple requests for the same information. One way to ensure consistency in your responses is to keep a detailed account of each records request and your response in a central location or database. Lastly, as an organization, always be forthright. If we are not upfront or do not convey realistic expectations for the delivery of information, we can be viewed as evasive or hiding information. Once public confidence is shaken and trust is broken, every decision you make moving forward is called into question. —



2023 ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI • APRIL 16-19, 2023

Balancing Hope, Fairness, & Accountability for Stronger Communities

Member Spotlight

Scott Widmer, Ohio Parole Board

by: Ashley Koonce, Executive Director, APAI

Scott Widmer has been appointed as the Central Region Vice President.

Scott Widmer began his career in corrections in 1995, as a corrections officer with Corrections Center of Northwest Ohio. He began employment with the Ohio Parole Board in September of 1996, as a Parole Board Parole Officer. He was promoted to a Hearing Officer January of 2001, and remained in that position until his appointment as a Parole Board Member on December 10, 2018, where he currently serves as the Vice-Chairman. Scott has performed a variety of duties and participated in multiple committees in his 26 years with the parole board. In addition to his experience with the parole board, Scott served 11 years as a school board member and four years as an adjunct professor for Tiffin University. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice from Kent State University and an MBA from University of Findlay. Scott has been married for 27 years to his wife Bethany and they share three adult daughters.

Scott also spent seventeen years as a revocation hearing officer. This allowed him to identify some of the most prevalent issues individuals face in adjusting back to society after incarceration and how that leads to violation behavior or new criminal conduct. Having a better understanding of how certain circumstances or choices lead to negative outcomes has assisted him in assessing suitability for those being considered for release. This experience coupled with the use of SDMF (Structured Decision-Making Framework), has aided in Scott's ability to provide more consistent and well thought out decisions.

Scott has been a member of APAI for four years. He believes that APAI affords an amazing opportunity to connect with peers outside of our own department that have a similar mission and face similar challenges. He plans to assist the Executive Committee in his role by increasing our ability to share information about current challenges and successes in our operations across membership, which will encourage engagement. Developing a simple and effective way to distribute this information is one of his main focuses. He hopes to work with the organizations in



Scott Widmer, Ohio Parole Board

the Central Region to develop a process to connect on a regular basis, possibly through short monthly or quarterly meetings with the focus of information sharing that can be passed along to the Executive Committee. The hope is this can develop a process to make connections with other boards across APAI to share insight and ideas for best practices.

On the topic of his vision for the field of parole, Scott is excited to be able to continue to participate in the continuous improvement of assessing individuals for release consideration. He also wasn't to keep a strong focus on being forward thinking and utilizing the experiences of other boards to develop policies and practices to be transparent to constituents. He believes if we can develop ways to improve transparency, we can avoid operating in a state of response to outside interest groups that often leads to bad practices for our organizations and those we serve. Scott will also continue work on ways to provide clear rationales that are understandable, able to withstand public scrutiny, legal review, and analysis.

We are excited to welcome Scott to the Executive Committee, as the new Central Region Vice President.



APAI Officer Elections Open April 13, 2023

The 2023-2024 Ballot will close April 17, 2023.

Visit www.apaintl.org/election.html for more information.

Francis Abbott
*Executive Director,
Louisiana Board
of Pardons &
Committee on Parole
Baton Rouge, Louisiana*



For Secretary



For Vice-President

Kecia Rongen
*Chair,
Washington
Indeterminate Sentence
Review Board
Olympia, Washington*

Silent

AUCTION

AT THE 2023 ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE

**Silent Auction items can be mailed to:
Jeannie Wark, Kansas Prisoner Review Board,
714 SW Jackson Street, Suite 300, Topeka, KS 66603.**

Items need to arrive by Thursday, April 13, 2023.

Executive Committee

President
Jonathan Ogletree
Kansas

Vice President
Kecia Rongen
Washington

Executive Director
Ashley Koonce
Texas

Past President
David Blumberg
Maryland

Treasurer
Laura Pisaturo
Rhode Island

Secretary
Francis Abbott
Louisiana

Northeastern USA
Matt Degan
Rhode Island

Western USA
Jennifer Shaffer
California

Central USA
Scott Widmer
Ohio

Southern USA
Benita Murphy
West Virginia

International Section
Sylvie Blanchet
Canada

International Section
Thando Tsetsewa
Africa

International Section
Alistair Spierling
New Zealand

International Section
Martin Jones
Europe

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