

Prison Tour offers sobering glimpse of life behind bars for first time offenders

Erin McGuire of the Fourteenth Circuit Solicitor's Office contributed to this story

Men convicted of murder, armed robbery and other felonies shared their stories on April 28, 2016 from inside Allendale Correctional Institution with a group of first-time offenders as part of the Fourteenth Circuit Solicitor's Pre-Trial Intervention (PTI) Program.

Eighteen PTI participants – ranging from 17 to 71 – from Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, and Jasper counties toured the Level 2 facility where they had the opportunity to see and speak with inmates who offered up an accurate, realistic account of life from inside one of the state's 23 prisons.

"You can't describe this particular prison tour experience. It's something that has to be seen and heard first hand," said Fourteenth Circuit Solicitor Duffie Stone. While each of the state's judicial circuits has PTI, Stone's circuit began instituting the prison tour component in 2006. "Our goal is to prevent the next generation of career criminals."

SCDC Director Bryan Stirling says PTI participants learn first-hand what life would be like if they continue down the wrong path. Ten ACI inmates, just one of 14 Operation Behind Bars public awareness teams in institutions across the state, give their testimony and speak to the realities of prison life.



"You're told when to get up, you're told when you sleep, you're told when to eat, you're told when its rec time," said Director Stirling. "If you think your life is good on the outside, it will not be the same here."

PTI is a diversionary program in South Carolina designed for first-time offenders charged with non-violent offenses (e.g.: disorderly conduct, various driving offenses, shoplifting, and possession of marijuana or cocaine, etc.). The PTI program requires a prison tour, community service and other programs specific to the criminal charge, such as alcohol education. Participants have only one shot at PTI anywhere in the state and most closely adhere to the program's requirements in order to be successful.

The Fourteenth Judicial Circuit's PTI program has an 86-percent success rate, meaning that only 14-percent are rearrested. Solicitor Stone credits the program's success, in part, to the prison tour. He believes the frank dialogue between inmate and PTI participant is most effective. "They see the inmates that they would be living with. They see the lack of freedom, the lack of family, the lack of finances," said Stone. "You can see that it makes a strong impression."

Since it costs nearly \$20,000 a year to keep each inmate locked up, keeping these guys out of prison is the main goal. "It's saving tax payers a lot of money," said Director Stirling. "It's a public safety tool that will hopefully wake some of these young men up, and some who I saw were a little bit older, they will not continue in their criminal ways and not end up in a facility like Allendale."





L-R) Director Stirling, ACI Warden John Pate, 14th Circuit Solicitor Duffie Stone on the yard at Allendale

