

Kennebec County Sheriff Randall Liberty Named Warden of Maine State Prison

Liberty has worked in law enforcement for 33 years and has served in the military.

BY CRAIG CROSBY KENNEBEC JOURNAL

ccrosby@mainetoday.com | 207-621-5642

Kennebec County Sheriff Randall Liberty has been selected as the next warden of the Maine State Prison.

Liberty, the county's sheriff for the past seven years, is set to take over the top position at the prison Sept. 28, according to a Department of Corrections news release.



Kennebec County Sheriff Randall Liberty has been selected to be the warden at Maine State Prison. *Kennebec Journal* File Photo/Andy Molloy

“I look forward to working with the professional and dedicated staff at the Maine State Prison,” Liberty said. “I appreciate this opportunity and am honored by the trust and confidence that the governor and Commissioner (Joseph) Fitzpatrick have placed in me. I look forward to my continued service to the people of the state of Maine.”

County Administrator Robert Devlin said in a prepared statement that Chief Deputy Ryan Reardon will step into the position, which is an elective office. Devlin described Reardon as “an experienced law enforcement professional who can quickly fill the void created by Sheriff Liberty’s departure.”

Devlin commended Liberty for creating a program — the Criminogenic Addiction & Recovery Academy — that is designed to help inmates with substance abuse problems.

“His creation of the CARA program in the Kennebec County Correctional Facility is just one example of his commitment to progressive programming and rehabilitating the people in his care,” Devlin said in the statement. “It has been a pleasure working with Sheriff Liberty.”

Liberty said he’s anxious to launch similar programs at the Maine State Prison. He said he thinks programs to help inmates suffering from mental illness or addiction, or geared toward veterans, will be even more effective with a stable population like that of the Maine State Prison than they have been at the Kennebec County jail, which sees about 3,200 new inmates a year.

“I’m looking forward to enhancing the programs,” Liberty said. “The primary goal is preventing recidivism. How do we prevent them from coming back?”

The Maine Department of Corrections at the end of August posted a [job advertisement](#) on its website seeking applications for the warden’s position. The application period was limited to just five days, from Aug. 24 to 28. Jody Breton, the department’s deputy commissioner, said at the time that “we’ll have somebody selected” shortly after Labor Day.

Breton said in an email Thursday that the department reached out nationally, as well as across the state, for someone who could balance the need for security with programs aimed at reducing repeated criminal activity.

“Sheriff Liberty stood out as the candidate with his innovative programming at Kennebec County while maintaining security,” Breton said. “He will be tasked with implementing progressive programming while maintaining security at the Maine State Prison.”

The advertisement indicated applicants for the job, which pays \$76,000 to \$105,000 per year, must have at least 12 years of education and experience in correctional programs or postgraduate

education in criminal justice, law enforcement, business or public administration, in addition to seven years of experience.

Liberty will replace Rodney Bouffard, who has been promoted to associate commissioner of the Department of Corrections. Bouffard replaces Cynthia Brann, the previous associate commissioner, who took a position in New York.

Bouffard has [been warden](#) of the Maine State Prison since 2013. He replaced Patricia Barnhart, who [was fired](#) in January 2013 after just three years amid a firestorm of controversy. Barnhart drew criticism in 2011 when she [bought 5 acres](#) and three houses from the state for [far below](#) their assessed value. The property was never marketed to the public, and the sale was later [declared void](#) by the state attorney general because it violated a law that prohibits state employees from having a financial interest in state contracts. Barnhart subsequently landed [another job](#) in the Department of Corrections.

Accusations arose after Barnhart's departure that [“a toxic culture”](#) existed inside the prison.

Liberty, 51, said he will spend his first days at the prison assessing the environment and looking for ways to make improvements. One problem he knows he'll have to tackle is the heavy employee turnover rate.

“If you spend the time to invest in them, how do you keep them there?” Liberty said. “Is it wages, the culture? It turns into an evolution of change to make it a more acceptable work environment.”

Liberty said he has been successful at going into difficult and diverse work situations and making changes.

“I've had good success with that,” he said. “I'm looking forward to that. People want to be led.”

The Maine State Prison has a capacity of 916 inmates and 410 staffers, according to its website. The Kennebec County jail is authorized for 147 inmates — 172 were there on Thursday — and Liberty oversees a staff of 150 employees combined in corrections and law enforcement. He said his time as sheriff, as well as his military experience, has prepared him to serve as warden.

“I'm very prepared to manage that scale of personnel and inmates,” he said. “The first thing I will do is try to build the team and strengthen the team and give them the tools they need to be successful in their positions.”

Liberty has worked in law enforcement for 33 years. He also served from 1982 to 2006 in the Army, the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve, reaching a rank of command sergeant major. Liberty served as a military policeman, corrections sergeant, drill sergeant, airborne, air assault, mountain infantryman and a U.S. Military Academy and West Point instructor. Liberty served in Korea, Italy and Iraq, receiving numerous awards, most recently receiving the Bronze Star for his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Liberty has a master's degree in leadership from Liberty University in Virginia and a bachelor's of science in public administration from the University of Maine at Augusta. He also is a graduate of the FBI's National Academy and the National Sheriffs Institute.

Liberty, a Democrat, was re-elected to a four-year term as county sheriff just last year after running unopposed for the position. Liberty said Reardon, a 20-year veteran of law enforcement who has been chief deputy for the past two years, is well prepared to lead the department until a replacement is named.

Liberty, who has had three sitting sheriffs depart during his 26 years with the county, said the Democratic caucus will accept nominations for sheriff and then select candidates to forward to Gov. Paul LePage.

The process mirrors that followed by Kennebec County District Attorney Maeghan Maloney in 2012 when Evert Fowle resigned to become a district court judge.

Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap said state law governs the filling of vacancies for offices such as sheriff, and that the interim sheriff chosen by LePage would serve until the end of 2016.

"In November 2016 there will be special election to be sheriff for the remainder of the term," Dunlap said.

Liberty said he is proud of his work in Kennebec County and looks back on his experiences with satisfaction. His career as a diver and dog handler helped recover lost loved ones. His work at the Maine Police Academy in Vassalboro helped train a new generation of law enforcement officers, and his work to create therapy programs at the jail helped people break the cycle of crime, he said.

"I've really enjoyed the ability to help people," Liberty said. "I'm very pleased with the progress we've been able to make."

Chief Deputy Ryan Reardon is fulfilling the Kennebec Sheriff's duties until the Governor appoints Sheriff Liberty's replacement. Chief Reardon can be reached at rpreardon@kennebecso.com.