

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Friday December 15, 2023
11:30am-1:30pm
Meeting held virtually

Board Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides (OCA)
Cecely Reardon (DYS)
Naoka Carey (CfJJ)
Rachel Gwaltney (CLM)
Rebecca Brink (DCF)
Heidi Gold (EOE)
Michael Coelho (Probation)
Dawn Christie (Parent)
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)
Jen Barrelle (DPH)

OCA Staff:

Kristi Polizzano
Melissa Threadgill
Arianna Turner
Morgan Byrnes
Ari Fertig

Other Attendees:

Kathleen Bitetti, OSA
Joshua Dankoff (CfJJ)
Omar Irizarry (DMH)
Audrey Hermann (Rep. Livingstone)
Laura Lempicki (Probation)

Meeting Commenced: 11:35 AM

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Threadgill welcomed the attendees to the Juvenile Justice Policy & Data (JJPAD) Board meeting. Members of the Board and guests introduced themselves.

Meeting Agenda

Ms. Threadgill presented the agenda for today's meeting:

- Updates from the OCA,
- 2023 JJPAD Annual Report
 - Review and discussion
 - Motion to approve and submit to legislature,
- 2024: What's to come.

Approval of Minutes from the October Meeting

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous JJPAD Board meeting minutes. Maria Mossaides, Rebecca Brink, Rachel Gwaltney, Dawn Christie, Heidi Gold, and Naoka Carey all voted in the affirmative. Michael Coehlo, Rachel Wallack, and Jen Barrelle abstained. No one opposed.

The meeting minutes from October were approved.

Updates from the OCA

Ms. Threadgill shared that the Childhood Trauma Task Force 2023 Annual Report was released this week and provided an overview of that report.

Ms. Threadgill then announced the expansion of the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program to Bristol County and the Cape & Islands district. Commissioner Reardon expressed her enthusiasm for this expansion.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions and comments. None were raised.

Ms. Threadgill then welcomed Ms. Polizzano to review the 2023 JJPAD Annual Report.

2023 JJPAD Annual Report

Review and Discussion

Ms. Polizzano introduced herself and started presenting on the 2023 JJPAD Annual Report key data takeaways, including the following:

- There was an increase in use of the juvenile justice system in Massachusetts in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 compared to FY22.
- This increase is driven by cases involving youth alleged of misdemeanor/lower-level offenses, particularly at the arrest stage. There was an 85% increase in arrests for youth alleged of committing misdemeanor offenses.

- The increase in overall system use has led to across-the-board increases in the number of youth being placed on pretrial supervision/monitoring or probation, and detained or committed to the Department of Youth Services (DYS).
- If the recent rates of increase continue, juvenile justice system use will revert to pre-Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA) levels in the next one to two years.
- Racial and ethnic disparities worsened at the beginning stages of the system. Black youth and Latino youth were more likely to come in to court on an arrest than a summons which is particularly noteworthy considering the preferred method to bringing youth alleged of delinquent offenses into court is through a summons.
- Youth held at DHS have higher rates of behavioral health needs, educational challenges, and – in some cases — trauma than last year including an increase in the percentage of youth detained who have current child welfare system involvement.

Ms. Polizzano finished by sharing that the board is not making new recommendations in this report but is highlighting a few made prior, including:

1. Increase opportunities to divert youth away from the system prior to court involvement
2. Address policies (particularly those at the policing level) contributing to racial disparities;
3. Improve the triaging of and access to supports for youth with unmet needs

Ms. Polizzano then welcomed questions.

One member suggested further breaking down data about the “front door” increases in system involvement to better understand and identify opportunities for diversion. Members discussed the value of accessing data regarding the specific delinquent offenses alleged as well as the police departments issuing the arrests. Members briefly discussed the limitations in accessing such data.

Members also discussed the challenges of securing access to timely and adequate services for youth with unmet needs. It was agreed that language would be included in this report to acknowledge the current challenges with accessing state services.

Ms. Threadgill discussed the overall findings of the report including the fact that there are increases in system involvement nearing the levels prior to the Criminal Justice Reform Act.

Ms. Threadgill then reviewed the report edits that was received and welcomed objections. None were raised. She also welcomed additional edits to the report. None were raised.

Motion to Approve and Submit to Legislature

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the 2023 JJPAD Annual Report. Maria Mossaides, Rachel Gwaltney, Naoka Carey, Cecely Reardon, Heidi Gold, Michael Coelho, and Dawn Christie all

voted in the affirmative. Rachel Wallack, Rebecca Brink, and Jen Barrelle abstained. No one opposed.

The motion was approved and the 2023 JJPAD Annual Report was approved.

Ms. Threadgill outlined the next steps for the report submission and thanked the board members for their work in gathering data for the report.

Ms. Threadgill then welcomed Ms. Polizzano to discuss the JJPAD work for 2024.

2024: What's to Come

Ms. Polizzano reviewed the timeline for the Dually Involved Youth and Pretrial Phase projects and welcomed questions. None were raised.

Ms. Polizzano then welcomed Ms. Threadgill to facilitate board member updates.

Board Member Updates

Ms. Threadgill welcomed board members to share updates from their respective organizations.

Commissioner Reardon shared that DYS has made updates to grants of conditional liberty (“GCLs”) based on national best practices; they have eliminated the conditions of school attendance and substance use and are ensuring that these behaviors are regarded as treatment issues.

Mr. Coelho shared that there is a new commissioner of Probation, Pamerson Ifill, and expressed an interest in setting up a meeting between the commissioner and the OCA to discuss their priorities.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed additional updates. None were raised.

Closing Comments

Ms. Threadgill thanked the board members for their work this year. She explained that members should expect to see a final copy of the annual report, as well as scheduling information for the next board meeting, in January.

Meeting adjourned: 12:13 PM