

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Thursday June 24, 2021
2:00pm – 4:00pm
Meeting held virtually

Board Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides (OCA)
Dawn Christie (Parent representative)
Ed Dolan, Fabiola White (Probation)
Joshua Dohan (CPCS)
Lindsey Tucker (DPH)
Nancy Connolly (DMH)
Naoka Carey and Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Peter Forbes (DYS)
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)
Rebecca Brink and Cristina Tedstone (DCF)
Tammy Mello (CLM)
Daria Afshar (Sen. Patrick O’Connor’s Office)

OCA Staff:

Melissa Threadgill
Kristi Polizzano
Alix Rivière
Jessie Brunelle
Ayanna Miller-Smith
Judy Touzin
Marcela Familiar- Bolanos

Other Attendees:

Kathleen Bitetti (SAO)
Rachel Gwaltney (CLM)
Rebecca Coyne (CfJJ)
Angela Brooks (AGO)
Members of the public

Meeting Commenced: 2:04pm

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.

Approval of Minutes from March Meeting

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous JJPAD Board meeting minutes. Rachel Wallack abstained.

The meeting minutes for March were approved.

Meeting Agenda

Ms. Threadgill presented the agenda for today’s meeting, including legislative updates, a discussion around the JJPAD Board’s COVID-19 report, subcommittee updates, and Board member updates.

OCA/Board Member Update

Ms. Threadgill updated the group on FY22 legislative funding for projects stemming from JJPAD Board work including funding for the Diversion pilot and funding for a Center on Child Wellness and Trauma.

Commissioner Forbes updated the group on the diversion pilot site procurement; hiring of a diversion manager; and funding for screening and assessment tools with Dr. Gina Vincent at UMass. Members suggested education around the selection of the risk/need tools with the JJPAD Board and other concerned stakeholders. Commissioner Forbes stressed the importance of individual case management for youth in the program.

Ms. Threadgill also told the group the OCA and EOTSS have been updating the juvenile justice website from the first version launched last fall. She will continue to update the Board as this work progresses.

Associate Commissioner Tucker (DPH) told the group about DPH’s vaccine equity initiative that launched in February. She told the group that in-home programming and mobile vaccine sites are up and running. She shared website links for more information and asked the Board to share the information with their networks.

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Delinquency and our Juvenile Justice System

Ms. Threadgill moved on to the next item on the Board’s agenda: discussion around the COVID-19 report they will issue this year. As a reminder to the group, Ms. Threadgill discussed the goals of the report are to: track the on-going impact of COVID-19 on the juvenile justice system; identify pandemic-related trends that may have a future impact on delinquency and the juvenile justice system; and provide recommendations for future policy/practice. She reminded the group on the background of the report and subcommittee input up to this meeting. Ms. Threadgill emphasized the group’s input on the recommendations section. Ms. Threadgill presented on the key themes of the report.

Reduced Juvenile Justice System Utilization During the Pandemic

Ms. Threadgill presented data to the group showing a decrease in juvenile justice utilization since the start of the pandemic through March/April 2021. She discussed this is a result of the reduction in delinquency as well as a concerted effort across systems to reduce youth contact with congregate settings. She told the group court process delays may cause a “spike” or increase in utilization coming. Members asked if the decrease in cases is reflected at filing and arraignment stages. It was shared that as of May, Delinquency filings are down 24% this fiscal year, and youthful offender filings are down 19%. Members discussed anecdotally there was an increased use of diversion. Members

reiterated the data does not reflect the youth who were not released during the pandemic and remained in detention longer. The report should reflect that some youth who remained in detention were “stuck”

Board members mentioned the decrease in utilization was felt at the Juvenile Court Clinics as well, as numbers were reduced by about half.

The group stated that this decline was seen prior to the pandemic too and the Board should watch to see if data indicates a “ramp up” in utilization over the next several months.

Silver Linings: Policy and Practice Innovation and Learning

Ms. Threadgill presented on the two major silver linings identified by subcommittee thus far: remote technology innovation and reducing the number of youth in custody.

Members said virtual visitations for all kids on probation (not just those categorized as low risk) was beneficial. In general, youth felt safe and more comfortable sharing with probation officers via virtual platforms and allowed for more flexibility with probation officer contacts. Members added that committed youth in residential placement could connect with community clinicians via telehealth and that can be helpful for reentry. Members hope to be able to continue to use that process to transition youth from residential placement to the community to supplement home visits.

Another remote technology innovation was around communication between the courts and CPCS attorneys. The courts notified CPCS on a regular basis of the youth who were summoned, so CPCS was able to assign attorneys days/weeks before arraignment. This meant the attorney and social workers could connect with youth and families ahead of time to explain the process, think about pre-arraignment dismissal motions, and promoted equity when thinking about youth with private attorneys. Members highlighted the collaboration between child-serving entities and the model of transparency for members. These were all signs of a good system.

Pandemic Created Increased Risk of Future Delinquency

Ms. Threadgill presented national and Massachusetts research on six key domains associated with risk of delinquency that have also been impacted by the pandemic: family, education, pro-social connections, substance use, mental health and trauma, and system involvement. Ms. Threadgill presented the pandemic impacts on each key domain.

Members commented on the mental health domain saying the impact of access to mental health supports and clinicians is a result of a lack of workforce. Members discussed any recommendations that increase supports without the available workforce can only go so far. Clinician burnout is also a concern. Members were interested on data on wait times. Members mentioned reaching out to Williams James College for some data. They run a referral services trying to connect families to services.

Members mentioned that the workforce is also made up of parents who are experiencing pandemic-related stressors. The group mentioned there are other economic factors like food insecurity and housing that have been impacted. Ms. Threadgill mentioned the report would name other indirect measures but would not focus the report on those topics, since the Board is focused on juvenile justice entities.

Ms. Threadgill presented potential recommendations the JJPAD Board could make regarding each domain discussed. She opened the conversation to discussion.

Pro-social Connections: Members emphasized stipends are important for youth, and also suggested funding transportation for youth. The group thought about creating “flex funds” that could be used for creative solutions to engage in pro-social connections. Members stressed the importance of socioemotional and educational needs and re-engagement with schools.

Mental Health: Members stressed that given the extensive waitlists, the Board should prioritize recommendations that expand other activities known to support mental health and expand resources for therapeutic mentors.

Family: Members stated that more FRCs have to offer the more families will use them. Chair Mossaides told the group that in a year the FRC contracts will need to be re-bid. The OCA is committed to expanding the number of FRCs as well as redesigning their functions. These recommendations should be in place for the next round of bids. Members said they would be interested in the discussions with the OCA on the redesign for FRCs.

Education: Members discussed the standard truancy model that should exist cross the state. Members talked about pre-truancy as well when students might be behind academically and acknowledge the educational deficits/ learning loss that might exist. Members said federal funding might be best suited for these recommendations. Members suggested the need for specific targeted strategies. Some recommended resources included: social work services, multicultural family engagement specialists, and reducing the use of police officers in schools. The group suggested that students with IEPs should get particular focus in these recommendations since they are most at risk of delinquency involvement.

Substance Use: Ms. Threadgill told the group the OCA will speak with people at BSAS to understand what service gaps exist in rural areas.

System Involvement: JJPAD members emphasized reentry while youth are still at a DYS facility to build skills.

Ms. Threadgill thanked the group for their input. She told the Board that they would have an opportunity to review a draft report during their September meeting. If any members would like to be included in the development of the report in August, they should reach out to her via e-mail.

Subcommittee Updates

Ms. Threadgill told the group there was not enough time to discuss the subcommittee updates but wanted to flag the section of the presentation for the group. The presentation will be uploaded to the JJPAD Board's website.

Closing Comments

Ms. Threadgill thanked the group for their time. The next meeting for the JJPAD Board is scheduled for September 2021. She asked the group to keep an eye out for the Doodle poll to select the next date. She informed members that the subcommittee meetings are being held monthly at set meeting times.

Meeting adjourned: 3:57pm