

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Wednesday, March 12, 2025
10:30am-11:30pm
Meeting held virtually

Board Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides (OCA)
Cecely Reardon (DYS)
Pamerson Ifill (Probation)
Nancy Connolly (DMH)
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)
Rachel Gwaltney (CLM)
Tobin Abraham (Rep. Nguyen)
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Julia Lane (DPH)
Cristina Tedstone (DCF)
David Whitham (Individual with expertise related to design and implementation of state administrative data systems)
Latoya Nicholas (Parent Representative)
Rebecca Brink (DCF)

OCA Staff:

Kristi Polizzano
Melissa Threadgill
Arianna Turner
Morgan Byrnes
Alix Riviere

Other Attendees:

Juin Liu (DESE)
Joshua Dankoff (CfJJ)
Kathleen Bitetti (OSA)

Meeting Commenced: 10:32 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.

Approval of Minutes from the December Meeting

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous JJPAD Board meeting minutes. Nancy Conolly, Rachel Wallack, Maria Mossaides, Ceceley Reardon, Cristina Tedstone, Tobin Abraham, Leon Smith, and David Whitham all voted in the affirmative. Latoya Nicholas and Rachel Gwaltney abstained. No one opposed.

The meeting minutes from December were approved.

Meeting Agenda

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

- Updates from the OCA
- 2024 Annual Report
 - Review and Discussion: Key Data Themes
 - Motion to Approve and Submit to Legislature
- 2025 Subcommittee Work Plan
- Board Member Updates

OCA Announcements

Ms. Threadgill shared OCA announcements, including information on the following:

- Legislative Updates, including bills that have been filed that relate to previous JJPAD recommendations
- Pretrial Report, which was published in January 2025
- Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP), which expanded to two more counties (Suffolk and Norfolk)

Commissioner Reardon shared her enthusiasm about the diversion program expansion and noted that in FY24, there were almost as many referrals as there were to date in 2023.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions about the MYDP. None were raised.

FY24 Data Key Themes

Ms. Threadgill welcomed Ms. Polizzano to begin presenting FY24 key data themes. Ms. Polizzano then shared themes including:

1. The increase in entries to the juvenile justice system has slowed significantly in the last year after two years of large increases.
2. Despite the plateau in overall system use, the use of physical custody is increasing.

3. This increase in the use of physical custody is partially driven by an increase in misdemeanor arrests and detention/commitment admissions for lower-"grid"- level offenses.
4. The vast majority of youth held in a locked detention facility are not found to be dangerous and not ultimately committed to DYS.
5. Racial disparities are worsening across many process points.
6. There are substantial increases in the use of physical custody for girls.
7. Key state-level reforms have made an impact on the number of young people coming into the system but room for improvement, particularly in the use of physical custody, remains.

Ms. Polizzano shared that the Board is concerned about the trends in system use of custodial process points, and encourages the state to implement recommendations that the Board has made in prior reports, specifically those related to use of arrests and pretrial detention, as well as those pertaining to racial and ethnic disparities.

Ms. Polizzano welcomed questions and comments on the data themes presented.

One member shared that the Department of Youth Services (DYS) is experiencing the increased number of girls in the system and is struggling to ensure programming keeps pace with demand. They also shared that the girls entering the system are often involved with multiple systems and have high needs. They pointed out that this trend calls into question the use of custodial placements by stakeholders when they feel there is a personal safety concern rather than a public safety concern.

Another member added that providers are also experiencing an increased number of girls who need services and have high needs.

Proposed Report Edits

Ms. Threadgill thanked members and their organizations for the data they provide for the report and the thoughtful feedback they provide.

Ms. Threadgill then reviewed a few additional edits suggested to the report since the report was last reviewed by members. Members discussed the first edit and shared that the members need to revisit the data in order to determine how to report the information accurately.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed additional edits or comments on the report.

Vote to Submit the 2024 Annual Report to the Legislature

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the 2024 annual report. Maria Mossaides, Pamerson Ifill, Leon Smith, and Rachel Gwaltney all voted in the affirmative. Cristina Tedstone, Latoya Nicholas, David Whitham, Rachel Wallack, Tobin Abraham, Cecely Reardon, and Nancy Connolly abstained. No one opposed.

The 2024 annual report was approved.

Ms. Threadgill then shared the next steps of the report and welcomed questions. None were raised.

2025 Work Plan

Ms. Threadgill reviewed the work completed on the dually-involved youth (DIY) project in 2024, including information on data procurement and stakeholder interviews. She then reviewed the 2025 work to be done on the DIY project.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions on the DIY project. None were raised.

Ms. Threadgill then reviewed the work plans for the Community-Based Interventions subcommittee, the Data subcommittee, and the Childhood Trauma Task Force. She also reviewed the work plan for the full board, which included:

- Summer: DIY project update and discussion
- Fall: Review and discuss DIY findings and subcommittee report outs
- Winter/Spring 2026: Review and discuss 2025 annual report and DIY report

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions on the work plans. None were raised

Board Member Updates

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

Mr. Whitham offered to present to the Data subcommittee on master data management and artificial intelligence natural language processing. Ms. Threadgill shared that Ms. Polizzano would reach out to set up a discussion.

Closing Comments

Ms. Threadgill thanked attendees for their work and adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 11:18AM