

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Wednesday, October 8, 2025
12:30pm-2:00pm
Meeting held virtually

Board Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides (OCA)
Cecely Reardon (DYS)
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)
Rachel Gwaltney (CLM)
Tobin Abraham (Rep. Nguyen)
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Julia Andrus (DCF)
David Whitham (Individual with expertise related to design and implementation of state administrative data systems)
Latoya Nicholas (Parent Representative)
Joseph Abber (Probation)
Bridget Nichols (DMH)
Heidi Gold (EOE)
Kesha LaTulippe (DPH)

OCA Staff:

Kristi Polizzano
Melissa Threadgill
Arianna Turner
Kerin Miller

Other Attendees:

Omar Irizarry (DMH)
Kathleen Bitetti (OSA)
Katy Perry Lorentz (DYS)

Meeting Commenced: 12:32 PM

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 March Meeting

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous JJPAD Board meeting minutes. Maria Mossaides, Tobin Abraham, Bridget Nichols, Rachel Gwaltney, David Whitham, Leon Smith, Julia Andrus, Rachel Wallack, Latoya Nicholas, and Keesha LaTulippe, all voted in the affirmative. Heidi Gold abstained. No one opposed.

The meeting minutes from March were approved.

Meeting Agenda

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

- Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) Announcements
- Dually Involved Youth Project Updates and Discussion
- Subcommittee Updates
- Board Member Updates

OCA Announcements

Ms. Threadgill began by sharing legislative updates, including information on JJPAD-related bills that have been reported out favorably from committee and bills that had hearings over the summer. One member shared that young people did a great job testifying at the hearing in favor of *An Act regarding families and children in need of assistance*.

Next, Ms. Threadgill shared information on the newly released Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) Report, including key findings and recommendations.

One member asked about efforts to address growing racial and ethnic disparities in CRA filings. Ms. Threadgill shared that the OCA is a strong supporter of *An Act regarding families and children in need of assistance*, which aims to reduce the number of CRA filings and support families, including families of color, in community based settings instead of court.

Ms. Threadgill then presented information on the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP), including details on the Georgetown Youth Diversion Certificate Program, which the OCA and several other state agencies recently participated in. She shared that it was a valuable experience and a great opportunity to hear about the diversion efforts of other jurisdictions around the country. Ms. Perry-Lorentz added that it was interesting to hear from several jurisdictions that had mandatory offenses for diversion, and Ms. Reardon thanked the OCA for sponsoring Massachusetts' participation in the program.

One member asked if the Georgetown program participants could share more information with board members about innovative strategies, specifically around gun violence prevention and diversion, used in programs around the country. Ms. Threadgill stated that she will follow-up

with more information from the program and added that the Massachusetts program group will be convening soon to discuss how Massachusetts can develop diversion efforts for youth who are DCF-involved and do not have a stable placement.

Ms. Threadgill then continued presenting information on the MYDP, including the OCA's forthcoming year 3 impact report which will include:

- Data and demographics from calendar year 2024 programming
- Areas for improvement

Finally, Ms. Threadgill shared information on the Center for Child Wellbeing and Trauma's Training and Learning Collaborative, which will be convening for the first time this fall.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions. None were raised.

Dually Involved Youth Project Update and Discussion

Ms. Threadgill welcomed Ms. Polizzano to begin presenting on the dually involved youth project including information on:

- Research questions and project goals
- The work done by the OCA and the Community-Based Interventions (CBI) subcommittee over the past two years
- The work that remains to be done over the next year prior to publishing a report in Fall of 2026
- The 73 interviews conducted between August 2023 and October 2025

One member asked which provider agencies were interviewed for the project. Ms. Polizzano shared that the OCA promises anonymity to anyone interviewed, so she cannot discuss specific names of providers, with the exception of NFI Massachusetts which presented at a CBI Subcommittee meeting on this project. She added that providers interviewed represented a wide range of geographic areas and were primarily from congregate care facilities.

Ms. Polizzano then shared some emerging themes from the research thus far, including:

1. Dual system youth are different than single system youth in key ways
2. Girls and LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in the dual status population
 - According to research, LGBTQ+ youth are likely overrepresented in the dually-involved population because they are overrepresented in state systems generally.
 - The literature suggests girls are overrepresented in the child welfare system, which could lead to their overrepresentation in the dually-involved population.
 - There are high rates of detention for Latino and Black youth.
3. There are gaps in services/early supports to prevent crossover or initial system involvement

4. There are child welfare system policies & practices that actively contribute to crossover

One member asked for clarification about the definition of a youth who is involved in DCF. Ms. Miller shared that the working definition in the chat: “A youth who enters DYS care/custody and is either in the care/custody of DCF or has an open case with DCF.”

One member asked if youth in out-of-home placements are overrepresented in the dually involved population. Ms. Polizzano shared that the OCA is still exploring the data to answer this question.

One member asked if there are efforts to address youth crossing over from the child welfare system to the juvenile justice system by enhancing identity and culturally affirming services. Ms. Polizzano shared that the OCA will explore the cultural competency policies and practices of other jurisdictions that have made improvements in the racial and ethnic disparities data involving crossover populations.

Ms. Polizzano then continued sharing the last two emerging themes:

5. There are juvenile justice system policies & practices that actively contribute to crossover, and
6. There are short- and long-term negative impacts to dual involvement

Ms. Polizzano then shared discussion questions with the group, including:

- Do you disagree with any of the emerging themes?
- Are there any gaps in services/challenges in policy in Massachusetts that were not reflected?
- What remaining questions do you need answers to before making recommendations?

One member asked for further clarification about how children become dually-involved in state systems. Ms. Threadgill shared that the OCA often hears of a child becoming involved in the child welfare system at an older age, some through the CRA system and some because of DCF involvement, emphasizing that there is no one pathway to the child welfare system. She added that once a child becomes child welfare involved, that can quickly escalate to involvement in the juvenile justice system, often through a family not having the resources to control escalating behavior.

One member shared that from the provider perspective, there are situations in which a child is in a congregate care facility and the provider has very few options to handle difficult behavior other than call the police; they emphasized that addressing this issue in the facility itself requires a level of staffing that is not possible right now. The member asked if there are other respite

options for kids in congregate care settings aside from using pretrial detention through the Department of Youth Services.

Ms. Mossaides shared that the OCA has made recommendations in many of its reports around creating respite programs; she added that the capstone to the Georgetown Youth Diversion Certificate Program could be a good opportunity to further explore this idea at the state level and try to determine what kind of program is appropriate.

One member stated that all of the groups that are overrepresented in the dually-involved population are cultural minorities, which suggests identity could be a contributing factor to their system involvement; they added that the group should consider this issue when assessing appropriate models to serve this population. Ms. Polizzano shared that the OCA will study some specific models across the country that focus on identity affirming practices.

One member shared that in the Board’s 2022 report, “Racial and Ethnic Disparities at the Front Door of Massachusetts’ Juvenile Justice System,” the JJPAD interrogated four possible explanations for why disparities existed in the system and suggested conducting the same exploration in the dually-involved youth report.

One member shared that they would like to see more connection to schools in this project and asked if there is a systemic way to connect the community more to this population of kids.

One member asked how the project accounts for different levels of entry into the child welfare system when comparing Massachusetts to national data and asked if there are any states who have low standards to entry as Massachusetts does. Ms. Polizzano shared that when the OCA tried to account for the different entry points into the systems and different definitions of dually-involved youth exist across the country, there was wide variation that made it difficult to standardize.

One member suggested that there may be specific practices in diversion that the group could apply to the dually-involved cohort.

Subcommittee Work Plans

The group did not have time to discuss subcommittee work plans. Information on the work plans for the Community-Based Interventions subcommittee, the Data subcommittee, the Childhood Trauma Task Force, and the full board was shared with the group to review on their own time. The full board workplan included:

- Early Winter: Review and discuss 2025 Annual Report
- Winter/Spring: DIY data presentation and case file review

- Spring/Summer: Review and discuss DIY report findings and recommendations and 1:1s/work planning with Board members

Board Member Updates

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

No updates were shared.

Closing Comments

Ms. Threadgill shared that the next full board meeting will be in December. She thanked attendees for their work and adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 1:58 PM