

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Tuesday October 25, 2022
12:30pm – 2:30pm
Meeting held virtually

Board Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides (OCA)
Nancy Connolly (DMH)
Christina Tedstone
Cecely Reardon (DYS)
Naoka Carey (CfJJ)
Dawn Christie (PPAL)
Rebecca Brink (DCF)
Barbara Kaban (CPCS)
Duci Goncalves (CPCS)
Yves Singletary (DPH)
Rachel Gwaltney (CLM)

OCA Staff:

Melissa Threadgill
Jessie Brunelle
Kristi Polizzano
Alix Rivière
Jessica Seabrook
Morgan Byrnes

Other Attendees:

Fabiola White (Probation)
Sana Fadel (CfJJ)
Joseph Abber (Probation)
Members of the public

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.

Meeting Agenda

Ms. Threadgill presented the agenda for today’s meeting, including updates from the state Diversion Learning Labs, a review and vote on the Board’s Racial and Ethnic Disparities at the Front Door of Massachusetts Juvenile Justice System Research Brief, a review of the draft CRA report recommendations, updates on the JJPAD subcommittees, and from Board members, as well as reviewing and voting on the previous JJPAD Board meeting minutes.

Approval of Minutes from the June Meeting

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous JJPAD Board meeting minutes. Yves Singletary, Rachel Gwaltney, Nancy Connolly, Maria Mossaides, Barbra Kaban, Lauren Matteodo, Duci Goncalves and Rebecca Brink all voted in the affirmative. Cristina Tedstone abstained. No one opposed.

The meeting minutes for June were approved.

Updates on the state Diversion Learning Labs

Ms. Threadgill gave an update on the Diversion Learning Lab, including:

- All time referrals by sending county, referral point (police, clerk magistrate, district attorney or judge), offense type and age
- Intakes by race and gender identity
- An overview of the MASYI-2 and YLS assessment outcomes

Ms. Threadgill then welcomed Commissioner Reardon to provide an update on the State Diversion Learning Lab. Commissioner Reardon provided updates on a current diversion coordinator position opening, and announced two new sites would be added, one in Hampden County and one in Plymouth County. Additionally, she mentioned that a smaller request for response (RFR) would be issued in January, with the goal of adding a provider in Bristol County.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions. One member asked how the diversion programming was impacting racial and ethnic disparities that are observed in the traditional justice system. It was explained that demographic data is collected, and when the program produces a large enough sample size, a full analysis will be done.

Review & Vote on Racial and Ethnic Disparities at the Front Door of Massachusetts Juvenile Justice System Research Brief

Ms. Threadgill reviewed the project plan with members. Next, Ms. Polizzano presented on both the findings, including:

- While overall contact with the juvenile justice system has gone down, racial and ethnic disparities still persist and are greatest at the “front door” of the system – the arrest and application for complaint stage.
- Offense severity (i.e., felony or misdemeanor), offense type (e.g., person, weapon, property) and the region a youth is arrested in can partially, but not fully, explain overall racial and ethnic disparities in youth entering the juvenile justice system.
- Research in other jurisdictions supports the hypothesis that police department policies, practices, and officer decision-making are also at least partially responsible for these disparities in Massachusetts.

Ms. Polizzano then presented on the recommendations, including:

- For the state, investing in prevention and alternatives to arrest by increasing investments in community-based programs and supporting/expanding the state Diversion Learning Lab
- For police departments,
 - gathering and using data to spot problem areas and improve practice by reporting use of summons to the NIBRS database, use internal data to see if disparities are replicated at the individual or department level and require officers to document their decision making when issuing a summons vs. a custodial arrest
 - reducing disparities through practice and policy change by providing more guidance and limitations on when to use a custodial arrest vs. a summons and review what polices/practices may be contributing to disparities

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions. Hearing none, she then reviewed edits received from Board members. Members noted that some of the edits suggested were to clarify that youth of color are not more likely to commit certain crimes when compared to their white counterparts, and therefore not a factor in the observed disparities.

One member mentioned that there is growing research that documents that for school aged children, any form of policing can be harmful. Members discussed and suggested that research be added to the report. The edit was made. Hearing no additional edits, the Board voted on the report.

The following members voted in the affirmative: Rachel Gwaltney, Naoka Carey, Duci Goncalves, Barbra Kaban, Maria Mossaides, Nancy Connolly and Cecely Reardon.

The following members abstained: Christina Tedstone, Yves Singletary, Joseph Abber and Lauren Matteodo.

The report was adopted.

Ms. Threadgill thanked members for their work.

CRA Report Recommendations: Review and Discuss

Next, Ms. Threadgill presented the CRA report timeline, explaining that a draft would be emailed to members no later than November 4th to be reviewed before a final vote at the Board's November meeting.

She then reviewed the draft recommendations, the first being to establish a common system purpose.

A member asked for an explanation on why the Board included a common purpose for the CRA system into its recommendations. It was explained that this would allow the Legislature to put purpose and goals into legislation, which was not done in the CHINS to CRA reform. Additionally, it was helpful in crafting recommendations in a collaborative way.

Members discussed how diversion from the traditional CRA court process changed in the CHINS to CRA reform.

Ms. Threadgill then presented on the nine recommendations, that were broken up into three themes.

The recommendations in Theme 1 focus on shifting a significant portion of CRA cases from the court room to the community, which could include:

- Expanding the number and functions of Family Resource Centers
- Substantially increasing diversion of cases from the court to FRCs by revising the CRA filing process
- Educating families and child-serving professionals about all options available
- Explicitly addressing sources of bias (both individual and systemic) that may be leading to disproportionality in referrals to the CRA system

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions on the draft recommendations in Theme 1. One member mentioned that many FRCs currently do not have the staff to support this increase in programming. It was explained that the recommendation includes increased staffing for FRCs with a focus on adding clinicians. Director Mossaides commented that the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) sits on the Families and Children Requiring Assistance (FACRA) Board and will continue to push for more appropriate staffing and funding of FRCs.

The recommendations in Theme 2 focus on increasing the availability of school and community-based services that specifically meet the needs of youth currently in CRA system, which could include:

- Supporting community-based programs aimed at supporting youths' behavioral and mental health needs, as well as those that promote prosocial activities
- Executive Branch agencies collaborating to identify program models that better meet the needs of youth struggling in out-of-home placements

- Addressing truancy by promoting effective student engagement practices that address root causes of truancy, and better identify both schools and students in need of extra support

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions on the draft recommendations in Theme 2. Hearing none, she moved on.

Next, Ms. Threadgill presented on Theme 3, which focuses on continuing to study implementation of these recommendations, which could include:

- Increase data availability
- Monitor implementation of policy changes

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions on the draft recommendations in Theme 3. Members discussed noting that the data collection should be needs focused and should be measuring what is driving youth into the system. A member suggested having the Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) to report the percent of students they are referring to special education programs.

Finally, Ms. Threadgill reviewed next steps, which includes sending the updated draft to the Board on November 4, which would allow members to review and send edits that will then be incorporated into an updated the draft. The Board will then review and vote on the updated draft at its November 18th meeting.

Subcommittee Report Out

The Board was then updated on the work of the Community Based Interventions (CBI) Subcommittee, the Data Subcommittee and the Childhood Trauma Task Force.

Community Based Interventions (CBI) Subcommittee

Between July and October, the CBI Subcommittee has reviewed, discussed and voted on the CRA report. It was also explained that at the November meeting, the group would hear an update from the Department of Youth Services (DYS) regarding the state Diversion Learning Lab.

Data Subcommittee

Ms. Polizzano gave updates on the Data Subcommittee's work, including:

- During the July meeting, the Data Subcommittee reviewed and discussed the RED Brief
- During the September meeting, the group heard presentations from outside speakers on administrative data centers

- During the October meeting, the group hear a presentation on Department of Public Health on the Public Health Data Warehouse (PHD) and reviewed FY22 juvenile justice data

Ms. Polizzano also noted that at the November meeting, the group will review and discuss the data section of the Board’s FY22 Annual Report.

Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF)

Ms. Threadgill then updated the group on the CTTF’s continued efforts to recommend to the state what, if anything, the Commonwealth should do to support and/or require specific child trauma identification practices. Ms. Threadgill explained that the group had spent the summer discussing general considerations and recommendations for trauma screening as well as sector specific (child welfare, juvenile justice, first responder, early childhood, pediatric primary care and K-12) trauma screening recommendations. In October, the group reviewed and discussed the full draft report.

JJPAD Board

Ms. Threadgill then presented on the Board’s fall and early winter plan, including:

- In the fall, the Board will review and vote on the CRA report recommendations and hear Subcommittee report outs.
- In early winter, the Board will review and vote on the FY22 Annual Report, review and discuss the CTTF Annual Report and hear Subcommittee report outs.

Board Member Updates and Closing Comments

Ms. Threadgill gave members opportunity to share updates of their agencies. Ms. Threadgill thanked the group for their time and adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 2:30 pm