

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Tuesday September 28, 2021
2:00pm – 4:00pm
Meeting held virtually

Board Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides (OCA)
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)
Joshua Dohan (CPCS)
Tammy Mello (CLM)
Peter Forbes (DYS)
Edward Dolan (MPS)
Matthew Conolly (EOE)
Naoka Carey (CfJJ)
Rebecca Brink (DCF)
Dawn Christie (Parent representative)
Lauren Matteodo (Sen. Gomez’s Office)
Daria Afshar (Sen. Patrick O’Connor’s Office)
David Melly (Rep. Dykema’s Office)
Lindsey Tucker (DPH)

OCA Staff:

Melissa Threadgill
Kristi Polizzano
Jessie Brunelle
Janice Neiman

Other Attendees:

Matt Pecoraro, Judge Baker
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Rebecca Pries (JCC)
Fabiola White (Probation)
Emma Moore (CfJJ Intern)
Kathleen Bitetti (SAO)
Angela Brooks (AGO)
Thula Sibanda (DYS)
Members of the public

Meeting Commenced: 2:03pm

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 on JJPAD initiatives, a discussion around the JJPAD Board’s COVID-19 report, and subcommittee updates.

Approval of Minutes from June Meeting

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous JJPAD Board meeting minutes. Maria Mossaides, Rachel Wallack, Joshua Dohan, Tammy Mello, Peter Forbes, Edward Dolan, Naoka Carey, Rebecca Brink, Dawn Christie, and Lauren Matteodo all voted in the affirmative. Matthew Conolly abstained.

The meeting minutes for June were approved.

Update on Diversion Learning Lab Launch

Ms. Threadgill introduced Dr. Thula Sibanda who has been spear-heading the DYS state diversion program learning lab launch. Dr. Sibanda told the group that the community partners who will host diversion coordinators each have signed contracts and an official “launch” is scheduled for October 12th. The three providers selected through the procurement process are:

- Family Continuity (Worcester County)
- NFI (Middlesex County)
- Merrimack Services (Essex County)

Dr. Sibanda went on to tell the group more about the kick-off event scheduled for October 12th and mentioned that DYS is in the final stages of hiring a full-time program manager to oversee the launch.

Dr. Sibanda said that each site will take diversion referrals from police, clerks, district attorneys and judges.

JJPAD Board Membership Updates & Announcements

Ms. Threadgill thanked Dr. Sibanda. Next, Ms. Threadgill introduced two newly appointed JJPAD Board members: Senator Adam Gomez is now the senate majority party representative and Matthew Connolly is the representative from the Executive Office of Education. Ms. Threadgill welcomed them to the JJPAD Board.

Ms. Threadgill also announced to the group that the Center on Child Wellness & Trauma (CCWT) that was developed by the Childhood Trauma Task Force and funded this fiscal year by the Legislature is set to launch in October. She told the group Audrey Smolkin at UMass Medical was recently appointed Executive Director of the Center.

Implementation of the School Resource Officer (SRO) Provisions of 2020 Policing Reform Law

Next, Ms. Threadgill updated the group on the implementation of the SRO provisions of the 2020 policing reform bill. This bill created a commission to develop a model Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that both police departments and schools use when there are school resource officers in a school. She told the group the commission leading this work (co-chaired by DESE and EOPSS) released a survey to school professions, parents and youth for feedback on model MOU language. The group anticipates a final MOU draft for departments/schools to use in early 2022.

Ms. Threadgill also reminded the Board that the 2020 policing reform bill included specific training requirements for SROs building on the 2018 criminal justice reform bill requirements. While the timeline on when all SROs need to be trained by is still to be determined, the first SRO training that incorporated the new curriculum took place in September 2021. Ms. Threadgill briefly presented the agenda of this training.

COVID-19 and the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice System: *Recommendations for Supporting Youth and Preventing Delinquency*

Ms. Threadgill turned to the next agenda item: to discuss the Boards' COVID-19 draft report. This report details the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on juvenile justice system utilization, increased risks for future delinquency, silver linings in agency-level responses to the pandemic, and recommendations for the state.

Ms. Threadgill presented on the decrease in utilization across juvenile justice process points, and hypotheses as to why utilization decreased. This includes shifts in “circumstantial” factors that are tied to decreases in likelihood of delinquency behavior and system-wide efforts to divert youth. Ms. Threadgill mentioned youth who were “stuck” in the juvenile justice system throughout the pandemic, including youth on pretrial supervision and youth held in detention held longer by an average of 19 days.

The group discussed looking at youth across the child welfare congregate care settings during the pandemic. There have been reports of increased assaults on staff during the pandemic which would speak to the heightened stressors and needs of the youth who were (and continue to be) in out-of-home placements. Members agreed that youth held in out-of-home-placements (whether through DYS, DCF, or another agency) were some of the hardest hit by the negative aspects of

shut-downs during the pandemic. The Board said this could not be addressed without speaking to the crisis in workforce shortages in residential facilities as well.

Ms. Threadgill briefly presented on the other major parts of the report, which were discussed at previous meetings. Ms. Threadgill reviewed the substantive edits to the report that were made since the Board received the draft report two weeks prior. There were no questions or conversation on the edits made.

The group discussed one recommendation in the report that suggested DYS—in collaboration with Probation, CPCS, and schools—review the youth who were detained or held in residential commitment centers throughout the pandemic who suffered hardships with the goal to provide supports to those youth. The group discussed the fact that there is currently no mechanism of identifying youth detained who are not later supervised on probation or committed to DYS. Some members mentioned that all youth in this position should have had an attorney who could help identify youth in these circumstances. Board members emphasized the importance of solving this issue and that there is a gap in the reentry process for these youth. The group discussed engaging family members before release from residential facilities and the school's role and responsibility in supporting youth returning from detention.

The group agreed this is an important consideration that requires more conversation with key decision-makers and stakeholders. The OCA committed to convening parties to problem solve and respond to this recommendation.

Ms. Threadgill asked the group if someone would motion to approve the report with the caveat that the OCA is still waiting on one data piece from DPH. A motion was made and seconded. Ms. Threadgill took a roll call vote on the report:

Maria Mossaides, Joshua Dohan, Tammy Mello, Naoka Carey, Edward Dolan, Dawn Christie, Lauren Matteodo, and David Melly all voted to approve the report. Rachel Wallack, Peter Forbes, Matthew Conolly, Rebecca Brink, Daria Afshar, and Lindsey Tucker abstained from voting on the report.

The report was approved.

Ms. Threadgill told the group the OCA would finalize the report and send it out to the Board and Legislature early the next week.

Subcommittee Updates

Ms. Threadgill moved on to the next part of the meeting's agenda. She updated the group on each of the two subcommittees work as well as the Childhood Trauma Task Force.

Childhood Trauma Task Force

Ms. Threadgill told the group the Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF) has continued their work looking at Trauma Screening across child-serving sectors. The CTTF will issue an interim report on their research in December 2021, and a full report with recommendation in Summer 2022.

Data Subcommittee

Ms. Threadgill updated the Board on the Data Subcommittee's work updating the 2019 data availability report to reflect all the progress made in the subsequent two years. She highlighted the main parts of the anticipated report and told the group this will be part of the Board's Annual Report.

Community Based Interventions Subcommittee

Last, Ms. Threadgill presented on the past 6 months of work the Community Based Interventions (CBI) Subcommittee has been conducting. This Subcommittee has continued their study on Massachusetts' Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) system. Ms. Threadgill told the Board that the group has dedicated five meetings to the topic so far, and the OCA has conducted over 80 interviews with over 100 individuals representing 15 stakeholder groups. She presented key takeaways from this work so far to the group including:

- Strengths of the CRA process
- Weaknesses, challenges, and gaps in the current system
- Overarching takeaways heard

Board members discussed these takeaways. Members discussed concerns bringing youth and families into a courtroom to solve issues and mentioned the potential harmful effects of congregate care placements.

Some members reminded the group of the success for Family Resource Centers (FRCs) in the 2012 CHINS to CRA reform law, and their integral role in supporting youth and families. The group agreed and suggested building FRC capacity to increase services. Ms. Threadgill suggested making FRC connections stronger between the courts and schools as well.

The Board discussed how many professionals do not understand the CRA process and misinform youth and their families on the process and what services can be accessed the court. The group also discussed the inconsistencies in CRA petitions' use across the state.

Ms. Threadgill told the group the CBI Subcommittee would continue to study this issue and issue a report sometime in the summer.

Closing Comments

Ms. Threadgill thanked the group for their time. She reminded the group that the last meeting of this year will be December 1, 2021, when the Board will discuss the annual report. She said this report will include:

- a summary of CY2021 work,
- FY21 data,
- and the updated juvenile justice data availability report.

She said the goal to get this report out by December 1, will also depend on getting the data in time. There were no additional comments or questions from Board members.

Meeting adjourned: 3:28pm