

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Community Based Interventions Subcommittee

Thursday April 15, 2021

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Meeting held virtually

Subcommittee Members or Designees Present:

Mike Glennon (Suffolk DA's Office)
Migdalia Nalls (CPCS)
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Dawn Christie (Parent Representative)
Brian Jenney (DPH)
Nokuthula Sibanda (DYS)
Chief Kevin Kennedy (MA Chiefs of Police Association)
Lisa Augusto (CPCS/CAFL)
Amy Ponte (CPCS/CAFL)
Kim Lawrence (Probation)

Other Attendees:

Melissa Threadgill (OCA)
Kristi Polizzano (OCA)
Alix Rivière (OCA)
Katherine Hughes
Madison Leonard
Kathleen Bitetti (SAO)
Shayna Simmonds (Probation)
Krissy Williams
Other Members of the public

Meeting Commenced: 1:03pm

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Threadgill welcomed the attendees to the Community Based Interventions (CBI) subcommittee virtual meeting. Members in the WebEx video conference and individuals on the phone introduced themselves. Ms. Threadgill then presented the agenda.

Review and Approval of Minutes from March 2021 Meeting

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous Community Based Interventions meeting minutes. No one was opposed from voting on the March minutes. Amy

Ponte, Kim Lawrence, and Lisa Augusto abstained. The meeting minutes for March 18, 2021 were approved.

Learning Lab Updates

Ms. Threadgill informed the group about a joint DYS/OCA virtual information session on April 27th, from 1:00pm to 2:30pm on the Diversion Learning Lab launch. She invited members to attend as well as forward the invitation to any of their contacts that might be interested.

Discussion of the Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19 on the Juvenile Justice System

Ms. Threadgill discussed answers to the survey sent out to members. She first presented answers to the question “What changed throughout the course of the pandemic that benefited youth?” which fell into four broad categories: remote technology interventions, system stakeholders attitudes and beliefs, reducing the number of youth in custody, and program responses. Members discussed what was meant by “unsafe court attendance.”

Next, she presented answers to the question “What changed throughout the course of the pandemic that may have negatively impacted youth?” which fell into four broad categories: technology challenges, isolation causing trauma and/or negative outcomes disproportionately felt among youth of color and under-resourced communities, lack of resources to address ongoing trauma, and delays in programming. Members discussed the perceived overuse of GPS (pre-trial and post-disposition) and home confinement, which some argued is inversely proportional to the decrease in custodies and arraignments. Some members noted that the duration of GPS use and home confinement appears to have increased during the pandemic. Members also discussed how the decrease in arraignments is due to a backlog of cases as well as virtually held cases being repeatedly continued.

Next, Ms. Threadgill presented answers to the question “What are we worried about moving forward?” which fell into the following categories: long-term impact on educational connections/attainment, mental/behavioral health challenges, longer-term impacts of financial insecurity during COVID, and longer-term impacts on relationships and behaviors. Members discussed the surveying of parents done by MassINC, which identified many of the issues highlighted. Others added that families in the community have lost confidence that the juvenile justice system currently has the ability to rehabilitate delinquent youth in their communities and

that there is a perception that youth are not being held accountable. Some mentioned that probation officers have not been working in the community in over a year and that virtual connections to youth cannot replace the relationships that could be established prior to the pandemic. At the same time, other members expressed that parents and youth feel relieved at not having to be physically present in court. Others mentioned that it will be important to understand the complex impact of virtual meetings—including the possibility of more 51As being filed as youth’s homes are increasingly visible to mandated reporters in the justice system.

Next, Ms. Threadgill posed the following questions to the group: What are transition measures that are needed to transition to a “post-pandemic” world? How do we triage given limited resources? What is needed to prepare for longer term impacts on the juvenile justice system? Members debated the decrease of child maltreatment reports and the expectation of a rise in 51A cases once students are fully back at school. Others mentioned the need to provide educational services.

Child Requiring Assistance System Foundation Setting and Discussion

Ms. Threadgill explained that the group will be spending the rest of the year focusing on the Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) system as part of JJPAD’s larger crossover youth project. She presented a brief overview of the process, including who can file a CRA (caregiver(s), school, or police), the role of different stakeholders (Clerk Magistrate, Probation, judge, and Family Resource Centers). She explained the reform from a CHINS system to the CRA one, including the creation of FRCs and increased rights of children and families. Members asked about the relationship between school truancy issues and bullying or relationship issues with school staff and how that is codified in statute.

Next, Ms. Polizzano presented available CRA data coming from the JJPAD annual report, FACRA reports, UMass FRC evaluation reports, and Juvenile Court Tableau. She explained that in the past four years petition types have remained the same, and so have the race/ethnicity and gender of children involved. She explained that Berkshire and Suffolk Counties have the highest rate of CRA filings compared to their youth population. She then delved into the data available in the 2020 FACRA report and the 2019 UMass FRC annual report.

Ms. Threadgill then proposed a research plan for the group, including finding more data sources, conducting family/youth focus groups, and conducting interviews with key stakeholders. Finally, she highlighted four emerging themes from the OCA’s initial interviews regarding CRAs, including: unnecessary/inequitable use of CRAs, CRAs as a system “fail safe,” the need for families to also receive assistance, and how CRAs can lead to out-of-home placements. Members asked about data regarding the overlap of CRA and delinquency cases or the rate of referrals to FRCs that end up being filed as CRAs. Others asked if having a CRA could possibly worsen youth’s outcome if they have later court-involvement.

Closing Comments:

Ms. Threadgill presented ideas for upcoming meeting topics and invited members to email the OCA to add to that list. She thanked members for their participation and informed them that the next meeting will take place on Thursday May 20, from 1:00pm to 2:30pm.

Meeting adjourned: 2:35pm