

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Community Based Interventions Subcommittee
Monday, April 27, 2026
11:00 AM – 12:30 PM
Meeting held virtually

Subcommittee Members or Designees Present:

Amy Ponte (CAFL)
Alton Jones (CLM)
Dawn Christie (Parent Representative)
Dolores Thibault-Muñoz (CPCS)
Heidi Gold (EOE)
Kim Lawrence (Juvenile Court)
Latoya Nicholas (Parent Representative)
Laura Miller (MDAA)
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Rebecca Brink (DCF)
Susan Gill-Hickey (DMH)

OCA Staff:

Melissa Threadgill
Morgan Byrnes
Kerin Miller
Arianna Turner
Bessie Pierre

Other Attendees:

Carisa Pajak (MassHealth)
Geraldyn Johnson (MassHealth)
Katheleen Bitetti (SAO)
Meredith Moody (Andover Social Justice Coalition)
Omar Irizarry (DMH)
Rayna Hill (MCLGBTQY)
Shaplaie Brooks (MCLGBTQY)

Meeting Commenced: 11:01am

Welcome and Introductions:

Ms. Threadgill welcomed the attendees to the Community Based Interventions (CBI) Subcommittee virtual meeting. She welcomed members to introduce themselves.

Review and Approval of Minutes from the March Meeting:

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous Community Based Interventions meeting minutes. Dawn Christie, Alton Jones, Heidi Gold, Amy Ponte, Melissa

Threadgill, and Dolores Thibault-Muñoz all voted to approve the minutes. No one abstained. No one voted to oppose the minutes.

The meeting minutes for March 23, 2026, were approved.

Ms. Threadgill reviewed the meeting agenda, which featured a guest presentation from Shaplaie Brooks, Executive Director, and Rayna Hill, Policy and Research Director, from the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth (MCLGBTQY) on Dual Status Involvement for LGBTQ Youth.

JJPAD Board 2025 Annual Report

Ms. Threadgill highlighted the JJPAD's release of its 2025 Annual Report. She pointed attendees to the report, as well as data summary presentation and data webinar recording. She added that attendees are welcome to request that OCA staff present the report to their respective agencies.

OCA Presentation on National Research on LGBTQ+ Youth

Ms. Miller summarized research findings on LGBTQ+ and gender nonconforming (GNC) youth that were shared with the Subcommittee one year ago, highlighting the following information:

- There may be an overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ and GNC youth within crossover populations.
- There is insufficient research on crossover prevalence rates for this population, possibly due to a lack of data due to lack of disclosure or inconsistent data collection.
- LGBTQ+ and GNC youth face elevated risk factors that increase their likelihood of entering both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, such as higher rates of family rejection/maltreatment or lack of affirming supports/services.
- Further research on this population using an intersectional lens is emerging, including a closer look at race and birth sex.

For a more in-depth review of this information, Ms. Miller directed attendees to a JJPAD CBI presentation from July 2025.

MCLGBTQY Presentation on Dual Status Involvement for LGBTQ Youth

Ms. Hill began presenting, first providing background information on the Commission. Ms. Brooks shared a description of the Commission's Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students, which provides training and technical assistance for educators and other school personnel on supporting LGBTQ youth.

Next, Ms. Brooks provided an overview of LGBTQ youth who are dually involved. She emphasized that the Commission serves all youth regardless of their identity, given the understanding that identity development is nonlinear. Regarding this population, Ms. Brooks shared that:

- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) started collecting and sharing data on LGBTQ youth in recent years.
- At least 21% of youth in DCF services identify as LGBTQ.
- Approximately 6% of Department of Youth Services (DYS) youth identify as LGBTQ.
- She noted that DCF reporting is likely inaccurate because case workers may not feel comfortable asking youth about their identity or skip identity questions.

Ms. Brooks then shared an overview of risk factors for LGBTQ youth that may contribute to dual involvement, including the following information:

- LGBTQ youth face higher rates of familial rejection and maltreatment.
- LGBTQ youth are more likely to be placed in group homes.
- For homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ, exchanging sex for needs (ESN) is often criminalized. ESN is different from Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC).

Ms. Brooks next presented on service gaps that can lead LGBTQ youth to interact more with the juvenile justice system, highlighting the following information:

- Racial bias, systemic racism, homophobia, transphobia and microaggressions can lead to home removals or deeming a youth a “problem child.”
- LGBTQ youth are more likely to be denied kinship placement or placement with their “chosen family.”
- Within state services, there is often a lack of education on LGBTQ issues that may contribute to service gaps.
- Delays in accessing immigration documentation, legal name change paperwork, or gender-affirming care may lead to a range of negative outcomes such as homelessness, substance use, or recidivism.

Then, Ms. Brooks shared information on high acuity placements and CSEC/ESN/sex work for LGBTQ youth, including:

- High acuity placements are especially important for LGBTQ youth who are victims of domestic violence, have a history of trauma, or lack a home to safely return to.
- ESN, homelessness, and mental health disorders are prevalent among LGBTQ youth.
- A lack of appropriate screening tools and effective training on trauma-informed care is a barrier for providers supporting LGBTQ youth.
- Risk factors for CSEC/ESN/sex work include a lack of gender-affirming items, bullying in group homes, or poor treatment in congregate care settings.

Next, Ms. Hill provided a summary of recommendations to DCF, which are outlined in the Commission’s annual report that will be available in May. The recommendations ask DCF to:

- Improve recruitment and training of LGBTQ-affirming placements.

- Improve family preservation services to safely monitor and mitigate concerns that may lead to the removal of a child to proactively address LGBTQ mistreatment at home.
- Improve interagency work to support “warm hand-offs” for transition-aged youth attempting to access services.

Ms. Hill then shared that the Commission recommends that DYS:

- Establish an LGBTQ caregiver education program within juvenile diversion programs.
- Continue to expand data collection and reporting efforts on LGBTQ youth in DYS custody, given persistent gaps.
- Improve interagency work to support “warm hand-offs” for transition-aged youth attempting to access services.

Ms. Hill next shared that the Commission recommends that the state:

- Invest in caretaker engagement and education to support LGBTQ youth across youth-serving agencies.
- Explore the creation of an LGBTQ youth maltreatment code system within DCF.
- Expand mental health services for youth in state systems, including foster care and the juvenile legal system.

Finally, Ms. Brooks and Ms. Hill outlined conclusions on needed strategies and supports for LGBTQ youth, including:

- Advancing economic stability for youth in the child welfare and justice system, particularly for those aging out of care or who earn income through employment.
- Engaging with youth, especially QTBIPOC youth, to better identify areas of improvement to better support multisystem-involved, dual-system-involved, and crossover youth.
- Increase training opportunities for child welfare staff, particularly for social workers who do not work on specialized teams.

MCLGBTQY Presentation Questions and Discussion

One member commented on the importance of supervision and consultation for social workers and other providers, particularly since receiving training on trauma-informed care does not guarantee the implementation of those learnings.

Another member asked if there are national trainings that could help address the lack of comfortability among youth-serving providers in asking about LGBTQ identity. Ms. Brooks responded that training itself might not address the problem, given that social workers might feel a question is inappropriate given a youth’s age or think that asking a question about gender identity will make the youth queer.

Ms. Hill provided further explanation as to why existing data collection falls short:

- Data collection tools fail to capture the fluidity of gender identity.
- Trainings on supporting LGBTQ youth offered through DCF's Child Welfare Institute are optional.
- There is an increase in youth selecting "prefer not to answer" because they do not know how the data is being used.
- Staff who identify as LGBTQ may also feel uncertain about asking youth about their identity because they also do not know how the data will be used.

One attendee asked if the Commission has considered what response might be required to policy changes court decisions allowing conversion therapy. Ms. Brooks shared that legal protections against conversion therapy are comprehensive in Massachusetts and they are working to strengthen consumer protection language next. Ms. Hill added that the Commission is also working to educate youth involved with state systems about the prevalence of conversion therapy and their rights in such situations.

Another member shared that they are happy to have DCF's Director of LGBTQIA+ Services present to the Subcommittee.

Attendees then discussed concerns and challenges surrounding data collection amidst uncertainty at the federal government level, as well as the importance of safely collecting data to ensure the quality provision of services in the future. Ms. Hill added that the Commission is working with the Attorney General's Office to develop guidance for state agencies on data collection best practices in the current environment.

Finally, attendees discussed the importance of providing support for youth even in the absence of knowing their gender identity, particularly in schools. Ms. Brooks raised the importance of a universal provision of services.

Ms. Threadgill added that given data about the prevalence of LGBTQ youth in Massachusetts, individuals that work with youth can know that it is likely youth they are interacting with may be LGBTQ even if that youth has not disclosed that information, emphasizing the importance of creating supportive environments and offering services widely.

Closing Comments

Ms. Hill shared that the Commission's report will be available at the end of May.

Ms. Threadgill thanked the members for their participation and adjourned the meeting. She shared that the next meeting will be on May 18, 2026 at 11am.

Meeting adjourned: 12:06pm