

Office of the Child Advocate  
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board  
Community Based Interventions Subcommittee  
Monday, October 27, 2025  
11:00 AM – 12:30 PM  
**Meeting held virtually**

**Subcommittee Members or Designees Present:**

Alton Jones (CLM)  
Brian Blakeslee (CPCS/CAFL)  
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)  
Susan Gill-Hickey (DMH)  
Thula Sibanda (DYS)  
Kimberly Lawrence (Probation)  
Daniel Wolski (MCPA)  
Latoya Nicholas (Parent Rep)  
Laura Miller (MDAA)  
David Whitham (EOHHS)  
Stacey Lynch (BSAS)  
Leon Smith (CfJJ)  
Heidi Gold (EOE)

**OCA Staff:**

Kristi Polizzano  
Arianna Turner  
Melissa Threadgill  
Holly Swan

**Other Attendees:**

Juin Liu (DESE)  
Katherine Perry-Lorentz (DYS)  
Daniele Rose (DYS)  
Craig Maxim (MYDP)  
Will Ford (MYDP)  
Darlysha Ortega (MYDP)  
Michelle Martinez (MYDP)  
Kathleen Bitetti (OSA)  
Darcie Edwards (Brockton Public Schools)  
Michael Kilkelly

**Meeting Commenced:** 11:02 AM

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Ms. Polizzano 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 September Meeting:**

Ms. Polizzano held a formal vote on the approval of the previous Community Based Interventions meeting minutes. Alton Jones, Stacey Lynch, David Whitham, Susan Gill-Hickey, Thula Sibanda, Latoya Nicholas, Kimberly Lawrence, Brian Blakeslee, and Daniel Wolski, all voted to approve the minutes. Laura Miller and Rachel Wallack abstained. No one opposed.

The meeting minutes for September 22, 2025, were approved.

Ms. Polizzano reviewed the meeting agenda, which features a guest presentation from the Department of Youth Services (DYS) on the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP).

**OCA Announcements**

Ms. Polizzano shared information on the new MYDP Year 3 Impact Report, which the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) released earlier that day, including key data from year three of implementation and areas for improvement.

Ms. Threadgill then shared information on the Georgetown Youth Diversion Certificate Program. She shared who the participants from the Massachusetts cohort were and highlighted some of the emerging trends in diversion in other states. Ms. Threadgill also shared that the MYDP has a similar success rate as other states and is diverting more serious charges than many other states.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions. None were raised.

**DYS Presentation on the MYDP**

Ms. Polizzano introduced the presenters from the MYDP and welcomed Ms. Katie Perry-Lorentz (Senior Director of Strategic Innovation, DHS) to begin presenting.

Ms. Perry-Lorentz provided an overview of the presentation and welcomed Ms. Rose (MYDP Program Manager), Ms. Martinez (Essex County Diversion Program Director), and Mr. Ford (Barnstable County Diversion Program Coordinator) to introduce themselves.

Ms. Perry-Lorentz then reviewed the MYDP objectives, which include:

- Increase the number of youth diverted from the juvenile justice system
- Improve the quality and consistency of juvenile diversion programs
- Reduce racial, ethnic, and geographic disparities in the use of diversion
- Strengthen connections between justice-involved youth and their families with appropriate community-based interventions
- Increase ability to track and evaluate the use of diversion

Ms. Perry-Lorentz discussed the MYDP structure, explaining that the program is funded by DYS but operates at the county level. MYDP is in 10 of the 11 juvenile court serving counties. She shared that the MYDP works within a network of community providers. While the program is based around local services, she explained that it is funded by the Massachusetts Legislature.

Next, Ms. Perry Lorentz discussed the MYDP program model, including the following information:

- MYDP offers individualized services and support to every young person.
- Youth are screened in using the Youth Level of Services (YLS) tool, which helps coordinators determine what services are needed and how to get youth connected to them.
- Case managers develop a case plan with input from the referrer, the family, the youth, and the diversion coordinator.
- MYDP is able to accept any case that the referrer is authorized to send (judges have some restrictions on which cases they can divert).
- Diversion coordinators decide based on the screening tool how much time the youth will be in the program for and how to connect them with services. They have regular check-ins and focus on individualized skill development.
- Agencies that youth are connected to during diversion programming can continue to work with the youth after their time in diversion ends.

Ms. Perry-Lorentz then shared information on each step of the MYDP process, including:

- Referral
- Intake, which includes an interview with the young person and a review of any court referral documents
- A diversion agreement using a positive youth development framework to help youth grow skills to succeed
- Case management
- Successful case closure, which is measured by having made meaningful progress towards diversion goals and avoiding additional charges.

Ms. Rose then discussed the MYDP sites, explaining that the most recent impact report focuses on the first five counties that opened sites, as well as Bristol and Barnstable counties which were added in late 2024. She shared her excitement about the program's growth and emphasized that there are many potential youth that the program can serve.

Ms. Rose next reviewed the 2024 Data Overview, including the following information:

- There were 348 referrals (23% increase from 2023), 65% of them were for males, and over 50% were for person offenses.
- Referrals have grown each year
- Most referrals are from Worcester, with the second highest number coming from Essex.

- Unlike the formal juvenile justice system, the MYDP serves a high number of girls relatively to the overall population.
- Historically, judges are the main referrers to the MYDP.
- The MYDP is working hard to increase police referrals because they want to divert youth as early in the process as possible; this can be challenging because there are over 300 police departments across the state.
- One major objective of the MYDP is to reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and the MYDP team is actively working to increase equitable referrals for Black youth.
- The majority of MYDP cases are low level offenses; this is intentional so that they can reduce recidivism in those with less serious offense. However, as the program grows, the MYDP team is actively encouraging referrers to divert youth with more serious offenses and a higher risk of re-offending.
- The MYDP team is pleased with the 80% success rate especially considering the program has maintained a high success rate while the number of participants has grown.

Ms. Rose discussed the ways in which the MYDP has grown, including:

- JJEMS Conversion:
  - For the first few years of the program, MYDP program data has been captured using an Excel file. This year, DYS is in the process of incorporating MYDP data points into the agency’s case management and data reporting system (“JJEMS”). This has been a big project for the agency, and an extensive amount of work has been done to get this system up and running with the goal of streamlining information to reduce the work required of diversion coordinators.
- Three New Sites:
  - The MYDP team is excited about the program’s continued expansion into new counties in 2025, including Suffolk, Norfolk, and Berkshire Counties. Suffolk County, for instance, is the smallest county geographically but has a large population, meaning that there is potential to serve many youth in need of diversion in this area
- Attorney General’s Office (AGO) Youth Diversion Program:
  - The MYDP recently embarked in a partnership with AGO to address cyber bullying and sexting, expanding the population of youth that the MYDP can serve. Thus far through this partnership, the MYDP team has observed that youth with these charges have greatly benefited from diversion programming.

Ms. Perry-Lorentz then shared updates on tracking performance outcomes, which for now includes the percent of youth admitted on an overnight arrest, detained pretrial, or committed to DYS who previously participated in the MYDP. She explained that the number of youth at DYS who have participated in the MYDP is low.

Ms. Rose next shared some challenges facing the MYDP, including:

- Staff turnover:
  - Key staff, who were integral to the program’s design, development, and initial implementation, left the program and took with them important institutional knowledge.
- Racial equity:
  - The MYDP is having intentional conversations with referrers and is open to input from JJPAD Board members as well, to figure out how to improve diversion access for Black youth.
- Buy-in from referrers:
  - The MYDP is lacking buy-in from key referrers, such as district attorneys, some judges, and police departments. Staff are working to encourage conversations on this and moving slowly with some referrers.

Next, Ms. Martinez shared several success stories from her experience as a diversion coordinator in Essex County. Her first was that of a 14-year-old girl who was referred from school for assault and battery. Based on the intake process and assessments, Ms. Martinez established diversion requirements related to some behavioral health needs. Ms. Martinez explained that the girl was connected with therapeutic services to help work on emotional regulation, where she showed a lot of progress, and had her risk level decreased to “low” (from moderate) after three months in the program.

Ms. Martinez shared the story of an 18-year-old boy who was charged with receiving stolen property when he was 17. The intake screenings determined that he was low risk, and he scored high in the area of education needs. She explained that he dropped out of school after witnessing a shootout, and with the support of the MYDP, he completed a 6-week online GED program and earned a promotion at work.

Next, Mr. Ford shared several success stories from his experience as a diversion coordinator in Barnstable County. His first story was that of a 16-year-old girl who was referred by a judge for assault and battery; her risk area was recreation, so she was connected to a barber school and a boxing group which were both positive extracurricular activities to help fill her time. Mr. Ford explained that the MYDP addresses the needs of the entire family because sometimes youth behavior is a function of family challenges; this girl’s mother expressed her desire to complete her education and for her kids to do the same. Mr. Ford shared that the MYDP connected her to MassHire and helped her complete her GED.

Mr. Ford next shared the story of a 16-year-old girl charged with sending a bomb threat; she was low risk and was able to get connected with the correct services. He shared that she is now a coast guard cadet, which was her dream career, and was able to apply because she did not have a criminal record due to her participation in the MYDP.

Mr. Ford then shared the story of a boy stealing from the grocery store; the MYDP identified that his parents did not have employment and had little food at home. He explained that the family was connected to MassHire and to their local Family Resource Center (FRC) for nutrition support.

Ms. Polizzano thanks the presenters and welcomed questions.

One member asked for clarification on how police officers can refer youth to the MYDP. Ms. Rose shared that police officers can complete the referral form and refer youth directly to the program (either before or after an arrest). She added that police officers can also inform the Clerk Magistrate in their county that they want the youth to go through the diversion program. Ms. Perry-Lorentz added that one of the reasons that the MYDP likes working with police departments is because there is room for potential in expanding diversion at this stage. For example, about half of the youth held overnight for an arrest are released at their arraignment date. Ms. Perry-Lorentz mentioned it's likely some number of these youth could have been diverted by police at the initial encounter. Youth could avoid this often-traumatic situation through the police diversion and save the youth from that experience.

One member asked if police officers need to file a criminal complaint before diverting youth. Ms. Rose clarified that police officers can refer youth directly to the MYDP without filing a complaint.

Members discussed supporting one another in starting diversion practices in new towns and shared the importance of continuing the momentum of diversion spreading across the state.

One member asked whether or not the MYDP has had conversations with Clerk Magistrates around diversion, given their low referral rates. Ms. Rose shared that the MYDP has had conversations with the whole court and that there are some pockets of high clerk participation, particularly in Bristol and Suffolk County.

One member asked if a youth can be diverted for a violation of their probation to avoid a new commitment or picking up a new charge. Ms. Perry-Lorentz shared that currently MYDP is only available for youth pre-arraignment.

One member asked if there is a way to ensure there is training for Juvenile Court judges on the use of diversion, as well as judicial leadership oversight of its use. Ms. Rose shared that the MYDP is working on tracking with some of their court liaisons.

Ms. Threadgill expressed her gratitude for the work of Ms. Rose, Ms. Martinez, and Mr. Ford and the value they bring to the program.

Ms. Polizzano asked what barriers diversion coordinators are facing in their work right now. Ms. Martinez shared that mental health was a huge challenge at the program's inception because service providers did not have the capacity to address the volume of need of youth; when the Community Based Health Centers (CBHCs) launched that was a huge positive shift. Mr. Ford shared that it is challenging to get referrals from stakeholders other than judges.

Ms. Polizzano welcomed additional questions. None were raised.

### **Next Steps**

Ms. Threadgill shared that the Joint Committee on the Judiciary will be doing a presentation on diversion on November 5 and shared the hearing details in the meeting chat.

Ms. Polizzano shared that the next two CBI meetings will be cancelled, and the group will reconvene on the Dually-Involved Youth (DIY) project in the winter.

Ms. Polizzano asked members to check their emails for a poll for meeting availability for 2026 meetings.

### **Closing Comments**

Ms. Polizzano thanked the members for their participation and adjourned the meeting.

**Meeting adjourned:** 12:09 PM