

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Community Based Interventions Subcommittee
Thursday, September 15, 2022
1:00PM-2:30PM
Meeting held virtually

Subcommittee Members or Designees Present:

Amy Ponte (CAFL)
Karin Orr (DMH)
Thula Sibanda (DYS)
Susan Gill-Hickey (DMH)
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Brian Jenney (DPH)
Rachel Gwaltney (CLM)
Barbra Wilson (CLM)
Brian Blakeslee (CPSC)
Migdalia Nalls (CPCS)
Kimberly Lawrence (Probation)
Dawn Christie (Parent)
Rebecca Brink (DCF)

OCA Staff:

Melissa Threadgill
Kristi Polizzano
Alix Rivière
Jessica Seabrook

Other Attendees:

Daniele Rose (DYS)
Kathleen Bitetti (SAO)
Jillie Santos (CfJJ)
Krystyna Boisjolie (RFK Community Alliance)
Jennifer Hallisey (EHS)
Becky Harrington
Other Members of the public

Meeting Commenced: 1:02 PM

Welcome and Introductions:

Ms. Polizzano welcomed the attendees to the Community Based Interventions (CBI) Subcommittee virtual meeting. She then presented the agenda, explaining the group would review the draft CRA report after reviewing and voting on the July meeting minutes.

Review and Approval of Minutes from the July Meeting:

Ms. Polizzano held a formal vote on the approval of the previous Community Based

Interventions meeting minutes. Barbara Wilson, Migdalia Nalls, Leon Smith, Amy Ponte, Susan Gil-Hickey, Kimberly Lawrence, Karin Orr, Brian Blakeslee, Brian Jenney, and Thula Sibanda voted to approve the minutes. No one abstained or opposed.

The meeting minutes for July 21, 2022 were approved.

Review of Draft CRA Report:

Before sharing the draft report on her screen, Ms. Polizzano asked if there is broad feedback. Members expressed their liking of the report, that it's representative of the work of the subcommittee and what it has learned regarding the CRA system. Starting with the recommendation section on page 49, Ms. Polizzano explained that the group would go through each recommendation and pause for feedback, questions.

She first began discussing the introduction, which lays out initiatives in Massachusetts that the group anticipates will impact the CRA system, including the MassHealth behavioral health redesign, the *Act to Increase Access to Behavioral Health Care*, and increased resources to support behavioral health services in schools. Additionally, the introduction of the report discusses the need to establish a clear CRA system goal which is laid out in the report as: "The goal of Massachusetts' CRA system is to provide children and families with the necessary supports to be successful in their home, school and community with as little court intervention as possible." (p.50)

Next, Ms. Polizzano discussed the first recommendation of the report to expand the number and functions of Family Resource Centers (FRCs) across the state. She pointed out that Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CfJJ) had added language on increasing access to educational supports in FRCs. Members pointed out the need to also highlight workforce issues for FRCs. The group discussed the recommendation that "FRCs should identify gaps in programming availability for CRA Diversion cases and fill in where possible," specifically that the latter part of the sentence might require a change in statute and also might not be best suited for FRCs whose functions are less about service provision than referring families to the right providers. In terms of funding, members mentioned New York and Connecticut's strategies to shift funding from the courts to community-based services to ensure the success of their system reform.

Next, the group discussed the second recommendation regarding substantially increasing diversion of cases from court to FRCs by revising the CRA filing process. CfJJ had previously sent edits adding details on educational supports in the CRA process. Members expressed satisfaction with recommending changing the name of petitions to make them more need-oriented rather than descriptive of the youth's behaviors, especially when the latter often have to do with events/situations that are beyond the child's control (e.g., community violence). It was also noted that changing the name and process of a CRA petition would require changes in the related standing order. Members also discussed the fact that children involved in the CRA system are often at the courts at the same time as youth involved in the delinquency system. This can, in some cases, be a safety issue and members suggested adding language in this section to

prevent comingling—perhaps by recommending separate court sessions for CRAs. Additionally, the group discussed the need for FRC liaisons to be physically present at the court and, when possible, that they be provided a confidential office to meet with youth and caregivers to facilitate warm handoff. Finally, members pointed out that recommending that FRCs establish a certification process to ascertain that robust diversion efforts have been attempted by all parties involved would require careful consideration of rules of confidentiality and attorney/client privilege.

Next, the group discussed the third recommendation aimed at educating families and child-serving professionals about all options available for support. The group did not make any comments.

Next, Ms. Polizzano presented on the fourth recommendation to explicitly address sources of bias (both individual and systemic) that may be leading to disproportionate referrals to the CRA system of certain demographics of youth, including Black and Latino youth. Members of the subcommittee did not have any comments.

The group then moved on to the section that includes recommendations to increase the availability of school and community-based services that specifically meet the needs of youth currently in the CRA System. The group first discussed recommendation #5 to support community-based programs aimed at supporting youths' behavioral and mental health needs, as well as those that promote prosocial activities. No edits were made to this section.

The group then moved on to the sixth recommendation that EOHHS agencies collaborate to identify program models that better meet the needs of youth struggling in out-of-home placements. Members discussed the need for stronger language to recommend added funding to appropriately staff congregate care settings. Members added that this recommendation would benefit from clearer language on the state agencies who oversee these residential facilities, which include DCF as stated but also DPH, DMH, and EEC.

Moving on, the group examined the seventh recommendation to address truancy by promoting effective student engagement practices that address root causes of truancy, and better identify and support students in need of extra support. CfJJ discussed their recommendation to provide stronger language to require every school district to have truancy prevention strategies, including the early warning model, which is a best practice they could consider. Members reiterated the role lack of safety in the community can play in truancy and how truancy prevention initiatives could tackle this issue. The group discussed the MA school system and how much control the state has over local school districts and how language from previous legislative bills could be used for this section of the report.

The group then moved to the final section of the draft report regarding the need to study the implementation of these recommendations and discussed the eighth recommendation to increase data availability in combination with the ninth recommendation to monitor the implementation of policy changes. No edits were suggested.

Finally, the group mentioned the need to highlight that some of these recommendations might be more urgent than others, such as the recommendation to support and increase community-based programs that promote prosocial activities. Members suggested that this could be done by encouraging FRCs to “think outside the box” and refer youth/families to organizations that are well respected and utilized in the community.

Closing Comments:

Ms. Polizzano thanked the members for their participation and informed the group that the next meeting will take place on October 20, 2022.

Meeting adjourned: 2:18 PM