



JJPOC Meeting Minutes

October 15th, 2020

2:00 PM

Zoom Conference Call

Attendance:

Rep. Toni Walker
Sarah Eagan
Stacy Schulman
Gary Roberge
Christine Rappillo
Desi Nesmith
Hector Glynn
Fran Carino
Marilyn Moore
Derrick Molden

Judge Bernadette Conway
Vanessa Dorantes
Erica Bromley
Janeen Reid
Jennifer Abbatemarco
Macklin Roman
Veron Beaulieu
Trina Sexton
Gary Winfield
Dr. Derrick Gordon

Judge Patrick Carroll
Joshua Bernegger
Abby Anderson
Angel Quiros
Martha Stone
Brenetta Henry
Tais Ericson
Astread Ferron-Poole
Lisa Sementilli

TYJI Staff:

William Carbone
Erika Nowakowski
Susan Cusano
Kelly Orts
Donna Pfrommer
Danielle Cooper

Representative Toni Walker called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Rep. Walker moved a motion to accept the minutes of September 17, 2020.

An announcement was made regarding Ms. Eleanor Michael's new employment opportunity and resignation from OPM. The JJPOC chairs, as well as many JJPOC members, thanked Eleanor for her service and dedication to this work.

Presentation on PA 19-187 Report: Use of Chemical Agents and Prone Restraints by the Department of Corrections

Warden Derrick Molden reported the use of chemical agents and prone restraints in their facilities. Chemical agents and prone restraints are used as a last resort. DOC understands that they are working with a specialized population and never use these two methods as a first option. Chemical agents and prone restraints are used prior to physical apprehension as they want to avoid physical/hands-on intervention with youth. Incidents of prone restraints, specifically, typically involve a mental health situation.

Overall, chemical agents and prone restraints have seen a decrease in use. DOC presented on the number of incidents, ages, and racial breakdown of using these two methods. DOC made it a point to acknowledge that when using chemical agents, the officer using the agent is exposed to it as well. Therefore, they experience the effects of it as well which is meant to deter officers from using these agents.

Presentation on PA 19-187 Report: Use of Chemical Agents and Prone Restraints by the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division

Executive Director Gary Roberge presented on the use of prone restraints in their facilities. A bar graph was displayed during this presentation that revealed the following: in January there were 15 incidences, February-15, March-11, April-6, May-6, June-8 July-9, August- 1, September-1. 90% of kids are put face down because they were caught in a fight. None of these incidents resulted in serious injury or ended up needing to go to the Emergency Room. All events are reviewed by shift managers and leadership. CSSD pointed out that 81.94% (50 cases) dealt with pre-dispositional youth, which means they recently entered the facility.

There was a Q&A session after the presentation. Concerns were brought up about the dangerous effects of chemical agents on youth. Science supports this claim that chemical agents are detrimental to children's health and therefore we should stop using chemical agents all together. Another topic of concern was how Connecticut can eliminate the use of force in youth facilities. DOC recommended the improved training and understanding of the youth population. Knowing how to deal with the specialized population can help manage them better. The overall goal is to minimize and/or eliminate the use of force and chemical agents. There was also a discussion on the racial and ethnic disparities of chemical agents and prone restraints. DOC responded saying that youth of color make up the majority of the population, but stressed the importance of ending racial discrimination.

Presentation on 911 Calls to Schools in Waterbury, CT by The Office of the Child Advocate

Sarah Eagan presented on the investigation of school calls to law enforcement in Waterbury Public Schools. She detailed the study by discussing the complaints received regarding how young children with disabilities are dealt with and the police responses. OCA provided individual advocacy support to children and families. The methodology of the investigation was to review data from District, CHDI, SDE, DCF, Waterbury Police, the examination of national reports, research regarding police first response in mental health crises, and reviewing interviews with state and local agencies and community providers. The OCA investigation found that from September 2018 through March 2019 approximately 200 calls to police from Waterbury K-5 and Pre-K through Grade 8 schools were a result of a child's behavior. In terms of race/ethnicity data, the police reports were not comprehensive however, where race was identified, black students were disproportionately represented in the number of students who were the subject of the call and number of arrests.

Police call types were most often about mental illness, medical assistance or a suicide attempt. The age of subjects ranged from 4-10 with the 8-10 range yielding the highest number of reports. It was found that many young children act out of frustration and despair at school. The most frequent calls were ones that involved children with disabilities. Lastly, 18% of police calls from the PreK- Grade 8 schools resulted in a student arrest. Charges included Third Degree Assault, Breach of Peace, Disorderly Conduct, Threatening, Harassment, Trespass, Criminal Mischief, Reckless Endangerment, and Sexual Assault 4th.

The schools with the highest number of police calls also had some of the highest numbers of student suspensions. Two schools have special education programs and these two schools had some of the highest numbers of police calls and suspensions combined. There were over 1300 school suspensions for the 20 schools examined. The key takeaways from the OCA investigation include trauma exposure and unmet learning and special education needs. Investment in prevention services and wrap-around supports, and a review of the costs associated with reliance on police, ambulances and emergency departments versus cost of supports for children, parents, and teachers were encouraged.

Furthermore, the OCA provided recommendations on how to improve the system. An education/special education audit should be conducted to determine what kind of learning supports there are for teachers and students. There should be a transparent and independent examination of embedded special education and alternative programs. We should also task a legislative committee or entity with examining the efficacy of prevention services, school-based reforms and public-private partnerships that support high need children and their families. This entity should also provide recommendations for interagency funding to scale up what works. In addition, we should consider raising the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 12. There should also be a prohibition on school suspension in elementary school and invest in an SDE compliance staff. Lastly, the State Board of Education should develop an equity dashboard.

There was a Q&A session following this presentation. Although some recommendations are specific to Waterbury, many other recommendations can be applied across the state because the examples in Waterbury are not unique.

Next meeting: November 19th, 2020

Meeting adjourned at 3:44pm.

*Audio and/or video of the meeting can be found on: <https://www.ct-n.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=17790>