



JJPOC Meeting Minutes

November 19th, 2020

2:00 PM

Zoom Conference Call

Attendance:

Rep. Toni Walker
Deputy Sec. Kosta Diamantis
Marc Pelka
Sarah Eagan
Sen. Gary Winfield
Christine Quaranta
Erica Bromley
Macklin Roman
Sen. Marilyn Moore
Janeen Reid

Hector Glynn
Sen. George Logan
Martha Stone
Sen. Catherine Osten
Brenetta Henry
Rep. Robyn Porter
Judge Patrick Carroll
Judge Bernadette Conway
Gary Roberge
Tais Ericson

Christine Rاپillo
Francis Carino
Comm. Vanessa Dorantes
Comm. Angel Quiros
John Holland
Stacy Schulman
Chief Joshua Bernegger
Veron Beaulieu
Natasha Pierre
Lisa Sementilli

TYJI Staff:

William Carbone
Erika Nowakowski
Susan Cusano
Kelly Orts
Amanda Pappas

Representative Toni Walker called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Deputy Secretary Diamantis gave welcoming remarks as well. Rep. Walker moved a motion to accept the minutes of October 15, 2020. The motion to accept the minutes was moved, seconded and passed unanimously.

Presentation on Youth Homelessness in CT Project

Statistics and studies were presented on homelessness by Partnerships for Strong Communities, Center for Children’s Advocacy, and Court Support Services Judicial Branch. Youth homelessness is highly associated with arrests. Drug abuse, mental health issues and lack of access to services are highly associated with criminal activity. The greater the disconnect from home, the more likely youth will engage in criminal behavior. In 2018, about 5,000 youth under the age of 25 were said to be homeless and are disproportionately youth of color. There are also significant safety concerns for this population. There are high rates of youth who have reported being in a situation that encouraged or provoked sexual activity in exchange for drugs, money, etc.

In recent years there has been a shift in the needs of minors. The specific needs are to be addressed through a survey that tracks and responds to homelessness. The goal of this survey is to ensure that individuals are not criminalized for being homeless. Data during transition ages and homelessness can be used to look at trends and build out our network of services. The outcome of the CSSD Housing Survey is to obtain stable housing (a major factor in reducing recidivism and improving quality of life). Data will be used to inform CSSD policy and procedures and continue effective services. Key takeaways of the survey were an overall understanding of homelessness; coordination between the homeless system and juvenile/ criminal justice systems to reduce duplication; explore housing options to avoid having individuals enter the system; and track this information to see if the efforts are paying off. In terms of next steps, CT was chosen to engage in a Collaboration for Change Project; a statewide minor homelessness taskforce was launched to develop state-wide recommendations for minor homelessness;

and developing a coordinated approach to ending youth homelessness coming out of the justice system. Currently there is a data gap surrounding youth homelessness so the creation of a “by name” list of youth who are homeless will be extremely helpful too.

There was a Q&A session after the presentation. Concerns were brought up about whether the data collected would be able to track ethnicity. In order to track ethnicity additional mechanisms would be needed to track this, but it is possible. Data will be released in ideally a year. It'll take about a year to be able to start drawing conclusions from the data. A suggestion was made about having data prior to a year so that youth do not get lost or left out. Another concern mentioned was whether the youth homelessness providers were full. Most youth do not want to stay in an unfamiliar case, so bed utilization is low.

Presentation on Updated Report on Confinement for Youth Age 15-21 in Department of Corrections from Office of the Child Advocate

This presentation focused on the OCA Investigative Report regarding conditions for incarcerated youth (MYI & York) that is completed every two years. A brief recap of the first report revealed that children of color were adversely confined and incarcerated. In addition, the adult prison system model does not meet the standards for youth needs. In terms of the 2020 report, it was recommended that staff need training to work with youth, the entire facility should be similar to the TRUE and WORTH units, and resources should be increased. Photos within the facilities were provided in this presentation.

There has been a lot of concerns about MYI's infrastructure. For example, some commissioners acknowledge that it's an outdated facility, the “door” should be taken off for many youth so that they are not locked in. The majority of boys had lived in conditions of neglect and half of the boys' families had been investigated 4 or more times due to child abuse and neglect. The majority of boys had a parent (typically the father) who has also been incarcerated. All of the girls lived in families that had extensive DCF concerns of child abuse and neglect as well.

Mental health issues are significant for these incarcerated youth. All youth, boys and girls, were classified as needing extensive mental health treatment. In terms of education, all educators stated that resources are a barrier to providing the level of education needed for youth at MYI. In both facilities, most youth do not come in contact with their family while in the facility. Pepper spray and chemical agent utilization have shown to have a negative impact on youth. In response to COVID-19, boys at MYI spent 18-22.5 hours in a cell per day and all youth were given two free phone calls. There were education packages on COVID-19 given to youth in both facilities as well.

Lastly, recommendations were presented. The first recommendation is for Connecticut to end placement of minor youth in adult prison system. The second recommendation is to ban chemical agents. The third recommendation is for legislation to limit cell confinement. Lastly, DOC and SDE should report to JJPOC. Sentiments from the DOC Commissioner were provided about improving facilities for youth and addressing their needs. He explained some of the challenges to the facilities, including the unprecedented health crisis, and acknowledges room for improvement moving forward. DOC values OCA and their recommendations and looks forward to continue working together. Q&A session will resume at the December meeting.

Next meeting: December 17, 2020

Meeting adjourned at: 3:42pm

*Audio and/or video of the meeting can be found on:

https://unehaven.zoom.us/rec/share/MK0Zr2LO_jgHzRmVXD3PAwQ9mcFMVEeOW110VvnKlvw0Mq1VVbN9FLMWObupA5BF.rJmqQFdvwY3xMzby Passcode: ^Xf+9rmg