



## Understanding the 2025 Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee Recommendations for Legislation

### Background

Between December 2024 and January 2025, the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC) passed recommendations from five workgroups – some meant to move forward for legislative consideration. The recommendations cover a wide range of issues facing young people at risk of or already involved with the juvenile justice system in Connecticut, including diversion, education, and re-entry. These recommendations originated from workgroups within the JJPOC who spent the past year, and some multiple years, on developing and researching effective strategies to adequately respond to the challenges and issues that both youth and state and municipal entities have raised to the Committee.

### Diversion Recommendations

Youth diversion redirects low risk youth from formal judicial proceedings to support services that address the young person's specific needs, promote positive behavioral changes, and are a more cost-effective policy compared to traditional punitive measures. In Connecticut, Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) offer a wide range of services, including crisis intervention, case management, and family counseling to young people referred to by police or schools. YSBs, then, divert these young people away from the judicial system. Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs) review the cases involving delinquent acts committed by young people and recommend diversion options based on their unique needs.

In Connecticut, there are approximately 34 municipalities that do not currently have a pathway to divert young people, meaning that there are approximately 34 municipalities that immediately direct such young people to the judicial system. Therefore, the Diversion Workgroup has worked closely with the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POSTC), the Department of Emergency Services and Public Pro-

tection (DESPP), and law enforcement from a variety of municipalities to increase access to the diversion system statewide.

The Diversion recommendations include The Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POSTC) working in partnership with the JJPOC Co-Chairs, their designees, and Community Expertise Workgroup (CEW) representatives to develop a statewide youth diversion policy and propose a youth diversion training curriculum for consideration as a part of its accreditation requirements for local law enforcement. To support the implementation of this, it is proposed that all municipalities shall have or have access to a diversion mechanism, and all municipalities and/or municipal agents that are responsible for operating a Youth Diversion Team/Juvenile Review Board should report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) annually regarding the young people that are being diverted.

### **Community Expertise Workgroup (CEW) Recommendation**

As part of the JJPOC, the Community Expertise Workgroup (CEW) is tasked with bridging the gap between impacted young people and policymakers through direct and indirect representation. By incorporating young people and community members, a new perspective in examining the operation of the JJPOC is offered, which better advances and enhances the work of the committee.

It is recommended that the Community Expertise Workgroup be responsible for appointing the vacant JJPOC member seats for two children, youths or young adults under twenty-six years of age with lived experience in the juvenile justice system.

### **Education Recommendations**

A student is considered chronically absent if their total number of absences at any point in the school year is equal to or greater than 10%. Chronic absenteeism continues to be a significant issue across all school districts in Connecticut, with a current rate of 17.4%. Dalio Education's October 2023 report "Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis" highlights that approximately 119,000 young people aged between 14-26 in Connecticut are at risk of becoming disconnected from school and/or work. Disconnection, in this sense, refers to young people who are not involved in education, employment, or training. Additionally, chronic absenteeism in New Haven schools increased from 21.1% to 37.5% of the school population and 27.9% to 35.2% in Hartford between 2019-2020. New Haven public schools faced a chronic absenteeism rate of 59.9% during the 2021-2022 academic year, which was highest in the state and considered "crisis level," according to the New Haven Register (2024). Statewide, 24% of Connecticut's youth were chronically absent. Although this number has decreased to 18.7% during the 2023-2024 academic school year, this is still a significant portion of the population. Therefore, additional measures need to be taken to combat chronic absenteeism and ensure that young people do not become disconnected.

The Education Workgroup recommends that attendance review teams report annually to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) on their approach and outcomes and CSDE report on its use and efficacy of chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plans by school district. The Education Workgroup would collaborate with CSDE to identify school district metrics that shall be reported to CSDE.

### **Gender Responsiveness Recommendations**

Youth that are currently residing in out-of-home placements have a legal right under state and federal law to appropriate care and treatment, yet concerns have been raised regarding current out-of-home placement settings in Connecticut failing to address these needs. Such concerns involve runaway incidents, calls to first responders, and a cyclical process of youth involvement in temporary out-of-home placements, hospital visits, and detention. At the forefront of these issues are the STTAR homes, whose young people are at high risk of becoming involved in the legal system or are already involved.

Therefore, there is a necessity to track the efficacy of the investment and quality for the new STTAR homes and further understanding of the acute intersection of youth victimization and future legal involve-

ment.

The recommendations put forth for legislative consideration by the JJPOC regarding gender responsiveness ask the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to report to the JJPOC on the implementation of the new STTAR Plan that was released in March 2024. This report should include the currently available metrics and should consider developing additional metrics. It also asks DCF to report to the JJPOC on how many calls it receives of possible and/or suspected child sexual abuse, including reports of abuse and neglect in out-of-home care settings; how many of those are substantiated; how many calls it receives of possible and/or suspected child sexual abuse are referred to regional multidisciplinary teams (MDTs); and any gaps in access to or capacity of the MDT system to meet the need.

### **Incarceration Recommendations**

A Reentry Success Plan was the product of the Reentry Subgroup, Incarceration Workgroup's two year endeavor with 7 state agencies, Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division, directly impacted youth and their families, legislators, and several nonprofits. In addition to this plan, which highlights a quality assurance framework and information concerning federal and state funding sources to support the implementation of the comprehensive reentry model, the JJPOC pushes for annual reporting regarding the previously highlighted reentry outcomes of young people, making the passage of these recommendations imperative.

The Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (JBCSSD) and the Department of Corrections (DOC) are to report on the prevalence of the listed items, which are the transportation assistance for a young person's family for visitation; flex funds to support families in need for up to six (6) months following a young person's return home; and flex funds for a young person and their family for the ability to relocate if needed for safety reasons.

Additionally, the families should be asked about their need for these services and an official record of the need and utilization should be submitted, which will allow for the identification of barriers, considerations, and potential opportunities. Finally, JBCSSD and DOC may also identify, or offer suggestions of their own, for potential funding reallocations to support the items listed. They should identify how many youth leave their facilities on supervision and end of sentence, and any appropriate or necessary partnership to deliver the provision of these services.

JBCSSD and DOC will be asked to submit to the JJPOC a list of vocational/employment programming that they have and the limitations present to connecting youth to opportunities in the community. An explanation on the process of such connection should be provided as well. Additionally, JBCSSD and DOC should identify the individual at each facility who is responsible for knowing the young people who are in job related activities, their release date, and how many young people released have an employer and/or are connected to a vocational program. Finally, JBCSSD and DOC should outline strategies and opportunities to address current limitations or inefficiencies in connecting young people to employment, testing, and opportunities prior to release and during their time in the facility.

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The Tow Youth Justice Institute is a university, state and private partnership established to lead the way in juvenile justice reform through collaborative planning, training, research and advocacy.

Please visit our website at [towyouth.newhaven.edu](http://towyouth.newhaven.edu) and follow us on social media [@towyouth](https://twitter.com/towyouth) or call 203-932-7361 with questions or for more information.



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