

GENDER RESPONSIVE PANEL

APR. 10, 2026

10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Legislative Office Building

Watch Live on our YouTube Channel.



GENDER RESPONSIVE PANEL

Overview

The panel will focus on a number of key concepts that are facing gender responsive efforts and system-involved girls. Panelists will share their expertise on the national state of gender responsiveness, evidence-based best practices, identification and assessment, treatment and behavioral health programs, relationships and family, safety and stability, system sustainability, and successful reentry efforts.

Defining “Gender Responsive” and its Practices

Gender responsiveness is best defined as a multidimensional, trauma informed approach that considers the unique pathways girls take when entering systems and addresses their individual needs through socially and culturally competent interventions. In 1998, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) released a seminal report detailing reforms across 25 states. This report outlined five essential guidelines: (1) programs should be all-female whenever possible; (2) girls should be treated in the least restrictive environment; (3) programs should be located close to home to maintain family relationships; (4) programming should be consistent with female development and emphasize the roles of relationships between staff and girls; and (5) programs must address the unique needs of parenting and pregnant teens.

Core Principles of Best Practice

Literature has identified five core principles of gender-responsive programming: cultural responsiveness, relationships, safety, a skills- and strengths-based approach, and a holistic approach. Cultural responsiveness aims to address risks based on a girl’s identified culture, including race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Relationship models focus on the understanding that healthy female development relies on mature, prosocial connections. Addressing safety requires trauma-informed care and an awareness of socially based power differences. A skills-based and strengths-based approach relies on increased engagement and confidence building, while a holistic approach considers the “whole girl,” supporting her through various options across a continuum of care—from arrest and sentencing to residential stay and parole.

Agenda

Welcome

Representative Toni Walker and Undersecretary Daniel Karpowitz, JJPOC Co-Chairs

Administrative Updates

Erika Nowakowski, TYJI Executive Director

Setting the Stage

*Attorney Sharmese Walcott and Judge Tammy Nguyen-O'Dowd,
Incarceration Workgroup Co-Chairs*

2025 Gender Responsive Connecticut Landscape Analysis Report Overview

Ryan Connick, TYJI

Gender Responsive Panel

Gender Responsive Experts

Question and Answer (Q& A)

Closing Remarks

Erika Nowakowski, TYJI Executive Director



GENDER RESPONSIVE PANEL



Dr. Stephanie Covington

Dr. Stephanie S. Covington is an internationally recognized clinician, author, organizational consultant, and lecturer. She is a pioneer in the fields of addiction, trauma, and recovery. She has developed an innovative, gender-responsive, and trauma-informed approach that results in effective services in public, private, and institutional settings. Her presentations, staff-development seminars, and technical assistance focus on systems change and the development of caring, compassionate, and empowering therapeutic environments. They provide professionals an opportunity to learn new skills for dealing with personal, institutional, and societal changes and are always in demand, both nationally and internationally. She has provided technical support to Connecticut to improve gender responsive services throughout the state, including assisting in creating a trauma informed system. She continues to consult with the Connecticut Women's Consortium.



Dr. Emily Salisbury

Dr. Emily Salisbury is an Associate Professor of Social Work and the Director of the Utah Criminal Justice Center at the University of Utah. She is trained as an applied criminologist. Her research focuses on the rehabilitation, decarceration and social reintegration of women in the criminal justice system, impacting the lives of more than 50,000 women. She serves as a Commissioner for the Council on Criminal Justice's Women's Justice Commission. She is the co-creator and Research Director of the Women's Risk Needs Assessment (WRNA), the only peer-reviewed, validated risk and strengths instrument in the public domain designed specifically for justice-involved women. Connecticut has since implemented the WRNA tool in the adult criminal justice system.



Camila Tougas

Camila Tougas is the Lead Juvenile Probation Officer for the Gender Responsive Unit of the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (JB-CSSD). Here she serves a supportive role to support the Gender Responsive Unit through her role as the Juvenile Probation Officer Training Academy Coordinator. As part of the Gender Responsive Unit, she assists the unit in addressing the specialized needs of girls, such as the effects of trauma, human trafficking, special education advocacy, family mediation and the facilitation of girl's group meetings. As a previous in-field Juvenile Probation Officer, she has experience working directly with justice involved youth and supporting them and their families to target risk areas through a case plan.



Christina Villatoro

Christina Villatoro is a Youth Residential Area Director for Community Solutions Inc. (CSI). She has previously worked as the Program Director for a transitional, independent living facility for adolescent females in the care of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. She is a certified trainer in Dr. Stephanie Covington's Voices curriculum. In addition, she is a certified trainer for the TIER (Trauma Informed Effective Reinforcement) Model – a trauma-informed, behavioral- motivation system that provides a strategic approach to assist women and adolescent girls and boys to develop cognitive, emotional, and behavioral awareness and which supports the development of positive, safe, and pro-social behaviors. She also provides quality assurance and technical assistance to programs to ensure model fidelity.

Building on Connecticut's history of leadership in gender-responsive reform, this report identifies current opportunities to enhance service implementation and system sustainability. We invite you to learn from the latest findings and data to better understand the evolving needs of system-involved girls.

Scan the QR code below to download the full 2025 Gender Responsive Connecticut Landscape report.



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