



Advisory Council on Juvenile Services

Meeting Minutes

Friday, April 14, 2023 @ 10:00 a.m.

2515 South Congress Ave, Austin, Texas 78704

Advisory Council Members present:

Lynn Hadnot, Council Chair, Melanie Ramsey, Council Vice-Chair, Marc Bittner, Shanna Floyd, Homer Flores, Karina Browning, Shandra Carter, Lou Serrano, Homer Flores, Ed Cockrell, Rocky Hensarling

Advisory Council Members not present: Judge Natalia Oakes, Judge Mark Allen

TJJD Staff in attendance:

Amy Miller, Sean Grove, Scott Friedman, Amanda Britton, Ashley Kintzer, Ryan Bristow, Mark Williams, Ronnie Solano, Travis County Chief Cory Burgess, Cameron Taylor

Other attendees:

Jennifer Sims, Megan Hamilton, Yesenia Rodriguez

Call to Order/Introductions:

The meeting began at 10:00 a.m. with Lynn Hadnot introducing himself and taking roll call of the Council members.

Approval of Minutes: December 16, 2022 Meeting

Ed Cockrell made a motion to approve the minutes. Mark Bittner, seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Texas Juvenile Justice Department Updates:

Shandra Carter, Executive Director of TJJD reported executive leadership of TJJD having recent meetings with new leadership of DFPS. The meetings between the agencies included DFPS Commissioner Stephanie Muth who began as Commissioner in January and Deputy Commissioner for DFPS Jennifer Sims who was in attendance for the advisory council meeting. Director Carter reported discussions were fruitful and included the airing of shared frustrations for both systems, strained resources, and the importance of moving forward in consultation with field stakeholders who are ultimately solution-focused. Director Carter stated similar discussions to be forthcoming with HHSC also.

Jennifer Sims, Deputy Commissioner of DFPS extended regrets on behalf of Commissioner Ruth who wanted to attend the council meeting but was called to the capitol for business. Deputy Commissioner Sims provided the council with her background, including having previously served as Deputy Commissioner with DFPS in years past under previous Commissioner Carey Cokerell who brought a juvenile probation perspective to the agency at the time. Mrs. Sims affirmed the productive discussion with TJJD and acknowledged current challenges with DFPS including a shortage of placement capacity (places to put kids) and an increased acuity level for kids in need of DFPS placement which makes finding viable placements even more challenging. Kids with histories of aggression and acute mental health needs are extremely hard to place. Commissioner Sims reported approximately 80 kids in the DFPS system are sleeping in hotel rooms each night on average and while the agency was working hard to move things forward, there are no short-term solutions currently or foreseeable. The challenges have resulted in difficult conversations with probation departments. Commissioner Sims explained recent law changes have made it more difficult for DFPS to remove kids. Immediate action items of the agency is to work toward addressing these additional hurdles and steps before removal, and to work toward expanding placement capacity. Commissioner Sims spoke to the intention and importance of DFPS to work closely with the advisory council to ensure good communication and partnership across the state. Steps to this end include DFPS regional investigators reaching out to the probation field to establish strong connections to move us forward. Advisory council comments included concerns with ensuring new DFPS staff are adequately trained and to consider having new staff partner with local probation departments to learn how probation works and to improve DFPS culture for retention. A joint training with DFPS and probation was discussed to help both agencies to expand the general knowledge for both agencies. This training can be offered via a webinar and everyone expressed support regarding this being an impactful endeavor to execute. Lastly, Commissioner Sims stated community-based care will continue to expand. This service is where the agency is moving and will be initiated when a child is actually in DFPS conservatorship. This will be managed by a single-source continuum contractor. Investigations will continue to be under DFPS. This will be good because the contractor is community-based and charged with building out community-based services and resources. TJJD Director Carter expressed concerns regarding re-entry for youth as it relates to home approval for kids returning to the community for state institutions.

TJJD Chief of Staff Sean Grove provided a legislative update. Chapter 55 rewrite by all accounts appears to be in good shape. HB 16 is still waiting to be debated on the house floor. TJJD provided information as requested to the legislature. Primary concern is the bill pulling resources away from the established regional task force which is charged with the same work. Other legislation of note include a bill which mandates a timeline for committed youth to be picked up from county facilities within 45 days. If youth are not accepted within the timeline, the county holding the child would receive reimbursement for the detention. There are multiple bills with different time limits. Chief Grove provided an update on the waitlist and advised the current timetable continues to improve and the current projection is to have the entire waitlist absorbed by the end of this year. At this point, no youth on the list will have been waiting more than 85 days which is an improvement. The list has decreased from 165 in July of 2022 and is now

around 100. The appropriations for increased salary support will increase the state's ability to recruit and eliminate the waitlist. Sean advised the state agency receiving verbal support from the legislature which would include unprecedented financial investment potentially. The fact the field and state agency was working together closely is considered to be a strong factor influencing this legislative support. TJJJ plans to be under a limited-scope sunset review next cycle. Representative Talarico's bill looks to dissolve TJJJ and create a new agency under HHSC. This model has been executed in other states. Several Chiefs provided testimony in opposition of the bill which was impactful. Raise-The-Age bills are not likely to move forward this session. A committee substitute bill was issued for a bill which would require detention hearings to be held for detained youth every two (2) days. Chief Homer Flores reported Chiefs in the south region were able to have a direct communication with author of the bill to express concerns.

Chief Hadnot articulated repeated inquiries from the field regarding counties with facilities not currently receiving reimbursement for detention costs when holding their own youth who have been lawfully committed to TJJJ while other departments are. Chief Grove reported this was included in TJJJ exceptional items request and feedback expressed from the legislature was extremely positive. Chief Hadnot expressed appreciation for the hard work and effort devoted to reducing the waitlist and voiced concerns received from the field to ensure having a waitlist becoming the new norm. Director Carter advised the state agency threshold for taking kids from the waitlist continues to be 150%. The agency simply cannot go beyond this threshold.

Lou Serrano, Deputy Executive Director for Probation, Parole, and Community Services reported the entire parole division will be moving to Austin in May. The state agency recently decided to close the Willoughby House in Tarrant County which was housing a small number of youth. Amy Miller, Director of Probation Services reported several excited collaboration with the field. Facility Administrator virtual meetings continue in order to strength facility operations. There will be a standing agenda item moving forward which will include facility inspections to allow the field and express concerns and ask questions regarding monitoring. This will establish a continuous feedback loop between the field and state agency. There is a back-to-basics training in the works for juvenile facility staff which will go beyond hard skills but include other supportive techniques to improve culture and skills needed to be successful and comfortable executing the duties of a juvenile supervision officer today. Director Miller advised additional TBRI training opportunities will be made available through TBRI Justice Connection Network. Regionalization continues to be successful with many applications being submitted and approved. Ashley Kintzer, Manager of Regionalization and County Grants continues to have communications to evaluate and answer questions with juvenile probation departments regarding interest in developing a regional post-adjudication program. The state has had conversation with ten (10) departments at this point. Grant contracts and funding information is being finalized and the team is optimistic the work will be completed in time for submission and review to the TJJJ Board of Directors this summer. JJAEP will holding their first in-person conference since before the pandemic on June 27-30 in Williamson County. At this time, the state agency has no current youth placed in Title-4E placements. The state agency also continues to support community-based efforts with federal funding as well. The possibility for

developing a more substantive training for juvenile probation officers was also suggested. This training should focus on more real-world skills needed for executing duties in the field. Upcoming conferences include JJAT which will occur in Waco on next week and the Post-Legislative Conference in August which will be held in August. The Correctional Management Institute (CMIT) announced its New Chiefs Development Training and it will occur January 29 – February 2, 2024.

Sunset Review Update & Discussion:

Chief Sean Grove advised SB 1727 is the governing bill and it continues to see legislative movement. The bill has received legislative support from members. There have been a few changes due to rules governing the house but nothing negatively impactful. TJJD continues to receive media inquiries but are often limited in responding due to questions being youth specific. TJJD continues its focus on educating all stakeholders with facts wherein youth confidentiality is not compromised. Chief Grove advised the Sunset Bill is scheduled to move the Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee (JJFI) next week.

TDFPS Update:

Rocky Hensarling, DFPS, CPS Director of Policy and Program introduced himself formally to the advisory council and provided some background information regarding his career and experience with the agency. Mr. Hensarling reported his current role with the agency includes oversight of kinship services and Permanency Division, and family-based services. Additionally, Mr. Hensarling reported he would be also taking a leadership role in transitional living and adoption services. An agency realignment update was provided for the council. Mr. Hensarling spoke to his commitment to collaboration and information sharing as he begins his role on the council. The alternative response initiative continues to be expanded as an intervention tool across the state of Texas.

Sub Committee Report:

- **Long Range Strategic Planning Committee: Fiscal Review of State-Cost Savings**
The Long Range Strategic Planning Subcommittee meet on April 6, 2023. Cost-savings reallocation strategies were discussed with Amy Miller, Director of Probation Service provided the subcommittee a report. Ideas for collaboration and strengthening a more targeted use of the funding was discussed. The meeting also included brainstorming approaches for the use of cost-saving funding specifically for community-based initiatives as well. The next meeting is to be scheduled as needed as Director Miller will be taking subcommittee recommendations and thoughts back the state agency.
- **Chapter 55 Committee: Public Policy Update**
The Chapter 55 Bill has received tremendous support from the legislature. Advisory council members expressed the strong methodology of how this bill was crafted with stakeholders coming together from across the state of Texas to craft the legislation in a collaborative effort, including members of the legislature. Advisory council discussed leveraging this same model of collaboration to address a raise-the-age bill for next legislative session. The importance of including advocacy groups who support this was discussed and the council agreed having all stakeholder input would be important.

- **Parole Services Committee: Contract-Parole Status and Field Assessment**

The Parole Service Subcommittee met on April 6, 2023. Discussion included what is working well with contract-parole services and what are hurdles and challenges to more departments getting involved in contract parole services. Challenges expressed at the local level includes the minimal funding provided, different accountability structures for probation and parole youth, and parole being a different program than probation. Because parole supervision and governing rules are different from probation, parole supervision is thought to potentially need an officer who is exclusively dedicated to parole supervision. In response to questions presented by council members, Lou Serrano advised council members once a child is committed to state custody, previous parental orders are not able to be enforced.

Old Business:

No old business was discussed.

New Business:

Chief Hadnot advised council members of a request for the council to review OIG investigative processes for Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (ANE). The inquiry is pursuant to HRC: 203.008 and being sought to provide the Texas Juvenile Justice Board recommendations for revision consideration. Director Lou Serrano provided council members with background information regarding the impetus of inquiry. The subcommittee will include Chief's with relevant experience, TJJD stakeholders, and OIG. The group will explore how the current process is governed, questions surrounding definitions, timelines, roles, and the appeals process for officers and departments in the field. Motion to develop and subcommittee workgroup my Chief Ed Cockrell. Second made by Chief Melanie Ramsey. Motion passed.

Advisory Council Member Updates and Announcements:

Subcommittee chair designations were discussed by the council. Chief Melanie Ramsey was nominated and voted to serve as subcommittee chair for the Long Range Strategic Planning subcommittee. Chief Ed Cockrell was nominated and voted to chair the Contract Parole Services subcommittee. Chief Shanna Floyd also moved for the council to move forward with creating a subcommittee to address raise-the-age legislation. Motion received a second and was adopted unanimously.

Chief of Staff Sean Grove advised the council Mr. Cameron Taylor is now serving as Senior Strategic Advisor for Director Carter moving forward. In this capacity, Mr. Taylor would be leading on strategic planning. TJJD Director Carter also advised Chief Sean Grove would be promoted to Deputy Executive Director as of June 1, 2023.

Public Comment:

There were no public comments rendered.

Next Meeting:

The council will meet virtually on Teams on Friday, June 16, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

Meeting Adjourn – at 12:15: pm. Edward Cockrell. Second Homer Flores.