



Advisory Council on Juvenile Services

Meeting Minutes

Friday, October 27, 2023 @ 10:00 a.m.

2515 South Congress Ave, Austin, Texas 78704

Advisory Council Members present:

Chairman Lynn Hadnot, Vice Chair Melanie Ramsey, Ed Cockrell, Shandra Carter, Lou Serrano, Homer Flores, Karina Browning, Judge Teana Watson, Lindsey Van Buskirk,

Advisory Council Members not present: Marc Bittner, Judge Mark Allen, Shanna Floyd, Judge Natalia Oakes

TJJJ Staff in attendance:

Ashley Kintzer, James Bateman, Ryan Bristow, Rachael Gandy, Susan Palacios, Amanda Britton, Marcus Boyd, David Ellis, Lynn Jackson, Javier Aguilar, Todd Novak, Chief Scott Matthew, Kaci Singer, Emily Anderson, Alawan Thomas, Deborah Harris-Wiggins, Dipesh K Mandal, Neil Eddins, Mark Williams, Scott Friedman, Preston Streufert, Anthony Tsao, and Ronnie Solano.

Other attendees:

Jerome Green, Chief Kyle Dobbs, Assistant Chief Brad Slater, Chief Cory Burgess

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: June 16, 2022 Meeting

Ed Cockrell made a motion to approve the minutes. Melanie Ramsey, seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Texas Juvenile Justice Department updates:

Shandra Carter, Executive Director for TJJJ provided a facilities update to the council. Director Carter reported both Evans and Gainesville Units are currently fully-staffed, with both units operating at capacity (all beds filled). The intake-unit at Ron Jackson has recently undergone new leadership with Antonio Houston being appointed as Superintendent, having previously served with the state agency as a Clinical Director. Autumn Lord also joined Ron Jackson as Assistant Superintendent. Director Carter reported being extremely optimistic that the new

leadership and their experience will continue to improve the culture and stability of the facility. The Mart facility continues to be the most challenged. The facility currently has the greatest number of committed youth while operating at 60% of needed staffing capacity for Juvenile Corrections Officers (JCO's) and 38% of needed clinical staff. While the physical layout allows for the greatest potential for taking additional youth from the current waitlist, the continued staffing limitations make significant movement unsafe and untenable. Director Carter reported options for contract-care for committed youth have completely dissolved. While the state agency will continue to contract with Pegasus for younger, lower-risk, lower-need offenders, the higher acuity youth being committed to the state warranted a recent Request for Proposal (RFP) to yield zero responses. Other creative solutions for managing the waitlist include evaluating "the back door" and improving re-entry collaboration and services.

Other changes include the decision to close Karyn's House, a halfway house for female offenders. The official closure date will be November 15, 2023. Director Carter reported questions regarding program effectiveness to have been looming due to historical operational challenges, e.g. staffing shortages, kids frequently running away, etc. In lieu of transitioning female offenders to a halfway house, the state agency will focus on the development and implementation of robust, targeted reentry services. Resources previously dedicated to the halfway house will be reallocated. The state agency has met with DFPS to discuss level-of-care rate changes. DFPS has developed a study to explore new rates for kids in care. TJJD will seek to leverage the study DFPS has in place to ensure uniformity for the system. Rachel Gandy, TJJD Chief of Staff will continue to lead the initiative and will bring additional information to the council as it becomes available.

Early discussions and planning for the next session's Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR) are underway to maintain the positive trajectory and momentum for the system. Work with Facilities Commissioner continues. The feasibility study has yet to begin, so the timeline for the new-build is not as far along as anticipated. The agency's goal was to go into the legislative session with real-estate secured, but the timeline is likely not feasible due to the unforeseen delay. The agency has begun an exercise involving leadership to focus on priorities. The agency is tasked with looking "unrecognizable" by the next legislative session and priorities to meet this goal include but are not limited to changing agency culture and moving to a Texas Model 2.0, with pillars being safety, security, transparency, and accountability.

Lou Serrano, Deputy Executive Director, provided an update on organizational changes within the state agency, including the retirement of former Probation Director Amy Miller. All agency changes and realignments are intended to strengthen a singular juvenile justice system. Ashley Kintzer has transitioned to Director of Probation Services role. Deborah Harris-Wiggins is now the manager of regionalization, and for the first time, each region has an independent regionalization administrator. Two (2) recent hires for regionalization positions came from local probation departments, which speaks to the culture change and trust impacts between the state and field. The success of FY23 shows reduced commitments to state custody, diverting the right kids. Director Serrano reported early numbers indicated approximately 520–530 youth having been committed to TJJD during FY23 with a target of 639. Regionalization efforts show

248 youth being successfully diverted. Ryan Bristow is now serving as Director of Integrated System Supports. Todd Nowak continues to lead parole services. Director Serrano reported that parole services seeks to mirror regionalization to strengthen reentry parole supervision and services. New initiatives are underway to bridge communication and collaboration between the parole division and the local probation departments.

Ashley Kintzer, Director of Probation Services reported there were a 138 youth in diversion placement to begin the fiscal year FY24. This year, there have been 18 youth placed through diversion and 24 youth successfully released from diversion placement. There have been 65 diversion applications submitted by 36 departments, with 31 applications being approved by the state agency pending diversion placement. Lastly, there are currently 132 youth in active diversion placements. Director Kintzer also reported having met diversion goals established by the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) for youth diverted and the average-daily population for the first time.

Discretionary State-Aid (DSA) regionalization expansion grant award notifications were published with departments coming into the new fiscal year, with six (6) departments being awarded to expand regionalization beds for youth. Awards went to Randall, Travis, El Paso, Harris, Nueces, and Garza counties. Both Randall and Travis are fully operational. Harris County is projected to be operational very soon and will bring five (5) beds online.

There are four (4) departments that received DSA detention expansion grants. The departments include Grayson, Collin, Tom-Green, and Smith. Director Kintzer reported that \$1,468,616.00 remains available due to not receiving enough applications. Planning for expending this funding will be important to ensure the funding is not returned and is used as intended by the legislature to expand detention capacity for the system. The council discussed ways to incentivize more local probation departments to apply for funding. There are a number of active DSA Community-Based grants that are proving to be very successful. Creative collaborations between the field and the state include exploring MOU's wherein kids on parole supervision can receive services through the local probation department with this targeted funding. The OJJDP grant for approximately \$800K has been submitted, which will prioritize service-gap mapping for Texas. The work which will be impactful in supporting regionalization planning. The grant award notification is currently pending, but should be announced soon.

Director Kintzer advised that the Regionalization Task Force will look to reconvene and begin creating the next regionalization plan for Texas. There are new member requirements for the task force, which will include adding a youth with lived-experience and a family member with children with system experience who are willing to assist with planning.

Ryan Bristow, Director of Integrated System Support provided a council update regarding the commitment waitlist. Director Bristow reported 83 youth being on the list with six (6) males scheduled for admission this week. No girls were scheduled for intake as the agency continues to adapt to the closure of Karyn's House. The field continues to receive regular updates regarding the waitlist and all scheduled youth movements for open communication and

transparency. Currently, youth remain on a waitlist for approximately 57 days on average. Lastly, TJJD case managers continue to engage and work with families of youth while they are on the waitlist to promote service delivery and engagement. Mr. Bristow stated he intends to send out a survey to the field in January in order to measure and track facility staffing as we move forward.

Sunset Review Update & Discussion:

Rachel Gandy, Chief of Staff, provided an update on transitioning from her role on the Sunset Commission to TJJD Chief Staff and assured council members that all information provided and shared during the Sunset Review has remained and will continue to be confidential. Mrs. Gandy commended the work and consensus building of the advisory council and stated that several recommendations made and adopted during the agency review sought to replicate the council structure and processes.

There are a number of high-level compliance initiatives, some of which will need to be prioritized in the coming months surrounding Texas Administrative Code (TAC) rule making for the state agency. These rules are required to be vetted by the council and include funding formula review changes to incentivize diversion. All potential rule changes are to be vetted by the advisory council and other stakeholders, including the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) before adoption. Mrs. Gandy advised that TJJD Board of Director appointments remain pending but are anticipated to be finalized by the end of the calendar year. Other updates include the state agency now having the authority to appoint advisory committees, which may be a useful resource for important work and easing advisory council member workload demands. Other recommendations include a requirement for the advisory council to adopt rules preserving the function and structure of the council. These are high-level rules which will be proposed for TAC adoption, not detailed governing bylaws. In order to promote efficiencies for rule making requirements, the state agency will draft and propose some general language, which will be vetted internally by Director Lou Serrano and his staff. The rules will then be submitted to the council for review and discussion as the established process flows.

An additional requirement involves the creation and implementation of a risk-based monitoring tool and inspection schedule for facilities. As the tool begins to take on more shape and structure, the tool will be provided to the council for review and input. Mrs. Gandy provided background information and context for prescriptive language from the statute for juvenile probation officer certification and the requirement for the agency to implement least-restrictive educational requirements while still ensuring public safety. Mrs. Gandy explained the plan for engaging the field and the importance of ensuring the exercise is appropriately and thoroughly executed for all stakeholders. Recommendations for minimum requirements for certification will be made by the advisory council to the TJJD Board of Directors for consideration and potential adoption. Other rule-making requirements include legal sufficiency reviews for internal processes of Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigative findings. This includes the administrative review process, which will involve the advisory council and an established subcommittee. Lastly, TJJD will be seeking council input on rules requiring probation departments to request diversion before a youth can be committed to state custody and rules

governing the ability of local departments to serve youth on the commitment waitlist in either pre-adjudication or post-adjudication programs.

TDFPS Update:

Lindsey Van Buskirk, DFPS, CPS Director of Field, reported that DFPS was actively engaged in the implementation of legislative changes, with most of the changes occurring on the investigations division. Other updates included the agency being fully funded on rate-changes for the first time. The agency continues to labor from the loss of hundreds of treatment beds, which has hampered treatment capacity. The reduction of capacity has caused significant angst between DFPS, local law enforcement agencies, and probation departments in managing assaultive behaviors committed by system youth. The average age of these youth is 14 -17 with most having significant mental health diagnoses and needs. Numbers for kids without placement (CWOP) have improved, and there are approximately 50-60 youth per night in CWOP. Numbers have improved due to targeted work and collaboration with other stakeholders. The agency plans to focus on identifying and addressing service gaps for caregivers who refuse to have their children return home, which is a growing trend. Lastly, an update regarding agency structure was provided. Mrs. Van Buskirk reported investigations would continue to be managed internally while community-based services were being contracted out to regional providers. The implementation plan for this will occur over the next several months.

Sub Committee Report:

- **Standards Subcommittee**

Standards Subcommittee Chair, Chief Melanie Ramsey, reported the standards subcommittee met on October 13, 2023. This was the initial meeting of the committee and was used as an opportunity for members to discuss initial thoughts surrounding the minimum educational requirements for juvenile probation officer certification and other associated considerations required Sunset. Each region is to take the feedback of the subcommittee back to their respective regions for regional collaboration and discussion. The subcommittee is scheduled to reconvene on November 15, 2023.

- **OIG Abuse, Neglect, & Exploitation Subcommittee**

Chief Ramsey notified the council that the workgroup remains on pause at this time. The TJJD executive team continues to work through some internal discussions, and once ready, the committee will be assembled to begin the work requested by the TJJD board.

Old Business:

No old business was discussed.

New Business:

No new business was discussed.

Public Comment:

TJJD Board Chair, Chief Scott Matthew thanked the council for their hard work and reported he has been working diligently with TJJD executive leadership on complex issues. Chairman Matthew expressed his optimism for the future of the juvenile justice system in Texas and recognized Director Carter and her team for their efforts in improving the state agency and their engagement with the field.

Advisory Council Member Updates and Announcements

Next Meeting:

The council will meet in person on Friday, January 19, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

Meeting Adjourn – at 12:00 p.m.