



Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform & Emerging & Best Practices Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 9, 2026, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm
100 Community Pl., Crownsville, MD 21032

Members in Attendance: Aaron Betsinger, Alycia Capozello, Andre Davis, April Adams, Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Bethany Strong, Betsy Fox Tolentino, Carlotta Woodward, Denise Henderson, Meghann Galloway, Donald L. Baker, Jr., Donna L. Christy, Liz Park, Eric N. Ford, Eunice Yarahi Humphrey, Gabrielle Wallace, Maria Navarro, Nathaniel Balis (Nate), Russell Hamill, Susan Leviton

Staff in Attendance: Sukyi McMahon, Deena Hausner, Ainsley Moench

I. Call to Order

Chair Judge Andre Davis called the meeting to order and welcomed Commissioners, agency representatives, and members of the public attending both in person and remotely. Commissioners were reminded of the Commission's attendance requirements for remote participation.

II. Approval of Prior Minutes

The minutes of the March 13, 2026 Commission meeting were presented for approval.

A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded. The minutes were approved without objection.

III. Chair's Report

Judge Davis shared reflections on his recent participation as a judge for the Department of Juvenile Services' annual National History Day competition held at the Cheltenham Youth

Detention Center. Students from multiple DJS facilities presented projects related to the theme “Revolution, Reaction, Reform.”

Judge Davis noted the quality of the presentations, the depth of research completed by the youth, and the educational value of the event. He highlighted the range of topics explored by participants and praised both the students and DJS education staff for their efforts.

He also shared that the Cheltenham librarian is accepting donated books and encouraged Commissioners to consider contributing educational materials to support youth in DJS facilities.

IV. Legislative Update

Youth Charging Reform Act

Secretary Betsy Fox Tolentino reported that Senate Bill 323 successfully passed the General Assembly. She thanked advocates, legislators, and Commissioners whose work contributed to the legislation’s advancement and acknowledged the years of advocacy that preceded its passage.

Secretary Tolentino specifically recognized Senator Will Smith, Delegate Sandy Bartlett, Delegate N. Scott Phillips, and other legislative leaders for their support.

She reported that DJS has begun planning for implementation and will engage courts, prosecutors, public defenders, law enforcement agencies, and community partners to prepare for the law’s October 1 effective date.

Department Updates

Secretary Tolentino also provided updates on:

- Establishment of the commission examining the cemetery at the former House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children at Cheltenham.
- Expansion of DJS public-facing data dashboards.
- Deployment of Origin tablets in committed facilities to support communication, education, cognitive behavioral programming, and workforce development.
- Passage of the DJS budget, including funding for facility improvements and electronic health records implementation.

Commissioners discussed future implementation considerations, including transportation logistics, detention capacity, and housing arrangements for youth charged as adults.

Legislative Session Overview

Commissioner Aubrey Edwards-Luce provided an overview of youth justice-related legislation being tracked during the 2026 legislative session.

Updates included:

- Senate Bill 323 (Youth Charging Reform Act), which significantly reduces the number of offenses subject to automatic adult charging.
- Senate Bill 715, establishing a truancy reduction pilot program in Washington County.
- House Bill 1058 / Senate Bill 537, creating a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund to support community-based prevention programs and youth service bureaus.
- House Bill 921, establishing statutory limitations on restrictive housing and solitary confinement practices for youth.

Commissioners discussed the status of several pending bills and the potential impact of future investments in prevention and diversion services.

V. Annual Report Planning

Commission staff reviewed the timeline for development of the Commission's 2026 Annual Report. Key milestones include:

- May: Draft workgroup summaries
- June: Workgroup review and finalization
- July: Full report review by the Commission
- August 13: Final Commission vote on the report

Staff presented the proposed report outline, which mirrors the structure used in the Commission's first annual report.

Discussion included:

- Incorporation of workgroup findings and recommendations.
- Development of a cross-workgroup synthesis section identifying common themes and priorities.
- Planned coverage of completed and ongoing work, including the Pre-DJS Flowchart, Youth Charging Reform Act implementation, reportable offenses research, prevention initiatives, and fatality review findings.

Commissioners discussed the anticipated scope of several workgroup sections and the need to distinguish between completed recommendations and ongoing areas of inquiry.

VI. Workgroup Updates

Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup

Nathaniel Balis and Eric Ford reported that the workgroup continues development of a State's Attorney process flowchart.

Building on the successful completion of the Pre-DJS Flowchart, the group plans to use a similar collaborative process with prosecutors and other stakeholders. The workgroup discussed narrowing the scope of the project to ensure completion within the current reporting cycle.

Juvenile Justice Processes and System Coordination Workgroup

Alycia Capozello reported that the workgroup continues its examination of reportable offenses.

The next meeting will focus on reviewing information gathered to date, identifying gaps in knowledge, and developing a framework for future recommendations.

Commissioners discussed the complexity of the issue, including:

- School safety considerations.
- Confidentiality requirements.
- Information-sharing practices.
- Educational outcomes for youth subject to reportable offense procedures.
- The balance between accountability and avoiding unnecessary stigma.

Maria Navarro emphasized the importance of understanding how reportable offense policies affect educational access, school climate, and supports available to youth.

Fatality Review Workgroup

Carlotta Woodward reported that the workgroup completed its third fatality review session.

The group continues to examine the deaths of youth under DJS supervision, including service histories, educational engagement, family circumstances, and opportunities for intervention.

Members discussed the importance of identifying recurring themes and creating a stronger feedback loop to ensure recommendations lead to meaningful system improvements.

Commissioners also discussed opportunities for collaboration between the Fatality Review and Prevention Workgroups.

Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup

Aaron Betsinger reported that the workgroup continues reviewing findings from the statewide service scan and continuum of care assessment.

The next meeting will feature representatives from the Governor's Office for Children's Young Men and Boys Initiative.

Members discussed the importance of service navigation, resource accessibility, and cross-system coordination for youth and families.

VII. Prevention Workgroup Presentation

Following a brief recess, the Commission received a presentation from the Prevention Workgroup and researchers from the Center for a Livable Future at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Food Insecurity and Juvenile System Involvement

Co-Chairs Donna Christy and Aubrey Edwards-Luce presented the workgroup's emerging focus on food insecurity as a driver of juvenile justice system involvement.

The presentation highlighted the concept of "survival crime," describing situations in which youth engage in unlawful behavior to meet unmet physiological needs such as food.

Researchers shared data indicating:

- One in three Maryland residents is experiencing food insecurity.
- One in six Maryland children experiences food insecurity.
- Food insecurity is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes, school absenteeism, and increased behavioral challenges.
- Youth experiencing food insecurity may be more likely to engage in behaviors associated with system involvement.

Research Partnership

Researchers from the Center for a Livable Future described a forthcoming statewide study examining the relationship between food insecurity and juvenile system involvement.

The project will include:

- Focus groups with youth.
- Qualitative interviews.
- Geographic analysis of food insecurity and youth arrest data.
- Examination of policy barriers to food access.

Study locations include:

- Prince George's County
- Hagerstown
- Cambridge
- Existing data from Baltimore City

Commissioners discussed:

- Stigma associated with hunger.
- School meal access.
- SNAP participation.
- The impact of immigration-related fears on benefit utilization.
- Rising school meal debt among working families.
- The relationship between food insecurity, chronic absenteeism, and system involvement.

Members expressed strong interest in how study findings may inform future prevention recommendations and broader juvenile justice reform efforts.

VIII. Housekeeping and Next Steps

Staff reminded Commissioners of upcoming workgroup meetings and annual report deadlines.

Commissioners were encouraged to review legislative materials, participate in ongoing workgroup discussions, and provide feedback on annual report drafts as they become available.

IX. Adjournment

Judge Davis thanked Commissioners, staff, presenters, and agency partners for their continued work and engagement.

The meeting was adjourned.