

Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform & Emerging & Best Practices Minutes

March 13, 2026

In-Person / Virtual (Hybrid)

Commission Attendees:

Aaron Betsinger, Alycia Capozello, Andre Davis, April Adams, Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Bethany Strong, Betsy Fox Tolentino, Carlotta Woodward, Denise Henderson, DHS designee (Meghann Galloway), Donald L. Baker, Jr., Liz Park, Eric N. Ford, Gabrielle Wallace, Maria Navarro, Nathaniel Balis (Nate), Russell Hamill, Susan Leviton, Tanya Schwartz

Non Commission Attendees:

Sukyi McMahon (GOCPP), Ainsley Moench (GOCPP), Arinze Ifekauche (GOCPP), Deena Hausner (GOCPP), Kara Aanenson (DJS)

I. Call to Order

Chair Judge Andre Davis called the meeting to order and welcomed Commissioners, agency partners, and members of the public. He opened the meeting by acknowledging the start of a new Commission year and expressed appreciation for the continued engagement and progress made across workgroups.

The Chair also congratulated Secretary Betsy Fox Tolentino on her official confirmation and thanked Vice Chair Liz Park for presiding over the December meeting during his absence.

New member Deena Hausner, Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives for GOCCP, was introduced to the Commission.

II. Approval of Prior Minutes

The minutes of the December 11, 2025 Commission meeting were presented for approval.

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

III. Legislative Session Update

Commission staff provided an overview of key legislation relevant to the Commission's work:

- **Juvenile Contact with Incarcerated Adults (HB 389 / SB 296):**
Establishes limits on youth contact with incarcerated adults and reinforces sight and sound separation requirements, with limited exceptions for temporary processing.

- **Youth Charging Reform Act (HB 409 / SB 323):**
Passed the Senate with amendments. The bill modifies automatic adult charges, removes most gun offenses and first-degree assault from automatic transfer, and introduces new reporting requirements to this Commission related to detention, waiver decisions, and youth charged as adults.
- **Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund (HB 1058 / SB 537):**
Establishes a fund to support community-based prevention programs, including youth service bureaus and other youth development initiatives.
- **Reportable Offenses Bill (HB 198):**
Requires law enforcement to notify State's Attorneys regarding certain student-related investigations.
- **Commission on Historical Institutional Practices (SB 776):**
Establishes a commission to examine the history and impact of the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children.

Commissioners discussed implications of the legislation, including capacity considerations and data reporting requirements.

IV. Commission Bylaws

The Commission reviewed the proposed bylaws developed by staff.

The Chair highlighted key provisions, including expectations for remote participation and on-camera engagement.

A motion to adopt the bylaws, with minor formatting revisions, was made and seconded. The bylaws were approved without objection.

V. Workgroup Updates

Fatality Review Workgroup

Carlotta Woodward reported that the workgroup continues to conduct detailed case reviews of youth fatalities occurring under DJS supervision.

The group is refining its review process and working to obtain more timely access to records, including educational and psychological information. Members emphasized the intensity and importance of the work.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 8, with additional cases to be reviewed.

Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup

Co-chairs reported that the workgroup has focused on establishing priorities for the year and gathering member input through surveys.

A recent panel on youth service bureaus highlighted the need to rebuild this infrastructure statewide and emphasized the importance of prevention pathways for youth diverted from the system.

Key themes included:

- Lack of coordinated service navigation for families
- Gaps in access to community-based services
- Need for sustained funding to support prevention infrastructure

The workgroup is exploring engagement with the Governor's Office for Children on initiatives focused on young boys and men.

Juvenile Justice Processes and System Coordination Workgroup

The workgroup has begun examining reportable offenses, focusing on both process and outcomes for youth.

Members are:

- Assessing how reporting requirements are implemented
- Considering impacts on youth, including educational consequences
- Gathering stakeholder input before developing recommendations

The group is also exploring alternative pathways to graduation, particularly barriers related to GED access.

Prevention Workgroup

The Prevention Workgroup continues its focus on root causes of system involvement.

Recent topics include:

- Housing instability
- Sleep and rest
- Environmental conditions such as air and water quality

Speakers highlighted how unmet basic needs affect school engagement, health, and behavior.

A key emerging theme is the intersection between school systems and prevention, including the role of community schools and access to supportive services.

Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup

The workgroup presented a pre-DJS system flowchart illustrating decision points before youth enter the Department of Juvenile Services.

The tool was developed in collaboration with law enforcement partners and reflects real-world decision-making processes, including:

- Officer discretion
- School-based handling of incidents
- Diversion opportunities
- Referral pathways to DJS

The presentation emphasized:

- The importance of establishing a shared understanding of system processes
- Variability across jurisdictions, particularly in diversion availability
- Opportunities for future recommendations, including expanding diversion and improving transparency

Commissioners discussed:

- The role of discretion and community context
- Racial disparities in decision points
- Opportunities to integrate resource mapping and data collection

The workgroup plans to continue refining the tool and expand its work to later stages of the system.

VI. Cross-Cutting Discussion

Commissioners engaged in a broader discussion on system navigation and service access, highlighting:

- The absence of a centralized, user-friendly system for families
- Challenges faced by working families in accessing fragmented services
- The need for navigators or peer support models
- Tensions between state and local responsibility for service provision

Staff shared updates on a statewide service scan underway across all 24 jurisdictions, including surveys and focus groups with families and providers.

VII. Commission Operations and Engagement

Staff outlined strategies to increase engagement across workgroups, including:

- Pre-meeting briefing materials
- Post-meeting surveys
- Earlier distribution of data and presentations

The goal is to support informed participation and allow members time to consult with their respective agencies.

VIII. Next Steps

The Commission will continue to:

- Advance foundational research and stakeholder engagement
- Develop recommendations across workgroups
- Integrate findings into the annual report
- Expand public education efforts

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for April 9, 2026.

IX. Adjournment

The Chair thanked Commissioners and partners for their continued commitment and engagement.

The meeting was adjourned.