

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

October 23, 2025

4 pm – 6 pm

Hybrid (in person at 100 Community Pl., Crownsville, MD, and via Zoom)

Commission Attendees: Carlotta Woodward, Donald L. Baker Jr., Russell Hammill, Betsy Fox Tolentino, Rafael Lopez, Lara Weathersbee, Alycia Capozello, Donna L. Christy, Elizabeth Park (Liz), Andre Davis, Nathaniel Balis (Nate), Sandy Bartlett, Susan Leviton, Maria Navarro, N. Scott Phillips, Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Brandy James, Regina (“Gina”) Mayers

I. Call to Order

Chair Judge Andre Davis called the meeting to order, welcomed Commissioners and guests, and acknowledged the breadth of expertise represented at the table. He noted the continuing momentum across the Commission’s five workgroups and emphasized the importance of grounding discussions in data and lived experience.

II. Approval of Prior Minutes and Agenda

The Chair invited any revisions to the minutes of the prior meeting. Hearing none, the minutes and the agenda were approved by acclamation.

III. Workgroup Updates

A. Fatality Review Workgroup

Co-chairs reported that the initial case review underscored the need for additional information from the Department of Juvenile Services. The workgroup is coordinating with DJS to gather supplemental documentation and will reconvene on the 30th to complete the review before moving into its next closed-session fatality review.

B. Education and Merit Exchange Workgroup

An update was provided noting that recent sessions focused on mapping the juvenile legal system from a public education and transparency perspective. Members are working to visualize system pathways, identify areas where families lose access to information, and document where youth fall out of supportive processes. A broader data collection plan is underway to support this diagramming work.

C. Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup

The workgroup continued its statewide mapping of rehabilitative services and met with multiple Local Management Boards to understand variation in prevention and reentry supports. Upcoming sessions will include conversations with credible messenger programs to better understand service availability and barriers.

D. Prevention Workgroup

The Prevention Workgroup discussed housing instability, homelessness, and the rise of survival-driven offenses among youth. Members emphasized the importance of addressing root causes like food and housing insecurity and noted that these themes are increasingly reflected in LMB and school district data. Aubrey Edwards-Luce highlighted that these discussions are foundational to prevention strategy development.

E. Public Education & Narrative Change Workgroup

Co-chairs briefly noted ongoing work on infographics and materials designed to demystify system processes for the public, with content focused on charging pathways, diversion, and dismissal rates.

IV. Agency Updates

A. Department of Juvenile Services

Secretary Betsy Fox Tolentino shared that the Governor has released new guidance and resources for federal workers affected by the government shutdown. She also reiterated that DJS is exempt from hiring freezes for staff who directly engage with youth, which allows continued hiring in residential settings and community offices. A comprehensive DJS briefing will occur at the December meeting.

B. Town Hall and Community Engagement

Delegate Scott Phillips announced that Secretary Tolentino will hold a statewide DJS Town Hall on November 4 at Owings Mills High School. Commissioners were encouraged to attend or share the event with community partners.

V. Discussion Items

A. Information Sharing Between Schools and the Juvenile Legal System

Maria Navarro, Superintendent of Charles County Public Schools, raised ongoing concerns regarding the lack of timely information about student arrests and court involvement, particularly for students who move between districts. She emphasized the need for a coordinated statewide notification system to support school safety, individualized education planning, and continuity of services.

Commissioners discussed legal constraints, cross-jurisdictional communication gaps, confidentiality requirements, and the vastly different protocols among counties, private schools, and out-of-state placements.

B. Maryland's Auto-Charging Laws

Susan Leviton presented on the Processes and System Coordination Workgroup report on the impact of Maryland's automatic charging statutes. She noted that auto-charging remains the largest driver of youth being held in adult detention centers and that Maryland continues to have the longest average length of stay for children in adult facilities nationwide. She reiterated findings that approximately 85 percent of cases that enter the adult system automatically are later dismissed or transferred back to juvenile court.

Members discussed the harms associated with adult detention for youth, including loss of schooling, interruption of services, trauma exposure, and barriers to reentry.

Workgroup Co-Chairs summarized the Processes and System Coordination Workgroup's recommendation, which does not prohibit adult charging, but would require all youth to originate in juvenile court. Judges would retain authority to transfer appropriate cases to adult criminal court following an individualized determination.

Discussion reflected multiple perspectives. Some commissioners expressed concern about incomplete data from law enforcement and state's attorneys offices, while others argued that long-standing statewide patterns, historical data consistency, and external research provide sufficient basis for action.

Judicial members reiterated their obligation to refrain from policy advocacy. One member clarified that Maryland law requires transfer hearings to be held within 30 days of detention.

C. System Lengths, Public Safety, and Rehabilitation

Commissioners compared educational and rehabilitative supports in juvenile versus adult facilities. Staff explained that DJS facilities provide year-round schooling, GED and diploma pathways, and workforce development, whereas adult facilities largely lack youth-appropriate programming. Aubrey Edwards-Luce inquired about restorative or rehabilitative resources available for youth in adult detention, and the discussion turned to the inability of adult facilities to comply with youth service standards.

The compliance monitor described the significant challenges counties face meeting federal sight-and-sound separation requirements.

VI. Vote on the Workgroup Recommendation

The Commission voted on whether to adopt the Processes and System Coordination Workgroup's recommendation regarding auto-charging.

Vote:

10 in favor, 3 opposed, 11 absent

Abstentions: Secretary Betsy Fox Tolentino, Secretary Rafael Lopez, Judge Lara Weathersbee.

The recommendation was adopted.

VII. Next Steps and Action Items

- Staff will distribute the flyer for the upcoming Judiciary-sponsored public forum on juvenile justice and the flyer for the DJS Town Hall.
- Maria Navarro will share testimony related to statewide information-sharing legislation.
- Commissioners will receive a law review article on reportable offenses and school system communication protocols.
- Workgroups will continue preparing for 2026 meetings.

VIII. Adjournment

Chair Judge Davis thanked members for their contributions, acknowledged the depth of discussion, and adjourned the meeting.