

Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform & Emerging & Best Practices Minutes

September 11, 2025

4 pm - 6 pm

Hybrid (in person at 100 Community Pl., Crownsville, MD, 21032 and Zoom)

Commission Attendees: Alycia Capozello, Carlotta Woodward, Donald L. Baker, Jr., Eric N. Ford, Betsy Fox Tolentino, Denise Henderson, Donna L. Christy, Andre Davis, Rafael Lopez, Sandy Bartlett, Susan Leviton, Tanya Schwartz, Maria Navarro, April Adams, Bethany Strong

I. Call to Order

Chair Judge Davis called the meeting to order, welcomed members and attendees, and invited a brief moment of reflection for victims of violence.

II. Approval of Prior Minutes and Agenda

The minutes of the June 12 meeting were approved by acclamation following confirmation of review.

III. Commission Business

A. Welcome of New Commissioners and Acknowledgment of Departing Members

The Chair welcomed April Adams, Bethany Strong, Eunice Humphrey, and Maria Navarro to the Commission and thanked departing members for their service. Commissioners noted that workgroup assignments can be revisited to support balanced participation and fresh perspectives.

B. Adoption of the Commission's First Annual Report

The Commission unanimously adopted the first annual report. Staff recognized the foundational nature of work from January through June and thanked workgroup leaders and members.

IV. Workgroup Updates and Strategic Planning

- Processes and System Coordination Workgroup: Reported on Maryland's noncompliance with the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act regarding youth in adult facilities. A brief is in development for Commission review

in October. The workgroup also set a timeline for statutory areas, including a focus on girls and education.

- Fatality Review Workgroup: Announced its first session for October 8 to review cases. Members will sign confidentiality agreements and meet in closed session given the sensitive nature of the material.
- Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup: Began a two year plan to map rehabilitative services statewide and identify gaps, including opportunities aligned with the ENOUGH Act and funding through the Governor's Office of Children.
- Prevention Workgroup: Continued the Maslow based inquiry into physiological needs with a focus on food insecurity and hunger. September discussion addressed projected federal policy impacts on SNAP eligibility and benefits.
- Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup: Prioritized demystifying the justice system for the public through infographics, factsheets, and listening sessions, with emphasis on diversion pathways, dismissal rates, and restorative practices.

V. Agency Update: Department of Juvenile Services

Secretary Betsy Fox Tolentino provided an update on her first 90 days. Key items included addressing staffing needs in residential facilities, validating the detention risk assessment tool, and preparing the intake decision tool to guide timely resolution, diversion, or prosecution decisions. DJS is building partnerships across agencies and community providers and strengthening alternatives to detention to ensure youth receive appropriate services at all stages.

VI. Panel Discussion: Gatekeepers of Justice: The Role of Maryland State's Attorneys in Juvenile Legal System Reform

Moderator:

Commissioner Sandy Bartlett

Panelists:

- Kelly Mosher
- Catharine Rosenblatt
- Carlotta Woodward

Panel Highlights

- Pathways and discretion: Prosecutors described the ways youth come to their attention and how evidence, services, and first offense status inform charging decisions. Detention cases run on compressed timelines, with petitions typically due within 10 days and trials within roughly 30 days, creating pressure to coordinate quickly with law enforcement and partners.

- Victim voice: Panelists emphasized early and meaningful engagement with victims, noting cases where victim preferences shaped outcomes.
- Diversion and local practice: Baltimore City uses mutual postponements to allow youth to engage in services with dismissal upon completion. Frederick County highlighted the JEDI program for first time misdemeanors and a Youthful Offender Program. Montgomery County described a shift from past diversion models to school based education and engagement efforts.
- Creativity and accountability: Panelists offered examples of tailored conditions, such as reflective writing tied to relevant programs, to foster accountability and growth. They underscored the importance of preventing escalation to the adult system.
- Interagency collaboration: Regular coordination with DJS, public defenders, courts, and community partners was cited as essential. Panelists described task forces and case conferencing that support earlier intervention.
- Community expectations and transparency: Participants noted public frustration about perceived accountability gaps in juvenile cases and discussed ways to improve communication about outcomes while respecting confidentiality.
- CINS petitions: Panelists observed that CINS petitions are voluntary and often lack enforceable consequences, which can limit effectiveness and frustrate families.

VII. Next Steps and Reminders

- Processes and System Coordination Workgroup to circulate its JJDPA compliance brief for Commission review in October.
- Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup to continue development of infographics and a seasonal release schedule.
- Next Meeting: Thursday, October 23, 2025 (hybrid).

VIII. Adjournment

The Chair thanked panelists, Commissioners, and guests and adjourned the meeting.