

Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform & Emerging & Best Practices Minutes

June 12, 2025

4 pm - 6 pm

Hybrid (in person at 100 Community Pl., Crownsville, MD, 20901 and Zoom)

Commission Attendees: Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Betsy Fox Tolentino, Denise Henderson, Donna L. Christ, Elizabeth Park (Liz), Sean Aaron Betsinger, Andre Davis, Lacey Davis, N. Scott Phillips, Nate Balis, Rafael Lopez, Rhondalyne Reed, Russell Hammill, Sandy Bartlett, Susan Leviton, Tanya Schwartz

Presenters from the Maryland Office of the Public Defender:

- Alycia Capozello, Deputy Public Defender
 - Tiera Hawkes, Juvenile Attorney
 - Michelle Kim, Supervising Attorney, Juvenile Division
 - Kimberlee Watts, Chief, Forensic Mental Health Division
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I. Call to Order

Chair Judge Davis convened the meeting and welcomed members participating in person and via Zoom. He noted ongoing work to improve hybrid meeting technology and thanked staff for their support.

II. Approval of Prior Minutes

The Commission approved the minutes from the May 15, 2025 meeting by voice vote. A motion was made and seconded, with no discussion.

III. Director's Overview and Statutory Alignment

Commission Director Sukyi McMahon reviewed the Commission's statutory charges and the internal crosswalk showing where current workstreams align with the mandate. Commissioners were provided a visual summary and table reflecting responsibilities such as reviewing and reporting on juvenile services and facilities, evaluating programs and practices, facilitating cross-system collaboration, and examining fatalities through the Fatality Review Workgroup.

IV. Data Requests and Reporting Timeline

Commissioners discussed outstanding interagency data requests and agreed it would be helpful to track requests and expected timelines. Members emphasized documenting what has been requested and when. The group also reviewed the Commission's reporting timeline, including the internal goal to circulate a near-complete draft in early August and work toward the statutory October 1 deadline.

V. Panel Discussion – “Defending Our Future: The Role of Maryland Public Defenders in Juvenile Justice”

Panelists: Alycia Capozello, Tiera Hawkes, Michelle Kim, and Kimberlee Watts.

Highlights:

- Early representation and youth-centered defense. Panelists described first contacts with youth and families, the importance of explaining attorney-client privilege to caregivers, and adapting practice to adolescent needs.
- Family engagement and trauma-informed practice. Defenders emphasized building trust with young people and families, recognizing trauma histories, and coordinating supports beyond court appearances.
- Diversion and services. Defenders discussed advocating for diversion, the uneven availability of community-based options, and the need for consistent service pathways across counties.
- Cross-system collaboration. Panelists urged stronger coordination among OPD, DJS, courts, schools, and behavioral health providers, and noted the limits of relying on law enforcement as the primary or first response in youth crises.
- Equity. Speakers highlighted disparities that shape who is charged, detained, or diverted and encouraged the Commission to keep equity at the center of recommendations.

VI. Announcements and Next Steps

- Commissioners noted recent leadership changes at DJS and welcomed the Interim Secretary.
- Staff shared that a consolidated outline would be circulated in late July, with a near-complete draft targeted for early August. Commissioners were encouraged to review the entire report for comprehensive feedback.
- Next Meeting: Thursday, September 11, 2025.

VII. Adjournment

The Chair thanked panelists and attendees and adjourned the meeting.