



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

Thursday, June 11, 2026, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm
100 Community Pl., Crownsville, MD 21032

Members in Attendance: N. Scott Phillips, Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Sean Aaron Betsinger, Susan Leviton, Maria Virginia Navarro, Eunice Yarahi Humphrey, Eric N. Ford, Tanya Schwartz, Nathaniel Balis (Nate), Liz Park, Carlotta Woodward, Alycia Capozello, Donna L. Christy, Gabrielle Wallace

Also in Attendance: Kara Aanenson, Meghann Galloway, Sarah Kaplan, Jameelah Wilson, Nadir Abdullah, Aubrey Gerhardt

GOCPP Staff in Attendance: Sukyi McMahon, Ainsley Moench, Deena Hausner, Selena Rawlley

Guest Speakers: Kecia Barnes, Brandon Wilson, Isham Cornish, Anthony Muhammad

I. Call to Order

Vice Chair Liz Park called the meeting to order in the absence of Chair Judge Andre Davis. Because a quorum was not initially present, approval of the April meeting minutes was temporarily tabled while the Commission proceeded with workgroup updates. Ms. Park welcomed Commissioners, guests, and members of the public attending the meeting.

II. Workgroup Updates

Juvenile Justice Processes and System Coordination

Commissioner Alycia Capozello reported that the workgroup continued its examination of Maryland's reportable offenses statute. Since the previous Commission meeting, members

received additional presentations from law enforcement representatives and the Department of Juvenile Services' education leadership. The workgroup is narrowing potential recommendations for inclusion in the Commission's annual report.

Public Education and Narrative Change

Commissioners Eric Ford and Nathaniel Balis reported that the workgroup finalized revisions to the Pre-DJS Youth Decision Process Flowchart and continued development of a companion State's Attorney Juvenile Case Decision Flowchart. Members discussed differences in terminology and practice across State's Attorneys' Offices and reviewed methods for accurately depicting prosecutorial decision-making. The draft flowchart has been distributed to the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association for review and jurisdictional feedback.

Youth Rehabilitation Services

Commissioner Sean Aaron Betsinger reported that the workgroup has been finalizing recommendations for the Commission's 2026 Annual Report. He introduced the day's panel discussion on credible messenger programs, noting the workgroup's interest in highlighting community-based approaches that support youth rehabilitation, diversion, and successful reentry. The workgroup planned an additional meeting later in June to finalize its recommendations.

Prevention

Commissioners Aubrey Edwards-Luce and Donna Christy reported continued progress on the Commission's research partnership with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future examining food insecurity and juvenile justice involvement. Funding for the study has been secured, focus group questions are being finalized, and work continues to examine how unmet basic needs, including food insecurity, housing instability, and access to healthcare, contribute to youth system involvement. The workgroup also reviewed its draft annual report summary and recommendations.

Fatality Review

Commissioner Carlotta Woodward reported that the Fatality Review Workgroup will meet in July to develop findings and recommendations based on the cases reviewed during the Commission's October, March, and April meetings.

III. Commission Business

Vice Chair Park recognized Laura Weathersby for her service to the Commission and thanked her for her leadership as Co-Chair of the Fatality Review Workgroup. Staff announced that workgroups would pause meetings during July and August, with the exception of the Fatality Review Workgroup, while annual report drafting continued. Commissioners were advised that the August Commission meeting would be held virtually.

Commission staff also provided updates on several ongoing Commission initiatives, including:

- Continued collaboration with the Center for a Livable Future on food insecurity research.
- Research underway with the Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law regarding reportable offenses.
- Statewide review of the State's Attorney Juvenile Case Decision Flowchart by the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association.
- Development of a phased distribution strategy for the Pre-DJS Youth Decision Process Flowchart.
- Continued drafting of the Commission's 2026 Annual Report over the summer months.

IV. Presentation: Credible Messenger Programs

The Commission received a panel presentation from community leaders representing Maryland credible messenger and violence intervention programs, including Kecia Barnes (CM3 Maryland Credible Messenger Program), Brandon Wilson (We Our Us), Isham Cornish (Break the Cycle Hospital Violence Intervention Program, Johns Hopkins Hospital), and Anthony Muhammad (Baltimore Brothers).

Building Trust Through Lived Experience

Panelists described the role of credible messengers as trusted adults whose lived experiences allow them to build authentic relationships with youth involved in or at risk of entering the juvenile justice system. Speakers shared their personal experiences with incarceration, community violence, family adversity, and rehabilitation, emphasizing that these experiences enable them to connect with young people in ways that traditional systems often cannot. Panelists stressed that credible messengers serve not only youth, but also families, and that long-term relationships are essential to lasting change.

Community-Based Rehabilitation

Panelists described their organizations' approaches to supporting youth through mentoring, conflict mediation, violence interruption, hospital-based intervention, educational engagement,

employment assistance, and family support. Speakers emphasized individualized "life plans," trauma-informed care, and collaboration with schools, probation officers, hospitals, and community organizations to address the social conditions contributing to justice involvement.

Wellness and Behavioral Health

Panelists discussed barriers to youth participation in behavioral health services, noting that stigma surrounding the term "mental health" can discourage engagement. Several organizations have adopted the term "wellness services" and utilize wellness coaches to normalize behavioral health support while connecting youth to therapists, psychiatrists, nutritionists, and other providers as appropriate.

Long-Term Mentoring and Prevention

The discussion highlighted the importance of sustained engagement with youth beyond formal programming. Panelists described maintaining regular communication with youth and families, supporting educational success, addressing transportation and employment barriers, and remaining involved after youth complete formal programs. Speakers also emphasized upstream prevention efforts beginning in elementary and middle school and the importance of strengthening family and community supports before justice involvement occurs.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Panelists encouraged policymakers to recognize the role that poverty, unstable housing, educational inequities, trauma, and other social determinants of health play in youth violence and justice involvement. They advocated for sustained investment in community-based organizations, credible messenger programs, and operational funding that supports staffing, transportation, family assistance, and other practical needs necessary to maintain effective services. Speakers emphasized that investments in prevention and community capacity ultimately reduce violence, incarceration, and long-term public costs.

V. Approval of Prior Minutes

Once a quorum was established later in the meeting, the Commission returned to the April 9, 2026 meeting minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded. The minutes were approved without objection.

VI. Adjournment

Vice Chair Park thanked Commissioners, presenters, community partners, and GOCPP staff for their continued work on behalf of Maryland's youth. The meeting was adjourned.