

Monmouth County Youth Services Commission

Minutes for Tuesday April 1, 2025

4:00 PM First Floor Conference Room,

Human Services Building with Zoom Link Option Available

Attendance:

Trude Arnette, Tara Buckley, Stephanie Cella, Achille Dejean, Thomas Fichter, Laurie Gerhardt, Jennifer Hoffer, Chanta L. Jackson, Ivan Kaplan, Dustin Knoblauch, Honorable Lourdes Lucas, Dr. Lester W. Richens, Raymond Santiago, Lynn Seaward, Kaitlyn Silagyi, Christine Talbot.

Safiya Baker, Caitlin Brown, Doris Darling, Nicki Francis, Talesha McLawhorn

Ellen Cohen, Kathleen Peterson

I. CALL TO ORDER: OPEN PUBLIC MEETING'S ACT **Honorable Lourdes Lucas**

Welcome and Introductions

Approval of YSC Minutes from February 4, 2025 (Action)

A motion was made, seconded and carried (Arnette: Richens) to approve the Youth Services Commission Meeting Minutes from February 4, 2025.

II. YSC Co-Chairs Report **Prosecutor Raymond Santiago / Honorable Lourdes Lucas**

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago reported that at the March 13, 2025 meeting of the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners Meeting the following appointments and/or re-appointments of members to the Youth Services Commission were made: Stephanie Cella, Northern Monmouth Division of Child Protection and Permanency Court Liaison; Achille Dejean, Executive Director, Mental Health Association of Monmouth County; Tara Buckley, Monmouth Vicinage Family Division Manager; and Elizabeth Williams, Esq., Assistant Deputy Public Defender; and Myra Carter, Chief of Probation for Monmouth Vicinage.

Prosecutor Santiago shared information on the following items:

Atlantic/Cape May Vicinage Assignment Judge Michael Blee has been appointed by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner to serve as the AOC's next Director following Judge Grant's retirement.

Executive Director, Dr. Jennifer LeBaron shared that the Juvenile Justice Commission is undergoing a name change to the Youth Justice Commission.

Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) 2023 Annual Data Report outlines the ways in which youth justice has improved since the groundbreaking initiative was implemented across the state in 2018. It focuses on declining trends in youth arrests and detention at the county level, and the related decline in youth sentenced or committed to secure care with the YJC.

New Jersey Department of Health Launches SAFE NJ Program to Support School Safety and Youth Mental Health Across State. Anonymous Student Reporting: A safe, secure platform for students to report concerns such as bullying, threats, or personal struggles, fostering a proactive approach to safety and intervention. Immediate Crisis Support: New Jersey students will have direct access to licensed New Jersey-based mental health counselors through the 2NDFLOOR Youth Helpline. This ensures they receive immediate and professional support from individuals who understand the unique challenges and resources within the state. Access to School and Community Resources: The program is designed to seamlessly connect students and families with vital school and community resources including basic needs, ensuring timely and effective support tailored to New Jersey communities.

New Jersey Department of Labor Unveils JOBS Grant to Enhance Employment Opportunities for Justice-Impacted Residents-Key components of the JOBS initiative include providing ongoing career coaching and mentoring, offering virtual services to improve training accessibility, facilitating internship placements for work experience, and partnering with employers to increase unsubsidized employment opportunities and retention. The program also uses data and evidence to track outcomes and optimize participant utilization of JOBS funds.

Judge Lucas indicated that there was still discussion on the juvenile detention facilities in the State, and some of the challenges county governments are facing with bed availability. She indicated that this topic is still being looked at.

Overview Presentation -Wellspring Center for Prevention- Why Try Leadership and Life Skills Training- Primary and Secondary Delinquency Prevention. Nicki Francis provided an overview of the Why Try Leadership Program and the Life Skills Training program that Wellspring Center for Prevention implements in Asbury Park, Keansburg, and Neptune Township (summer recreation). LifeSkills Training is a classroom-based universal prevention program designed to prevent adolescent tobacco, alcohol, marijuana use and violence and includes eight sessions. WhyTry is an evidenced-based social and emotional learning program. Why Try is delivered as a 7-session classroom program in Asbury Park and Keansburg and as a 6 session Why Try Summer Program at Neptune Township Recreation Program. Why Try Small Group sessions for 6th grade and 7th grade students are also being conducted for youth referred by school staff for behavioral incidents in both Asbury Park and Keansburg. Nicki Francis provided examples of the lessons and the enrichment activities conducted. She discussed how the small groups are structured, and the referral process. This year, Wellspring Center for Prevention will add small group presentations to all 7th graders at Asbury Park Middle School on vaping/marijuana. Nicki Francis responded to questions and highlighted a few of the other prevention programs that Wellspring Center for Prevention is conducting in Monmouth County.

III. Division of Child and Youth Services Report

Dustin Knoblauch reported on the various community education outreach activities conducted and a recent presentation to School Substance Awareness Coordinators (SACs) and Guidance Counselors. She indicated that a speakers bureau presentation was recently given at the crisis intervention team training, and highlighted how we can work better with law enforcement.

Dustin indicated that at the upcoming meeting of the Positive Youth Development Hub, the NJ Department of Health will talk about the SAFE NJ Program to Support School Safety and Youth Mental Health Across State. A training is being planned for in May at Monmouth University and will focus on topics that include human trafficking, social media, and gang awareness. More details will follow. Dustin shared that Project HEAL – Kristina Vander, Clinical Program Manager, presented information on their Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program of Hackensack Meridian, which is available to Monmouth and Ocean County victims of violence. Medical, therapeutic, and case management services offered. The program also provides youth based mentoring support groups in collaboration with Big Brothers Big Sisters. Available to youth ages 12-20 years who or at risk or engaged in violence.

IV. YSC Administrator's Update

Ellen Cohen reported that we have been collecting the 2024 data on various points in the system to update our Youth Services Plan. Information has been shared with the YSC membership relative to the 2024 Juvenile Detention Admissions, the 2024 Juvenile Detention Alternatives Admissions and the 2024 Monmouth Vicinage Court Processing Data. She indicated that Trude Arnette would be highlighting the YSC Planning Committee's activities in her report. Ellen indicated that we are in the process of gathering information on Station House Adjustments through a law enforcement survey. There have been 11 responses thus far as of this morning. We hope to obtain point in time information from juvenile probation and IEP Youth Services (Probation Offender Program). Big Brothers Big Sisters will be conducting a youth survey of those in their school based mentoring program. Members of the Planning Committee are outreaching to gain updated information on service needs.

Ellen indicated that now that the first quarter is here, fiscal and program reports will be entered into the Juvenile Automated Management System. We will be looking to conduct monitoring of the funded programs starting early June.

A draft of the competitive contract RFP for the Family Navigator Program has been prepared for our purchasing division's release once we receive official word of the 2026 JDAI IF funds and application process.

V. Education Update

Dr. Lester W. Richens shared news of two youth traumatic losses that occurred since our February YSC meeting. He indicated that once again, we are looking at mental health issues and trying to understand why. Dr. Richens reported that restricting the use of cell phones at school is gaining momentum for they are a distraction to learning. He noted that some districts are facing shortfalls with their school budgets. A proposal to close two elementary schools in Middletown Township is being considered. Dr. Richens stated that schools are doing their best to address the budget shortfall and that the Governor has put in a lot of school aid. We are getting towards the end of the school year and there is testing coming up for students late April/early May.

VI. Family Division -Court Processing Update

Tara Buckley reported that the Family Division staff vacancies have been filled. There is a new Assistant Family Division Manager and a new Probation Officer Clerk in the court room. The team is now full which is good for the docket. Tara shared that there is a Children in Court (CIC)- aging out youth fair being planned in June.

Tara Buckley, Family Division Manager provided an overview on the 2024 court processing data for Monmouth Vicinage. She indicated the following:

In 2024, there were 310 juveniles docketed, 51 juveniles diverted, and 162 juveniles adjudicated delinquent by Monmouth Vicinage.

In 2024, there were 475 cases docketed, 52 cases diverted, and 208 cases adjudicated delinquent.

In 2024, there were 1,040 offenses docketed, 71 offenses diverted, and 559 offenses adjudicated delinquent.

In 2024, juveniles aged 15-16 comprised the largest number and percentage of juveniles docketed and adjudicated whereas, juveniles aged 13-14 comprised the largest number and percentage of juveniles diverted.

Overall, males continue to comprise the largest number and percentage of those docketed diverted and adjudicated delinquent compared to females.

The race / ethnicity data for 2024 docketed, diverted and adjudicated delinquent juveniles still seems to indicate that the 'Hispanic' ethnicity system indicator is still not accurately captured in the data report for a large majority of juveniles. The vicinage will be reviewing the data further to determine a way for the data to accurately capture the 'Hispanic' ethnicity indicator noted in the system.

While a significant number of charges are identified as "Not Categorized" within the offense category data for 2024, the assault offense category had the highest number of docketed, diverted, and adjudicated delinquent juveniles (139 juveniles, 12.25% of offenses).

There was some discussion on the assaults. A number appear to be stemming from Keansburg citizen complaints as opposed to the School Resource Officers. Prosecutor Santiago expressed interest in seeing the report on Keansburg school fighting/assault. Tom Fichter stated that some of the parents are dissatisfied with the results of the Harassment Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) investigation. Dr. Richens indicated that more education for the families and the public on HIB may be needed. If the child is the aggressor or the victim, the incidences raise concern. Judge Lucas expressed kudos to Ivan Kaplan who has turned some kids around and have responded very well to his approach.

VII. YSC Planning Committee

Trude Arnette reported that the YSC Planning Committee met on February 18th and March 18th. We have begun to update the 2026 Youth Services Plan. We are thankful to those YSC members and Youth Justice stakeholders, who have provided us with their 2024 Annual Statistics. We are reviewing our current 2025 Youth Services Plan Update and have started to integrate our current

activities and updated our focus areas, data, and recommendations. We look to update each section of the Youth Services Plan from prevention, diversion, detention and detention alternatives, disposition, and re-entry.

Trude Arnette stated that the NJ Department of Education School Performance Reports for 2023-24 is expected to be released this month. We have begun to update the harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) incidents, chronic absenteeism (school days missed), student school suspensions (in school and out of school), and the violence, vandalism, weapons, and substances abuse data.

Relative to law enforcement data, we have obtained the 2024 Bias Incident Reports for Monmouth County from the NJ State Police and the 2022 Uniform Crime Data for Monmouth County to identify the police departments with the highest number of offenses and highest number of arrests. Local police departments are sending their station house adjustment (SHA) data directly to the state and it is more challenging to obtain the information. The Uniform Crime Reports do not show the youth arrests broken down as they were in the past. A Law Enforcement Survey on Station House Adjustments will be conducted through the assistance of Thomas Fichter and the Prosecutor's Office. There is also a need to update the Monmouth County Juvenile Officers and the Monmouth County School Resource Officers lists.

Requests for court processing, probation supervision data, and JISP information has been made. The 2024 detention admissions and detention alternative admissions data was received and shared with the YSC membership and will be helpful to our continued planning efforts.

The next meeting of the YSC Planning Committee is scheduled for April 15th at 10:00 AM through zoom. If interested in participating, please let Ellen or I know.

VIII. Overview Presentation-YMCA of Greater Monmouth County

Talesha McLawhorn gave an overview power point presentation on the YMCA of Greater Monmouth County's Role Models for Change Mentoring Program serving at risk youth, ages 9 through 12 years of age. Talesha McLawhorn indicated that the mentors identify the youth's interests and strengths, through activities such as recreation, arts and crafts, academic support / homework help, empathetic listening and affirmations. The Community Based Mentoring Program is contracted to serve a minimum of twenty-four (24), at risk Monmouth County pre-teens, ages 9 to 12 years old. The mentoring services are intended to improve school engagement and address the difficult transition between elementary and middle school. The mentoring services are offered over a 12-week period and includes parental involvement. Each youth is offered 24 hours of direct mentoring, to include a 1-hour comprehensive assessment with the caregiver and an additional 3 hours of in direct supportive services. The annual level of service under this agreement is 648 service hours (576 direct/72 indirect). Talesha stated that since the program started through initial partnership funding, there have been 131 referrals and 70 unduplicated families served. The program does provide youth an opportunity to re-enroll, if appropriate. This year, they have connected with the elementary school in Middletown. Examples of activities conducted or anecdotes of what might a session look like were given. Talesha indicated that they are actively recruiting mentors and encouraging individuals to apply. Direct supervision is provided to interns.

IV. New Business

X. Old Business

XI. Public Comment

XII. Adjournment-

A motion was made, seconded and carried (Richens:Silagyi) to adjourn the meeting .The next meeting of the Monmouth County Youth Services Commission is scheduled for Tuesday, June 3, 2025, at 4:00 PM.