

Monmouth County Youth Services Commission

Minutes for Monday, August 3, 2026

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 Jackson, Ivan Kaplan, Dustin Knoblauch, Cailin Mejia, Dr. Lester W. Richens, Prosecutor Raymond Santiago, Kaitlyn Silagyi, Christine Talbot, Elizabeth Williams, Ellen Cohen, Kathleen Peterson

I. CALL TO ORDER: OPEN PUBLIC MEETING’S ACT

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago read the Open Public Meeting’s Act statement and provided a welcome. He noted that Judge Lucas was engaged in court duties and would join us if able. **A motion was made, seconded and carried (Richens: Silagyi) to approve the Youth Services Commission Minutes from June 2, 2026.**

II. YSC Co-Chair Report

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago reported that he participated in a recent meeting with New Jersey Attorney General Jennifer Davenport to discuss how her office can be of assistance to us. Prosecutor Santiago shared a concern related to the increase of youth with firearms and gang involvement. A review of different legislation is taking place to see how other states are dealing with crimes of violence. Prosecutor Santiago indicated that a “slight correction” not an “overcorrection” may be needed. He indicated a desire to help youth and protect youth.

III. Division of Child and Youth Services Report

Dustin Knoblauch provided an overview of the 2027-2029 Monmouth County Youth Justice Strategic Plan. She stated that for this cycle of planning things look a little different. The voices of families and youth are integrated into the planning document from various focus groups, listening sessions and forums that took place. Dustin Knoblauch highlighted the different priority areas discussed: Restorative Practices & Conflict Resolution/Evidenced Based Prevention Programming – Elementary Age & Countywide/Family Support & Engagement/Career & Workforce Development/Creative Innovation Programs/Mentorship/ Specialized Focus of Youth with Serious Crimes/Residential Treatment Services/Family Crisis Intervention Unit (FCIU, mandated program).

Dustin reported that Monmouth earned statewide recognition for innovative crisis response programs that are now being recommended as models for communities throughout New

Jersey. The child and family crisis diversion program is helping keep kids out of the emergency room. She shared information on the dates for upcoming Monmouth ACTs Positive Youth Development and Transitioning to Adulthood Hub meetings.

IV. YSC Administrator's Update

Ellen Cohen reported that the 2027-2029 Monmouth County Youth Justice Strategic Plan will be e-mailed out to the membership for an electronic roll call vote. Ellen indicated that our 2027 allocation letter from the New Jersey Youth Justice Commission indicates the same level of funding for the State Community Partnership and Family Court Services. She stated that we are waiting for the 2027 comprehensive funding application to be issued. There will be another meeting of the core group to discuss service priorities for the 2027 grant application. Once the allocations are determined by service category, they will be shared with the Youth Services Commission and require separate electronic roll call vote. This will become the basis of a new competitive contract request for proposals issued through our Purchasing Division based upon our 2027-2029 Youth Justice Strategic Plan and service priorities developed. Ellen also reported that we are near completion of our 2026 monitoring of the YSC funded programs and thanked the members of the monitoring team who participated in the process. * Ellen had previously shared with the YSC membership a budget modification request submitted by IEP Youth Services where an electronic roll call vote was taken July 14th -July 16th. There were sufficient votes to move the motion forward to transfer \$35,050 in 2026 Family Court Services funds from the Probation Multi Treatment Program to the Probation Offender Program for submission to the NJ Youth Justice Commission.

V. Monmouth County Park System

Tracy Shiffman was not present and will be rescheduled.

VI. Education Update

Dr. Lester W. Richens stated summer is flying by and soon it will be back to school. Dr. Richens indicated that 17 districts are going through statewide monitoring and there have been meetings held with the Superintendents and Business Administrators. Dr. Richens shared information on a speaker and program focused on addressing antisemitism and antisemitic behavior that is a resource for schools. He extended an invitation to the YSC membership to attend Wednesday's program at the AG building at 10 AM if interested.

VII. Family Division

Tara Buckley reported on some staffing changes within the Family Division. She indicated that Jenna Johnston is the new team leader for Juvenile. The after-hours response schedule has been established. Tara Buckley stated that there have been some juvenile altercations

at the courthouse that have required an increase in security officers in the waiting area / hallway.

VIII. Probation Division-Juvenile Supervision

Caitlin Mejia reported on probation activities. Caitlin Mejia indicated that there were 110 youths on probation supervision. 18 were on a specialized caseload, 26 were on deferred disposition, and the rest were general supervision. Caitlin reported on staffing changes at probation with one longstanding officer retiring and a new officer on boarding. Caitlin reported that they had recent programs for the youth on probation on topics such as marijuana, navigating the next chapter -what to expect after probation, and a fun day program run by an intern.

IV. New Business

There was some discussion on Kratom becoming a schedule 1 drug.

Communication on safety with e-bikes will be distributed to schools. A new law went in effect July 19th. A summary of the new law will be shared in English and Spanish.

Tom Fichter provided an update on Restorative Justice Trainings being conducted. He indicated that there was one in Red Bank with Juvenile Officers this Friday. He expressed his thanks to Dr. Richens for helping link him to the principals. He indicated a focus on Middle Schools and Boys and Girls Club training.

Tom and Dustin highlighted the benefits of having training with juvenile officers on the various early intervention resources for youth and families in Monmouth County.

National Night Out against Crime is being held tomorrow, August 4, 2026. Prosecutor Santiago indicated that there were 26 -27 towns having formal programs and encouraged membership to attend our local events.

X. Old Business

XI. Public Comment

XII. Adjournment- The next meeting of the Monmouth County Youth Services Commission is scheduled for Tuesday, October 6, 2026, at 4:00 PM.