

Monmouth County Youth Services Commission

Minutes for Tuesday December 2, 2025

4:00 PM First Floor Conference Room,

Human Services Building with Zoom Link Option Available

Attendance: Tara Buckley, Myra Carter, Stephanie Cella, Tom Fichter, Laurie Gerhardt, Jennifer Hoffer, Chanta Jackson, Ivan Kaplan, Dustin Knoblauch, Honorable Lourdes Lucas, Dr. Lester W. Richens, Prosecutor Raymond Santiago, Kaitlyn Silagyi, Christine Talbot, Ellen Cohen, and Kathleen Peterson

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

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago called the meeting to order and read the Open Public Meeting's Act. A motion was made, seconded and carried (Peterson:Talbot) to approve the Youth Services Commission Minutes from October 7, 2025.

Honorable Lourdes Lucas called for a motion to accept the prior roll call votes taken on November 10-12, 2025, and November 13-14, 2025, to be reflected in the YSC Minutes.

A motion was made, seconded and carried (Silagyi:Santiago) to reflect the following prior roll call vote taken into the YSC Minutes: A motion was made, seconded, and carried (Peterson:Fichter) that the Monmouth County Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Child and Youth Services- second one-year renewal option to the #CC-9-2024-2 be exercised for the period January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026. This recommendation will be forwarded to the Monmouth County Division of Purchasing and the Board of County Commissioners for award.

A motion was made, seconded and carried (Knoblauch:Peterson) to reflect the following prior roll call vote taken into the YSC Minutes: A motion was made, seconded, and carried (Peterson:Arnette) to approve the recommendations developed by the YSC Proposal Evaluation Committee for the Monmouth County Department of Health and Human Services-Division of Child and Youth Services - #CC-5-2026 (Family Navigator-Partners with Families; Juvenile Family Crisis Intervention Unit; and Adolescent Early Intervention Services) for the period January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026; and to forward the report and recommendations to the Monmouth County Division of Purchasing and the Board of County Commissioners for award.

II. YSC Co-Chairs Report

Prosecutor Raymond Santiago indicated that there has been communication with community partners to expand services to address crimes of violence in the county where we can that youth are involved with. He noted he was thankful for the services available, however, there were areas to expand. Thomas Fichter provided an update on the Restorative Justice outreach to schools. Monmouth Regional High School Restorative Justice student training took place mid-November, and a successful circle was conducted. Tom noted some interest expressed by Wall Township, in Restorative Justice, however he needs to follow up with them. A RJ presentation will be made to the Monmouth County School Principals in February at one of their meetings. Honorable Lourdes Lucas shared there was a case they hoped to conduct an RJ conference with, and the Family Navigator was willing to help, however it did not work out. Other cases will be considered in the future for a RJ conference.

III. Division of Child and Youth Services Report Dustin Knoblauch

Dustin Knoblauch provided a brief overview of the activities of the Division of Child and Youth Services. She highlighted the CIACC youth services presentations to various schools and to the Substance Awareness Coordinators (SACs). A presentation for the McKinney Vento Homeless Liaisons was held. The topics for December 5, 2025, Education Partnership training includes- Topic 1—Problematic Sexual Behavior and Topic 2—Early Childhood Relational and Mental Health. The next Positive Youth Development Hub meeting will take place on 1/9/25 and have a focus on Medicaid cuts and their impact. Resources to address behavioral health issues that have no cost and low barriers are being compiled. The youth behavioral health-postvention team has had discussion with the Prosecutors Office on how to accept referrals from law enforcement. Prosecutor Santiago indicated he is happy to help and welcomes discussion on ways to reduce violence. Dustin reported that the Youth Justice Commission announced a RFP for a Pivot Point Detention Alternative Pilot Program, to serve youth experiencing long case processing times and to act as a temporary placement when a detention bed is not available. She stated that Monmouth County's numbers are low and it is not something we would go for. It appears to be more appropriate for counties with a high volume of cases and long case processing times. Dustin shared that we have been assigned a new Youth Justice Commission JDAI research and reform specialist named Kayla Cunha that the Division met with. A case review of kids recently incarcerated or lost to gun violence will be conducted and Kathleen Peterson will be the lead on this.

IV. YSC Administrator's Update

Ellen Cohen reported that the 2026 streamlined renewal applications (CC-9-2024-2) from our funded programs were received October 14th and the YSC Proposal Review Committee met on November 10th, 2025. Recommendations for continuation were presented with an electronic roll call vote taken by the YSC membership. She thanked members who served on the review committee and the YSC membership for supporting the recommendations presented. Ellen reported that the competitive contract (CC-5-2026) RFP public announcement for the Family

Navigator-Partners with Families, Juvenile Crisis Intervention Unit, and Adolescent Early Intervention Services was issued with a deadline for submission of October 28, 2025. The YSC Evaluation Committee scored the proposals and met on November 10th, 2025. An electronic roll call vote was taken by the YSC membership, and the recommendations approved were forwarded to the Purchasing Division for award on December 11, 2025, Board of County Commissioners meeting. Ellen stated that the 2026 contracts for both CC-9-2024-2 and CC-5-2026 have been prepared, and will be issued to the agencies following December 11, 2025, Commissioners' meeting. She stated that the Youth Justice Commission has indicated that there will be changes to the of the next three-year youth services planning cycle (2027-2029), however, they have not yet been issued. A survey on Station House Adjustments and Diversion Programs was sent out to YSC Administrators for their JJDP unit, completed and sent back.

Ellen stated that the 2026 YSC Meeting Schedule will be sent out again and indicated that our first meeting of the new year will be February 3, 2026, at 4:00 PM.

Ivan Kaplan shared he distributed holiday Thanksgiving meals to 9 families through the JDAI IF grant. Families expressed their appreciation. Ivan indicated that it was a way to recognize and encourage the youth on detention alternative supervision and their families.

V. Education Update

Dr. Lester W. Richens stated that Dustin conducted a presentation to the Superintendents of Schools and did an outstanding job. He noted that it opened the eyes of superintendents, who were not aware of the mental health services available and now, they know who to contact.

The New Jersey Department of Education announced that Gillian Ober, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in the Freehold Borough School District, has been named the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year for 2025-2026.

The New Jersey public schools receiving the 2025 New Jersey Blue Ribbon Schools designation included Monmouth -Holmdel Township School District- Indian Hill School.

Dr. Richens indicated that the RJ program will present on February 3rd at the School Principals Meeting, where they typically have 25 to 30 Principals present.

VI. Family Division

Tara Buckley indicated that Judge Kerry Ellen Higgins is retiring. She reported that the FJ team leader has seen more filings coming in from Keansburg for court formal. Tara stated that she and Judge Lucas plan to meet with Family Based Services and share information with families regarding this resource.

VII. Probation Division

Myra Carter reported that there were 121 youths on probation supervision. She provided an update on the gun violence initiative and stated that the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County has been added to the Board, and they seek other resources. Myra Carter stated that Dr. Richens

has been helpful with some of the roadblocks experienced. Myra reported that 16 youth participated in a pro-social pumpkin painting activity. On December 16th, probation is seeking to have a juvenile commencement ceremony for 24 youth. She reported that it may be held virtually due to challenges getting the youth attend in person.

VIII. Youth Defense Unit - NJ Office of the Public Defender

This item will be tabled until the February meeting.

IV. New Business

Congratulations to Kaitlin Silagyi, who has been named the new Acting Director of Behavioral Health for Monmouth County.

Judge Lucas spoke about the challenge finding the right and appropriate out-of-home placements for youth, and discussed obstacles experienced. In discussion with parents, she received feedback that they are interested in secure facilities for youth. Dustin stated that the CMO operates under the least restrictive environment, home with services, and it has been a challenge across the board to find secure out of home placements. A desire to bridge the gap in services was expressed.

X. Old Business

XI. Public Comment

XII. Adjournment-

The next meeting of the Monmouth County Youth Services Commission is scheduled for **Tuesday, February 3, 2026, at 4:00 PM.**