

# **Monmouth County Youth Services Commission**

**Tuesday, April 4, 2023**

**Minutes**

**4:00 PM**

## **Attendance:**

**YSC Members:** Trude Arnette, Kathy Collins, Thomas Fichter, Dr. Charles R. Ford, Jr., Laurie Gerhardt, Jennifer Hoffer, Ivan Kaplan, Hon. Ellen Torregrossa-O'Connor, Geoffrey S. Perselay, Raymond Santiago, Lynn Seaward, Kaitlyn Silagyi, Desiree Whyte.

## **Staff:**

Ellen Cohen

## **Guests:**

Mary Fowler, Caitlin Mejia, Sandra McDonnell

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

Hon. Ellen Torregrossa- O'Connor called the meeting to order and read the Open Public Meeting's Act Statement. A motion was made, seconded and carried (Arnette:Perselay) to approve the minutes from the February 7, 2023 Youth Services Commission meeting. Judge O'Connor welcomed everyone and indicated that from the court's perspective a lot of interest things have been going on relative to our local discussions. Significant efforts have been made to work with youth diverted and court formal. A major reduction in court backlog has been demonstrated and local efforts to move the court calendar shown. She thanked all involved.

## **II. YSC CO-CHAIR REPORT**

Geoffrey S. Perselay congratulated the Judge on the achievements. He reported on the activities within the Department of Human Services that include: 1.) Place-Based services-pilot program which, is driven by the upcoming building construction (HVAC replacement project); 2.) the Navigation System-Warm line, Service Coordination and

Software; and 3.) Career Paths-a model is being worked on with Brookdale Community College and Monmouth University in collaboration with Workforce Development.

Geoffrey Perselay reported that the Division of Workforce Development received a significant grant to support summer youth employment. He indicated if members know youth in need of summer employment, including their own children, this is a great opportunity. They are to reach out to the Division of Workforce Development for more information.

Geoffrey Perselay reported that they have hired a fulltime, Director of Child and Youth Services and will provide additional information either at the next YSC meeting or sooner.

He shared that the Monmouth County Constitutional Officers invited fourth graders throughout the County to showcase what they like best about Monmouth County by designing posters for the “My County” poster contest. The posters created should depict special and unique things about Monmouth County. Posters must be mailed or delivered to the Monmouth County Surrogate’s Office at the Hall of Records, 1 East Main St., Freehold. The deadline is 4:30 p.m. on Monday, May 1, 2023. Invitations to participate in the contest have been sent to all County school principals.

At the March 16, 2023, meeting of the Board of County Commissioners, Thomas Fitcher was officially appointed as a Regular Member to the Monmouth County Youth Services Commission to fulfill an expired term ending on December 31, 2024.

### **III. YSC ADMINISTRATOR’S UPDATE**

Ellen Cohen reported that due to the uptick in cases identified by the court as well as the schools, there has been considerable focus and attention by the stakeholders on identifying potential resources to address Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB), as well as Cyberbullying and the Improper Use of social media by teens. She noted that

through Judge O'Connor's leadership, potential programs and resources are being explored and hopefully more will be developed to address these concerns and intervene before more tragedies occur.

The School Performance Reports for 2021-2022 school year should be released any day on the NJ Department of Education website. Monmouth County specific information will be reviewed. A school directory was recently obtained from Dr. Richen's office which contains the names of the individuals serving as Anti Bullying Coordinators and Homeless Liasons.

Relative to the threat assessment teams that NJ Public Schools are to develop for the 2023-2024 school year, -the guidelines will be developed by the NJ Department of Education in consultation with state law enforcement agencies and the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. The threat assessment team, which is to be established by a board of education or board of trustees in each district shall be multidisciplinary in membership, including: A school psychologist, school counselor, school social worker, or other school employee with expertise in student counseling; A teaching staff member; A school principal or other senior school administrator; A safe school resource officer or school employee who serves as a school liaison to law enforcement; and The designated school safety specialist.

Ellen reported on the modification to Monmouth's 2023 JDAI Innovation Application prepared by the Innovations Workgroup and is recommended by the local Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement for submission to the Juvenile Justice Commission. Copy of the modified proposal and budget was included in the YSC meeting attachments. She stated that we are looking to reallocate funds to the Family Navigator-Partners with Families proposal. We had originally conducted a competitive contract- RFP for the school-based diversion-respond with restorative practices but, there were no applicants who responded. Once we receive an indication whether our modification has been approved by the Juvenile Justice Commission, then an amendment to our purchase order and contract with the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County will be put

forward for action by the YSC through resolution by our Purchasing Division and County Commissioners. For submission of the modified application prepared by the Local Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement to the Juvenile Justice Commission, support from the Youth Service Commission was given. Raymond Santiago abstained.

#### **IV. Education Update**

Dr. Richens indicated that he was unable to attend the meeting. Ellen indicated that the New Jersey Office of Education, Office of School Finance provided a summary of Fiscal Year 2024 K-12 School Aid, excluding debt services' aid. It shows Monmouth County's allocation as a -5.95% aid percentage difference from FY23-FY24 K-12 Aid. She indicated that half of the Monmouth County districts showed a decrease in their state aid for FY24. Dr. Ford shared information on the additional funds announced today for districts to apply for, who have a shortfall and noted that it will only cover a portion. The legislation allows school districts that will see a reduction in school aid in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget to request an additional amount of aid equal to 66 percent of the difference between the amount they received in the 2022-2023 school year and the amount of aid currently proposed for the 2023-2024 school year. All eligible districts that submit a request to the Commissioner of Education will receive this additional funding and must include a written plan indicating how they intend to fund operations in future years when this aid is no longer available.

#### **V. Prosecutor's Office**

Judge O'Connor welcomed Prosecutor Raymond Santiago and Thomas Fichter. She stated that they have been proactive working with the schools. She indicated with the increase in firearms, gang related issues and growing concerns with threats in schools, we all need to work together on prevention and early intervention. Prosecutor Santiago stated that meetings around these issues have taken place and that he hoped they will be meaningful. He expressed that Thomas Fichter is a great asset to his office, and noted that relative to school security, mapping of the various schools including colleges and universities is critical in case a response is needed. Thomas Fichter shared that an educational intervention program is being developed that will start in June and run

monthly, on the topic of cyberbullying and personal internet responsibility and safety. It will be a resource for Stationhouse Adjustments and for juveniles diverted by the court. Their office will look to track the kids who attend the one-hour educational program. For the next school year in September, they hope to raise awareness on cyberbullying through engaging the youth in a public service campaign through a contest and entries developed by youth. Prosecutor Santiago expressed the importance of listening to youth and engaging their input on ways to reach their peers.

Thomas Fichter provided an update on the Strategies for Youth -law enforcement training and Juvenile Justice Jeopardy. He shared that a four-day training will take place on June 13-16<sup>th</sup> for Monmouth County law enforcement on Policing the Teen Brain that will be conducted by the Strategies for Youth through the grant made available through the Juvenile Justice Commission. An overview presentation by Strategies for Youth on the Juvenile Justice Jeopardy Program will also be held on April 25<sup>th</sup>. He indicated that the interest in both has been positive thus far.

## **VI. Probation Update**

Caitlin Mejia reported that probation is running a great program, on a monthly basis, that has thus far had an excellent turn out. The Monmouth County Juvenile Intervention & Enrichment Program has included monthly presentations on various topics. A presentation on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) was given in February for youth and one was given in March for their parents/guardians. Collaboration with IEP Youth Services-Probation Multi Treatment Program has taken place. Other topics covered and planned for include financial literacy, wellness and nutrition, life skills, youth employment, expungement & juvenile law. Caitlin Mejia stated it is great to be back on track and having the programs in person. Caitlin reported that probation held a job fair that was attended by 100 clients (both adults and juveniles). She indicated that April 26<sup>th</sup> they were going to hold another job fair with the hospitality employers.

## **VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **A. YSC Planning Committee**

Trude Arnette reported that the YSC Planning Committee met on March 2, 2023. She indicated that the group has been reviewing and discussing various studies, reports and data that will be helpful to our development of the Youth Services Plan. Information shared at the March meeting included:

- Updated Children System of Care and Child Welfare Maps
- Monmouth Vicinage-Court Processing-Family Division Caseload
- December 2022 -Probation Profile- Juvenile Supervision
- 2020-2021 NJ DOE-School Performance Reports (*Please note that the new School Performance Reports for 2021-2022 should be released this month*)
- Pew Research Center Links to articles on parenting, teens, social media, cyberbullying, school shootings and the educational toll due to COVID-19.
- American Psychological Association Articles on how to help teens manage stress, suicide prevention, firearm safety, school violence ... and
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2011-2021

Trude Arnette indicated that some program updates were provided which, included Prevention First's move to 40 Christopher Way in Eatontown and an update on the YMCA of Greater Monmouth County mentoring services. A U.S. Department of Education press release was shared that indicated federal funds to support mental health and student wellness announced for New Jersey includes: \$2,700,000 for the NJ Department of Education; \$279,059 for Passaic Board of Education, and \$807,332 for Kean University.

Trude stated that there is a YSC Planning Committee Meeting on Thursday, April 6<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 AM. She indicated that there will be discussion on strategies to gain youth, family and community input on service priorities and gaps in service for the next three-year Youth Services Plan through our service providers & points in the system. Exploration of survey instruments or focus group questions will take place.

### **B. Juvenile Justice System Improvement**

Kathy Collins highlighted the 2022 Annual Report prepared for the New Jersey Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement on Juvenile Justice Reform in New Jersey. The impressive publication was e-mailed out to the membership for review. A historical perspective on JDAI was given. Some of us remember its inception in New Jersey 20 years ago and some of the concerns at the time Kathy Collins stated the results in New Jersey have been remarkable. Reductions in detention populations have dropped by 74% with youth of color accounting for almost 90% of the decrease. The year in review reflects on the continued evolution of youth justice reform in NJ and puts a spotlight on state and local achievements. Focus areas contained in the annual report included: promoting race equity, detention reform, mechanisms to divert youth from the formal system, reinforcing & promoting the JJC's plan for transforming agency practice, and broader system decision points. Kathy Collins shared that Monmouth County is highlighted in the report relative to Navigating the Court Process with the Support of a Family Navigator: the court's Family Division recruitment of youth for Juvenile Conference Committees; and the School/Justice Partnership survey of school SACs and District Superintendents regarding school-based referrals for marijuana possession and disciplinary responses and the school wide education and awareness program that resulted. Kathy Collins stated that the local efforts outlined in the report are inspirational.

**VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

**IX. OLD BUSINESS**

**X. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**XI. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned.

***Upcoming YSC Meeting Dates- June 6, 2023-Human Services Building, First Floor Conference Room; August 1, 2023-Agricultural (Ag) Building, Conference Room # 2; October 3, 2023-Agricultural (Ag) Building, Conference Room #2; and December 5, 2023-Virtual via Zoom.***