

Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Meeting

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
810 Seventh Street NW.
Washington, DC 20531

Wednesday, October 26, 2022
1:00 -2:35 p.m.

Attendance:

Liz Ryan, Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Vice Chair, Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Vanita Gupta, Associate Attorney General of the United States

Julie Herr, Designated Federal Official, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Miranda Lynch-Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Human Services Policy, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

David G. Rice, Special Assistant for Housing and Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Sheryl Davis, Executive Director, San Francisco Human Rights Commission

Bonita Williams, National Program Leader Vulnerable Populations, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Manny Lamarre, Senior Advisor, U.S. Department of Labor

Mark Patterson, Administrator, Kawaihoa Youth and Family Wellness Center

Rose Petoskey, Senior Counselor to the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior

Amy Solomon, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, Department of Justice

Michael D. Smith, Chief Executive Officer, AmeriCorps

Beth Connolly, Assistant Director, Office of Public Health, Office of National Drug Control Policy

Rebecca Zornick, Acting Deputy Director of the National Mental Health and Substance Abuse Policy Laboratory, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Deborah Spitz, Group Leader, Teachers, Leaders, and Special Populations Office of School Support and Accountability (SSA), U.S. Department of Education

Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt, Judge, 449th District Court, Hidalgo County, Texas

Mary “Tib” Campise, Associate Director, Child and Youth Advocacy, U.S. Department of Defense

Andrea Coleman, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

National Juvenile Justice Network's Young Justice Leaders

Arrianna Jentink-Bristol

Mora Greer

NyKia Gatson

Dallas Crosby

Alani Rouse

Derick Mejia Torres

Administrator Ryan opened the meeting with remarks welcoming members and attendees.

Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta welcomed the Coordinating Council on behalf of Council Chair and Attorney General Merrick Garland and noted it was nice to see the Council reconvene after a long hiatus. Each member has much to contribute to keeping communities healthy and safe.

She welcomed new members and welcomed the Young Justice Leaders Panel. She noted, "We need to hear from young people who have lived experiences with the juvenile justice system." The Council is eager to hear the panel's insights on what works and what doesn't. Especially during this—Youth Justice Action Month--it is critical that we continue forward progress towards a juvenile justice system that is truly just.

We must improve youth outcomes while enhancing community safety. We must renew our focus on keeping youth out of unnecessary confinement and in their communities with the support they need.

But we at the Justice Department know that we cannot do this work alone. That's why we must work together with our partners at the federal, state, and local levels. The Coordinating Council is essential to that work. The challenges that our youth experience don't fit neatly into silos, and neither can our responses.

Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Amy Solomon echoed the critical importance of youth voices in informing our work. She and her colleagues at OJJDP have spent months listening to stakeholders in the field and have seen incredible progress over the last few years. She noted that youth arrests and residential placement are at historic lows. States are making an effort to keep young people out of the adult system. Children are better served when they are treated like children. Young people and those under 17 are responsible for very few crimes. She is hopeful that the Council's work will build on this positive momentum in the field and the successes that we all know are possible.

Liz Ryan Remarks

Key Points:

- The President has proclaimed October 2022 to be Youth Justice Action Month.
- The Council was formed in 1974 as both a sounding board and an incubator for new ideas. It is charged with making recommendations to Congress and the President. Together, we look forward to fulfilling the Council's statutory charge by sharing critical

information, identifying opportunities for collaboration, and improving the way that federal programs serve our young people.

- As OJJDP Administrator, I have established several key priorities for the Office: treating children as children; serving young people at home with their families and in their communities; and opening up opportunities for young people involved with the justice system.
- Running through OJJDP's priorities are two essential principles: a commitment to racial equity and fairness; and a vow to listen to and hear the concerns of young people impacted by the juvenile justice system.
- What the Council hears from today's panel will be critical in helping the group establish its priorities, which are separate and independent from OJJDP's priorities.
- Justice is not "one size fits all. The needs of our young people are complex, and they require a multidisciplinary approach." That's why the work of this Council is so essential.

The Council went around the room introducing themselves before Andrea Coleman convened the Youth Panel.

Andrea Coleman led the Young Justice Leaders Panel, a panel of young people who had been involved in the juvenile justice system as kids – and "kids" is an important term, one panelist noted. It's important to remember that "young people," and "juveniles" are "kids." They aren't young adults; they don't think and behave like adults.

Andrea asked the first question of the panel. Due to time constraints, it was noted that Council members would not be engaging in back and forth with the panel.

Tell the Council about yourself and why you care about youth justice.

Derrick: 1st generation immigrant. Came to the U.S. undocumented from Honduras. Wants to break the cycle of violence.

Dallas: He was incarcerated at 15 and tried as an adult at 16. He helps kids in the area where he lives. He represents people who look like him as well as his white counterparts.

NyKia: Represents youth who are silenced within Kansas systems. Identified a lack of support when parents are in prison; wanted to be productive and not in the system but she couldn't because she was just "trying to survive."

Alani: Wants to focus on mental health. She was in a psychiatric hospital, which did not serve her well. Thinks the age to enter the adult system should be raised.

Mora: Dad in prison since she was 6 months of age. She felt that she lost a parent to the justice system; mentioned "push out." Was not able to be caught (for help) before she could fail. She noted that resources should be offered to kids before they get into the system.

Arrianna: She went through the system, cousins and siblings also went through the system. Brother died by suicide; system failed him.

Andrea posed the second question to the panel: *How does criminalization affect young people?*

Dallas: He noted that one day, youth will be sitting in the seats of the CC. Kids are impressionable at ages 13 and 14. He said that it's important to refer to "youth" as "kids." Using "kids" brings home the fact that these young people are in fact kids. Once a kid has a felony, it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to get a good job when they are out of prison.

NyKia: She noted that it's important to "pre-habilitate." And it could be easier than to rehabilitate someone. She spoke of knowing someone who had mental health issues who died in prison. It's important to have resources available and to understand what preventative measures are available and when to take them. She noted that families suffer as a result of criminalization and incarceration and the disconnection.

Ari: Causes stress in addition to what's going on at home. Criminalization leads to no jobs and not being able to attend school. Fines and fees can't be paid, which leads to additional problems with the justice system. She said she felt as if her "guard was always up," leading to issues with mental illness. She wondered if it was possible for justice-involved youth to be paid to go to school, and that pay could go to fines and fees.

Derrick: Criminal justice system is being used as a fix for the failures of all other systems – housing, education, labor. It doesn't prevent criminals; the system makes them.

Dallas: A system set up to make people of color (POC) fail. He noted that the public defender was more like the "public pretender." There are no initiatives to help POC.

Mora: Once charged, kids are far away from families; stripped of names (referred to as numbers), family. The root of the problem is mental health. It's not taken seriously in the Black and Brown communities. A kid in the system has no money, no job, no housing once they are released but are expected to pay fines. She noted that there is plenty of money to keep kids in the system, but apparently no money to help kids when they are out of the system. She said, "the system is not meant for me. It's meant to break me."

Alani: Criminalization takes away the ability to heal. Once someone is in the criminal justice system, that is the standard they are held to. Criminalization is limiting and damaging; holding kids to adult standards that even they can't meet. "Rehabilitation" is not rehab at all. In rehab or therapy, kids can give the illusion that they are okay just to get out of the hospital. She said, "no one cares if you're okay; just that you look okay."

What can we do to ensure that youth justice systems treat all youth – kids – with equity and fairness regarding race, LGBTQI+ and economic status?

Mora: Treat kids as if they were your own. Treat them like they are members of your family. Treat as if they are “you or your own.” Important to think of it as, “I could make a big impact in this kid’s life,” while understanding that this impact could be negative or positive.

Ari: Treat each kid on a case-by-case basis. Ask why. “Why do kids act the way they act.” No one asked her why, which could have helped her. Additionally, get rid of fees and fines. In order to get off probation, fines must be paid. If fines aren’t paid in the juvenile system, at 18, they enter the adult system. This keeps people in the system.

Dallas: This is not a fair system. It’s unjust. He noted that “You can’t be what you can’t see.” He knows of a trans man who was put into female prison; the individual was raped and became pregnant. The individual should have never been in that situation in the first place.

Alani noted that “the house needs healing.”

NyKia: Funds aren’t being used for mental health or for transitional housing, welfare, or education.

Derrick: Mentorships, fellowships, and access to post-secondary education are important to providing support to kids.

Council Member Comments and Feedback

Michael Smith: Excited about how service plays into navigating the system. Noted that mental health and substance abuse are vital to address. Give children opportunities and education.

Beth Connolly: Noted the president’s unity agenda when addressing mental health and substance use; these are often co-occurring disorders. One thing we can do as a council is think about how these impact children, their communities, their well-being, and equity.

Rebecca Zornick: Noted the importance of mental health awareness. Address mental health with early interventions and diversion from the system.

Deborah Spitz: Noted the importance of transition services; access to post-secondary education. She echoed a panelist’s comment that some of these children can’t even read but they can be jailed.

Judge Renee Rodriguez-Betancourt: Offered a judge’s perspective. The judge and the system need the full picture and need to review an offender’s background. She noted that after hearing the youth panel, she is compelled to take action.

Mary Campise: Feels a need to press pause, reflect on what we heard before we jump in to take action. We don’t want to have a reaction, but first reflect on what we heard. Wants panel to know she won’t forget what she heard.

Rose Petoskey: Indian youth and Indian communities are impacted by the justice system in a specialized way. She noted the importance of acknowledging mentors in underserved communities.

Mark Patterson: He let the youth panel know that the past doesn't define you. It's possible to turn your life around. It doesn't happen overnight, but rather a lifelong process. It's possible to break the cycle and the panel shows it. He said that there needs to be a clear vision for our youth, and we need business community support, life skills development, 4H in every county.

Manny Lamarre: Amazed at the authenticity of the panel and the concrete takeaways. At Labor, main priority is to improve the workforce. We have a clear vision for youth, and our secretary and staff have direct experience in this area. Priorities are on paid work experience, having the business community support young people, and having "no wrong doors" – making sure that there are supportive services and ensuring those services are provided.

Bonita Williams: USDA and 4-H provide skill development for young people. They also have a sports program in every county in the country. We work with historically black colleges and universities. We look forward to working with this committee and engaging young people before they get into the system, and we want to work to change the lives of those already in the system.

Sheryl Davis: She notes the importance of outreach and engagement. She mentioned we should be creating tools and checklists and manuals at the federal level to be able to give to states and local communities. Best practices informed by community, not researchers. The youth community needs quality affordable housing.

David Rice: Our role is to ensure that housing is better quality, there is more of it, and that it's more affordable. Looking forward to working with the Council to ensure housing is accessible.

Miranda Lynch-Smith: Wants to be accountable to the people who have shared their experiences. Wants to deliver on solutions. We can have a long-term vision of support for families, and we can figure out what we can do right now to make a difference.

Liz and Julie thanked attendees for their participation.

Julie closed the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6OxdFMGa3E&t=4244s>