

**Behavioral Health Sub-Committee**  
Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission  
Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division  
Connecticut Office of Policy and Management

**September 2, 2021**  
**10:00 – 11:00 am**  
**(via TEAMS)**

Minutes

In attendance: Michael Aiello, Chris Burke, Craig Burns, Jillian Cundari, Judith Dowd, Gail Hardy, Michael Norko, Monte Radler, David Rentler

1. Minutes of the June 3, 2021 meeting were approved without additions or corrections.
2. Discussion of resuming criminal justice operations, inter-agency communications and preparation

***DMHAS report from Michael Norko and Chris Burke:***

Competency to stand trial evaluations have been completed at an average rate of 8.2 per week across the state since January and have kept pace with orders. The pre-COVID averages ranged from 11-13. We continue to use vacant courtrooms as venues to do the evaluations, with DOC transporting defendants from facilities to the designated courtrooms. Evaluations have also been done in our offices, and some in DOC facilities in person. Michael Aiello noted that the volume of court hearings is higher now than in 2020, but not back to normal rates, which is consistent with the rates of competency evaluations.

Pretrial Intervention Program (PTIP) referrals are increasing over the last several months. The demand exceeded providers' capacity to enroll new clients for some time, but we are re-distributing referrals and managing the rate. Regular meetings are occurring with Judicial to monitor the program referrals and program enrollments. Referrals are not yet back to normal pre-COVID rates, but the increases are helping providers restore clinician time to accommodate the enrollments.

Data from Judicial revealed that in CY19, 43% of defendants referred for competency evaluation had misdemeanor-only charges. In CY 19 there were 78 such referrals of misdemeanants in the Bridgeport court. We have entered into a contract with a provider in Bridgeport to provide 3 beds for an enhanced forensic respite program to which such defendants can be referred in lieu of competency evaluation and continued criminal justice processes. We had one meeting with Bridgeport court staff to describe the program, and are planning another and hope to begin admitting clients into this form of diversion in the next couple weeks.

We are close to hiring a case manager to increase the pace of Temporary Leave and Conditional Release applications from Whiting Forensic Hospital. A new re-entry program focused on southeast CT partners is being revised to focus on community supports for women with intimate partner violence and trauma histories. A new police diversion program for six police departments along the shoreline is providing clinical support to officers during overnight hours.

Three recovery peer specialists are being hired to work with Jail Diversion teams. Staffing is being increased in programs at Continuum of Care.

We are planning trainings on criminogenic need for our providers through a grant.

Four courts are being added to the Treatment Pathways Program via a new grant. Judicial will decide the most appropriate courts.

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***DOC report from Craig Burns:***

Videoconferencing/telehealth equipment has been added; there are now two units each at York, Garner, and Osborne and one unit at Carl Robinson, and intake. They have discovered the need to purchase external speakers so that the remote participants can be heard in the DOC station. They are developing processes for gathering the data required by the federal grant that supported the equipment purchases. They believe that the telehealth equipment will be used for paneling hearings on Wednesdays and Thursdays, making it available for competency evaluations and discharge/re-entry planning the other days. DMHAS will look into whether additional grant dollars can be used for the speakers, and for additional equipment if experience demonstrates the latter is needed and would be useful.

DOC has hired a new APRN as the Regional Mental Health Administrator.

DOC is developing process for compliance with the Governor’s Executive Order 21-1 related to segregated housing and other forms of restrictive housing related to out of cell time. There are concerns for developing procedures related to individuals whose acute mental illness makes out of cell time more challenging. Targets for next phases are Oct 1 and Dec 1.

With the closure of Northern, DOC is working on creating alternate COVID isolation units at each facility.

Dr. Burns noted a recent webinar demonstrating the effectiveness and cost savings of Receptions Centers in Pittsburgh. Dr. Norko attended a webinar reporting success with a similar program in northeast Oklahoma. Dr. Burns proposed four regional reception centers for CT. Dr. Norko suggested we query law enforcement about the viability of programs covering regions (i.e., whether officers would be able to drive out of their locale to bring someone to a regional center).

***CSSD report from Michael Aiello:***

Following up on the housing survey, CSSD is developing women’s beds in collaboration with Mercy Housing, which can be used by the courts and by probation. They have developing rapid re-housing in New Haven via collaboration with Columbus House and the Department of Housing and are now working on the same in Hartford. They have also identified that pretrial clients are at greater risk of housing instability, and are developing in-reach programs to identify unstably housed individuals in Hartford and New Haven who are pretrial.

The Sierra enhancement of clinical services for mental health is working well; Connection has moved the program from its criminal justice side to its behavioral health side. Staffing, programming, and access to the community have all increased. Training and communication have also increased.

ASIST RFP has been posted for CSSD contractors.

***Division of Criminal Justice report from Gail Hardy:***

The courts are opening further: juries are being selected; protective barriers are in place in the courtrooms; the public has been able to attend hearings to some extent. The courts are working on clearing out the backlog of cases related to pandemic restrictions. Jail diversion referrals are increasing.

PSRB hearings are continuing in a virtual format.

There are a few NGRI trials coming up in the near future.

***Parole report from David Rentler:***

Dana Begin from DMHAS has presented trainings on mobile crisis to parole officers and halfway house, which have gone well.

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Parole expects to have ten more residential substance beds available on October 1.

Parole is developing an RFP for a five-bed sub-acute mental health residential service for individuals who are not compliant with their psychiatric medications, but do not need a hospital level of care.

**Public defender report from Monte Radler:**

Attorney Radler is concerned about the needs of citizens with autism spectrum disorder, especially those involved in the criminal justice system. He supports the idea of looking into Reception Centers. He noted the upcoming report from the Whiting/CVH Legislative Task Force and possible recommendations related to the PSRB. He and Dr. Norko are to speak separately about this.

**OPM report from Judy Dowd:**

Judy noted the CHES program which was developed to provide Medicaid-supported housing. This may be an avenue to explore for hospital outflow tracks, now that the criteria have changed to only require risk of homelessness for participation. She suggested that DSS and DMHAS housing staff have a meeting with several of us to discuss further.

- 3. Other agency updates: none
  
- 4. CJPAC: Next meeting September 30, 2021.
  
- 5. Next meeting Behavioral Health Subcommittee: December 2, 2021. That meeting will be scheduled for two hours to allow further discussion of CHES and autism services.
  
- 6. Tentative 2022 meeting schedule: March 3, May 5, July 7, Sept 1, Dec 1