

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

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

Minutes

In attendance: Michael Aiello, Thomas Burr, Tasha Hamm-Busha, Jillian Hancock, Judith Dowd,
Gail Hardy, Michael Norko, Monte Radler, David Rentler, Chelsea Ross, Sally Zanger

1. Minutes of the September 2, 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:

Competency to stand trial evaluations have been ordered at an increased volume in recent weeks. This led to a surge of admissions to Whiting for restoration, which have been challenging to manage while one unit was closed for significant needed repairs. In the last couple weeks, we have had a decreased in evaluations completed because of COVID – either because DOC facilities were closed to professional visits, or detainees could not be transported to courthouses because they tested positive. We still continue to use vacant courtrooms as venues to do the evaluations, with DOC transporting defendants from facilities to the designated courtrooms, although this has become more challenging for the courts as they are using the courtrooms more. Dr. Burns has worked hard to arrange a protocol for us to use newly-acquired videoconferencing equipment for competency evaluations, and we expect those to begin as early as next week. This is fortuitous timing with the increased COVID cases around the state and the likely emergence of the Omicron variant.

Pretrial Intervention Program (PTIP) referrals continue to increase, although at a pace that the providers are generally able to manage. A couple weeks ago, one provider needed assistance with some of the referrals and they were sent to another provider. Regular meetings with Judicial are continuing in order to monitor the program referrals and program enrollments. Early indications are that the fee waiver rate is increasing with the increased referrals; this may lead to a deficit in the pre-trial account. We are meeting with our fiscal unit on a monthly basis to review and project the fiscal impact.

We met with the Bridgeport court staff on October 19 to review the plans for the new Enhanced Forensic Respite Bed pilot program in that location. The goal is to refer defendants with misdemeanor-only charges who might otherwise have competence evaluations and restoration ordered. The first client was admitted in late October, who has now been successfully discharged to follow-up care, with a return court date next week. A second client left the program for a few days, but has returned. A third was accepted, but transfer from DOC was delayed because he tested positive for COVID. The DMHAS research unit (UConn School of Social Work staff) will be doing a program evaluation of outcomes.

An offer was made to an individual for the case manager position to increase the pace of Temporary Leave and Conditional Release applications from Whiting Forensic Hospital. The person did not take the position, and it is currently being re-posted.

A new re-entry program with Alliance for Living and York Correctional Institution is being initiated to focus on community supports for women with intimate partner violence and trauma histories. The program will use Peer Navigators as a key element of the service.

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A new police diversion program for six police departments along the shoreline is providing clinical support to officers during overnight hours. A telephone crisis clinician from BHcare was made available November 1.

Three recovery peer specialists are being hired (through CCAR) to work with Jail Diversion teams in areas with high rates of opioid overdose (Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury). We are awaiting final approval of new contracts.

Four courts are being added to the Treatment Pathways Program (TPP) via a new grant (see CSSD report below).

On December 1, Governor Lamont announced the nomination of Nancy Navaretta, MA, LPC, NCC for the position of Commissioner of DMHAS.

DOC report from Tasha Hamm-Busha:

Increases in COVID cases have prompted cancelling of social visits as well as some professional visits. Inmates who test positive are not transported off their housing unit, although it should be possible (in the case of videoconference evaluations) for the computer equipment to be brought to the inmate's unit.

CSSD report from Michael Aiello:

The courts being added to the TPP are New Britain, Waterbury, Danielson, and New Haven.

The movement of the Sierra program to the behavioral health side of The Connection has resulted in significant improvements, and the program is working well.

ASIST contracts are being updated.

CSSD is working on the Section 1115 (of the Social Security Act) waiver for care of individuals with opioid use disorder and substance use disorders. There will be significant overlap for individuals with co-occurring disorders (with mental health disorders).

Division of Criminal Justice report from Gail Hardy:

Trials continue to increase in number, with Part A cases now being called. Trials are underway currently in New Haven and Stamford. Courtrooms are not fully available for trials, as they are also being used for various conferences and meetings to permit social distancing.

Competency to stand trial hearings are occurring both by videoconference and in person, depending on the court.

The courts are working on clearing out the backlog of cases related to pandemic restrictions; some cases where defendants have not been re-arrested are likely to be dismissed to help clear out the backlog of cases.

Resource coordinators in the Early Screening and Intervention programs (ESI) are working with homeless individuals, at levels approaching pre-pandemic volume.

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Parole report from David Rentler:

Parole has received responses to a 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. They are now reviewing the proposals.

Public defender report from Monte Radler:

The legislative CVH/Whiting Task Force has completed its work and the report is expected to be released soon.

OPM report from Judy Dowd:

The legislature has indicated an interest in focusing on the mental health system in the next session, which starts February 9. A hearing is planned for January 11 from 10a-12n to discuss continuum of care, gaps in services, etc. It is hoped that resources will be provided to meet needs across the continuum of behavioral health services.

3. Other agency updates: none

4. CHERS program and autism services:

In our last meeting, we wanted to explore whether the CHERS program might be used to establish new hospital outflow tracks based on risk of homelessness. Several members of the Behavioral Health Subcommittee met with Dawn Lambert of DSS on September 10, 2021 to learn about the program. CHERS targets individuals who are homeless (or at risk) who have significant co-occurring physical and behavioral health needs. Those who meet target criteria will also receive a housing voucher from the state. The funds are not available, however, to establish residential treatment programs. This program will thus not be a source of funds for establishing joint agency programs for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, as we had hoped.

Judy Dowd reported that the autism waiver is up for renewal, and the hope is that in the next round it will be possible to include wraparound services, including supportive housing, as part of the waiver. There is no mechanism for such services in the current waiver.

Michael Norko reported that DMHAS is investigating expansion of an existing community residential program in Hartford that is able to serve people with autism. DMHAS will need to continue meeting with DDS and DSS to discuss other potential joint agency ventures for this population.

5. CJPAC: Next meeting December 16, 2021.

6. 2022 meetings of the Behavioral Health Subcommittee:

- March 3 (Another meeting may be scheduled depending on the outcomes of the January 11 legislative hearing)
- May 5
- July 7
- Sept 1
- Dec 1