

Children's Justice Act

Under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children - Three Year Assessment - Connecticut 2018-2021

Number:

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**Connecticut's Three-Year Assessment Report
2018-2021**

I. Provide a brief overview of the CJA State Task Force

The Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children (GTF, Task Force, or Governor's Task Force), first established in 1988, identified the need for greater coordination of agencies involved in the investigation, intervention, and prosecution of child sexual abuse and serious physical abuse cases. The development of multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) that provide critical coordination at the beginning stages of an investigation has provided a means of maximizing community resources that strengthen and improve interagency responses and interventions. The guiding principles and values that were established initially continue to guide the direction and focus of the Task Force.

II. Overview of systems improvements that were made to address the Task Force goals/recommendations that resulted from the previous Three - Year Assessment.

PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS 2018 THREE YEAR ASSESSMENT

The GTFJAC engaged a consultant in the fall of 2016 to develop a tool to survey the task force and conduct a strategic planning retreat based upon results. The consultant was contracted to provide the services and deliverables as follows: strategic planning for Connecticut GTFJAC – to include advance consultation with the site; advance survey development, distribution, compilation; materials development, facilitation of planning session(s); development of strategic plan documents; follow-up support regarding implementation.

The following are the recommendations from Connecticut's 2018 Three Year Assessment.

Recommendation #1: Use the next six months to develop a framework and plans for the next federal grant application, which is (was) due May 2018. Four ad-hoc groups replaced all the existing workgroups and committees as follows:

Based on the 2017 retreat outcomes, the four ad hoc groups established at that time have been incorporated into the ongoing priority areas of the Task Force. During the three-year reporting period, the MDT/CAC Evaluation and Quality Assurance workgroup has been incorporated into the MDT Evaluation committee; the training workgroup has evolved into a larger Training Committee. The Systems Gaps and Barriers nor the Child Fatality Response workgroups were active during this reporting period. However, based upon input from these areas, ongoing presentations have occurred during bi-monthly Task Force Meetings. (The areas addressed in the section of 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C) are identified next to the topic area)

- 1. MDT/CAC Evaluation & Quality Assurance -- Section 107 e (1)(A) and (B)**
- 2. Training -- Section 107 e (1)(A), (B) and (C)**
- 3. System Gaps & Barriers -- Section 107 e (1)(A), (B) and (C)**
- 4. Child Fatality Response – Section 107e (1) (A) and (C)**

Recommendation #2: Discuss possible restructuring of the GTF meeting schedule and agenda:

The Connecticut task force has been in existence for several years. The task force needed to refocus and ensure it met the tenets of the CJA legislation and adopt national best practice standards. Education around the legislation, review of the bylaws, discussions around the model, and a review of best practices culminated in restructuring

the task force, voted on in March 2018 and implemented as of July 2018. During this reporting period, the task force dedicated time on each agenda for presentations to the membership to increase member knowledge in various areas. These topic areas are suggested and selected at the task force meeting and presented at a subsequent meeting. The Task Force also looked at possible barriers to having representation from key stakeholders on the task force and updated the By-Laws to address this. It was noted that there were at least two constituencies, the Adult Survivor and the Parent representative, who may not have an agency that was supporting them to attend the Task Force meetings. The Task Force looked to incorporate a bylaw change to compensate for the Adult Survivor and the Parent Representation on the task force. The bylaw change was voted on and passed at the May 2020 GTF meeting, with the vote on compensation amount passed in July 2020. During this reporting period, the COVID 19 Pandemic occurred, and in March 2020, Connecticut ceased in-person meetings, resulting in virtual Task Force meetings, sub-committee meetings, and training.

Recommendation #3: GTFJAC and CCA continue to work together to support MDT/CAC development:

It is recommended that the GTFJAC and CCA (Connecticut Children’s Alliance) continue to work together to support the ongoing needs of Connecticut’s Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) that are legislatively mandated to investigate specific cases while ensuring that all Connecticut children and their families have access to high quality, comprehensive, specialized and culturally competent services. The task force is committed to ensuring MDTs receive evidence-based training, peer review support for forensic interviewers, and resources to serve Connecticut’s families. The task force continues to look at ways that Connecticut can fully implement Public Act No. 17-190, which spelled out in statute, Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs): ensure accreditation of Connecticut’s CACs, include key members of the MDTs and the role of the Connecticut Children’s Alliance to provide annual reports to the GTF and the Connecticut General Assembly. This legislation was signed into law in June 2017 and went into effect on July 1, 2018. The task force is committed to assisting all Connecticut’s Child Advocacy Centers to reach full accreditation. It has looked to align the MDT evaluation tools to align to NCA standards closer. The task force feels this comprehensive support will address Section 107 e (1)(A), (B), and (C). The MDT Evaluation committee spent time during this reporting period updating the evaluation tools, creating Universal Standards and Universal Team Protocols and Universal MOUs with key stakeholders. The Training Committee provided statewide training aligned with topic areas solicited from the MDT Provider Outcome Measurement Surveys. With the continuation of social distancing due to COVID 19 in the last year of the reporting period, all of the in-person training scheduled by the teams was canceled. The GTF Training Committee and CCA have continued to partner to provide virtual training to meet the needs of training hours for team members.

Additional recommendations since 2018 Three Year Assessment Submission:

Recommendation #4: The task force will review the goals of the next Child and Family Service Plan

(CFSP): The Department of Children and Families is responsible for developing and implementing the Child and Family Service Plan due on June 30, 2019. The 2019 CFSP was shared with the members of the task force. Additionally, the GTFJAC members reviewed the approved Program Improvement Plan (PIP) and summary, which outlined strategic actions for the department to meet the goals and outcomes found in the CFSR. One of the task force chairs participates in the APSR process and provides updates regarding the MDT/CAC model. One of the task force chairs participates in the APSR process and provides updates regarding the MDT/CAC model. Three members of the task force and the GTF Coordinator participated in the CFSP process through stakeholder meetings and contributed to the final report. The final CFSP was shared with the GTF. Through participation in this working group, the GTF was invited by the Office of Early Childhood to ensure GTF stakeholders participated in community action sessions around the mixed-delivery system of services and supports for families with children birth through five with the following overarching goal: *To uncover the most practical, well-received ways to increase coordination and collaboration between the home visiting, special education, Medicaid, child welfare, housing, public health, and early care and education systems to better support families and facilitate their participation in the early care and education system.* Family involvement is a tenet in the CFSP. These sessions looked to convene as broad as possible local/regional participation around services and supports for

vulnerable families with young children. Information regarding these sessions was shared with the Task Force and Connecticut's Multidisciplinary teams. Task Force members intend to ensure that purposeful connections are made between the work of the task force and the goals of the CFSP.

Recommendation #5: The task force will review statewide data. The Chapter Director of the Connecticut Children's Alliance (CCA) provides the task force data collected from the statewide Outcome Measurement System (OMS); surveys are distributed to caregivers, multidisciplinary team members, and other key stakeholders. The Training Committee developed additional questions for the OMS survey to gather data regarding training area needs. The surveys collected data regarding the Minimal Facts training, allowing the GTF to evaluate various factors related to the training. The MDT Evaluation committee began the evaluation process of the state's Multidisciplinary teams. The data collected during the evaluations of the MDTs are reviewed to ascertain if there are trends, issues, or gaps in services statewide. These universal issues enable the GTF to solicit and develop training or recommend policies to address the need. The Office of the Child Advocate provides the Task Force annual data regarding child fatalities and speaks to the trends related to child maltreatment-related fatalities.

III. Overview of the process used to complete the 2021 Three-Year Assessment.

The GTFJAC engaged a consultant in summer 2020 to conduct a statewide assessment of Connecticut's systems. The consultant was provided past CJA grant applications, past three-year assessments, the 2009 Connecticut Statewide Assessment, the 2021 CJA Program Instruction, and participated in the March 31, 2021, Federal grantee meeting on Three Year Assessment. This was done to ensure that the consultant had a firm understanding of the Children's Justice Act requirements.

The consultant met regularly with key GTFJAC stakeholders throughout the assessment process. Ten meetings were held with the consultant, the GTFJAC Coordinator, and the Tri-Chairs of the Task Force, who formed an ad hoc committee to ensure the completion of the Three-Year Assessment. Additionally, the consultant participated in a dozen meetings with the Connecticut Children's Alliance Executive Director. These meetings provided the consultant with background and clarifying information on definitions, policies, and protocols related to Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs). The full Task Force received regular updates from the consultant on the assessment process and participated in a special meeting in April 2021 to review the assessment results and discuss recommendations based on findings. The consultant's full report and executive summary are provided as addendums to this report. (Addendum I and Addendum II)

Data Collection:

The consultant conducted data-gathering efforts to review the current system of investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of child abuse cases and neglect and identify potential areas needing reform. Several areas were identified for exploration: investigations by the Department of Children and Families and law enforcement, prosecution, services provided to families, and how the system interacts with offenders and alleged offenders.

The following data collection efforts were conducted: (Details provided in the consultant's final report.)

- **Interviews:** Sixteen interviews were conducted over the telephone or via Zoom from September 30, 2020, to November 2, 2020. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length.
- **Focus groups:** Nine focus groups were held from January 12 to March 9, 2021, with a total of 49 participants overall. The focus groups were organized by discipline and consisted of DCF workers, forensic interviewers, law enforcement, court-based victim advocates, Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Coordinators, medical professionals, mental health professionals, prosecutors, and victim advocates. Participants were recruited

through suggestions from MDT Coordinators and other sources. Focus groups lasted approximately one hour. All sessions were recorded, and notes were transcribed.

- On-line survey: A 26-question survey was distributed to GTFJAC members, MDT Coordinators, staff at the Department of Children and Families, prosecutors, victim advocates, and other groups. All but four of the twenty-six questions were narrative. One hundred five people responded to the survey, with a completion rate of 58%. Of those 105 people, 18 were members of the Task Force. Comments from respondents included in the final report from the consultant were edited for clarity and length. This occurred in consultation with the Tri-Chairs.
- Observation of MDT meetings: The consultant observed six MDT meetings representing different geographic areas of the state.
- OMS Surveys: Data from the Connecticut Children’s Alliance Outcome Measurement System (OMS) surveys of families/caregivers served at CACs and MDT teams were included in the final report.
- NCATrak Data: Data from the statewide CAC database was included to illustrate cases that went through the MDT/CAC process.
- Task Force Member Agency Survey: Task Force members were asked to submit information regarding their agency’s activities during 2018-2021 relative to the three categories contained in Section 107 (e) (1), as well as identify individual areas of focus for the next three years and their recommendations for priorities for the GTF for the coming three years. These agency responses are provided as an addendum to this report. (Addendum III)

IV. A clear outline of the policy and training recommendations that resulted from the 2021 Three-Year Assessment process will guide the Task Force’s work for the next three-year period. (Details provided in V)

2021 Three-Year Assessment Recommendations

- Recommendation #1: Enhance communication, collaboration, and role clarity through training. Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).
- Recommendation #2: GTFJAC and CCA continue to work together to support MDT/CAC development. Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).
- Recommendation #3: Increase system transparency and identify gaps through an annual data collection process and report.
- Recommendation #4: Begin to address racial disparities and implicit bias through training, policy/protocol changes, and updates to MDT standards and evaluation criteria. Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).

V. Description of Task Force plans to incorporate the new recommendations into the work of CJA. (i.e., preliminary information on activities that will be undertaken over the next three years to address the recommendations).

The majority of the proposed activities reflect the continuing needs of Connecticut and have driven much of the GTF’s work over the years. Thus, the 2021-2024 Three Year Assessment Recommendations align with the ongoing work of the Task Force.

Recommendation #1: Enhance communication, collaboration, and role clarity through training.

The GTFJAC Training Committee has partnered with CCA to provide statewide training during the previous reporting period. The Task Force will assess the activities and outcomes of the training committee to ensure the committee addresses the training needs identified through the Three-Year Assessment, OMS survey results, and other data collection activities.

The committee has the following responsibilities:

- Review specific training offered and ensure it will enhance providers statewide to enable them to better perform their roles as MDT members and other professionals within their specific disciplines.
- Assess existing training opportunities and evaluate the unmet needs for training of MDT members in terms of the investigation, assessment, intervention, and prosecution of child sexual abuse.
- Make recommendations for structural and procedural changes to the Governor’s Task Force for Justice for Abused Children to most efficiently and thoroughly meet the training needs of GTFJAC members, law and judicial professionals, and the professionals within their disciplines.

Recommendation #2: GTFJAC and CCA continue to work together to support MDT/CAC development.

The Connecticut Children’s Alliance (CCA) is a coalition of Children’s Advocacy Centers and Multidisciplinary Teams that work together to improve the system in which child abuse cases are handled. The CCA director position is supported, in part, by Connecticut’s CJA funding allocated to GTFJAC. Since its inception, the Connecticut Children’s Alliance, Inc. has provided a forum for education and support to the state’s MDTs and CACs via monthly meetings and regular training opportunities. Formed initially as a grassroots alliance of the MDT coordinators, the CCA is now a federally recognized non-profit organization (established in May 2009) as well as an accredited NCA (National Children’s Alliance) State Chapter (awarded June 2011). CCA, Inc. is committed to strengthening multidisciplinary collaboration and fostering systemic and societal change to protect children. CCA, Inc. also is committed to ensuring that all Connecticut children and their families have access to high-quality, comprehensive, specialized, and culturally competent services of a Children’s Advocacy Center or Multidisciplinary Team.

The MDT coordinators, through CCA, have maintained their commitment to increase their visibility and become a voice for the children and families they serve. Members of the CCA continue to educate legislators and other stakeholders about Multidisciplinary Teams, Children’s Advocacy Centers, and the importance of a coordinated interagency response to child sexual abuse. In addition, the CCA continues to be involved in other statewide efforts to improve practice related to the investigation of child abuse cases. The GTFJAC supports the CCA’s mission that embraces “national best practice” in multidisciplinary investigations of child abuse.

Recommendation #3: Increase system transparency and identify gaps through an annual data collection process and report.

The MDT Evaluation committee collects data from individual teams during the evaluation process. In addition, the committee will be collecting universal issues that arise during these evaluations. The committee will collate these universal issues to present to the Task Force and other key stakeholders.

The Task Force should:

- Examine system/service gaps and barriers as well practice fidelity issues (e.g., forensic interviewers, medical exams) that have been previously brought to GTF
- Develop a systemic process for GTF to discuss and track system gaps/barriers regularly
- Identify strategies for GTF to develop a common policy platform or agenda

- Collect data from key stakeholders (partners, agencies, etc.) and develop quality assurance (importance of data to help define gaps and whether progress is being made at improving services and reducing gaps)
- Collect data periodically (perhaps quarterly) to monitor a change in the gaps/barriers
- Convene a working group to execute this process.

Recommendation #4: Begin to address racial disparities and implicit bias through training, policy/protocol changes, and updates to MDT standards and evaluation criteria.

Several respondents raised systemic racism, racial inequity, and implicit bias during the three-year assessment process. The GTFJAC Training Committee had begun to provide statewide training in these areas during the last year and will continue to ensure that related topic areas are addressed. Language and cultural barriers impact the experience of some victims, their families, and the character and quality of the interactions families have with professionals doing this work. The Task Force and CCA will continue to support the MDT/CACs in the state. Through the work of existing and new committees and engaging key stakeholders, the task force will develop strategies to address systems that contribute to the lack of culturally competent services in Connecticut. The MDT Evaluation committee reviews and updates the Connecticut Standards and Protocols for the MDTs. The committee will begin to review current documents and update them where appropriate.

2021-2024 Recommendations (The areas addressed in the section of 107 e (1) (A), (B), and (C) are identified next to the topic area)

- **Recommendation #1:** Enhance communication, collaboration, and role clarity through training.
- **Recommendation #2:** GTFJAC and CCA continue to work together to support MDT/CAC development.
- **Recommendation #3:** Increase system transparency and identify gaps through an annual data collection process and report.
- **Recommendation #4:** Begin to address racial disparities and implicit bias through training, policy/protocol changes, and updates to MDT standards and evaluation criteria.

2021-2022 Priority Area	2021-2024 – 3 Year assessment Priorities and Recommendations
Development and Support of MDTs and CACs – Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B), and (C).	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3 Recommendation 4
MDT Evaluation – Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3
Training– Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3 Recommendation 4
MDT Data Collection– Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).	Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3
GTF Membership	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3 Recommendation 4 It is an ongoing priority to have a full GTF to continue the work of GTF statewide and provide to members training opportunities that will assist them in their work.
GTF Website	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2
By-Laws	These are reviewed and updated as needed.
Legislation – Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).	Recommendation 3

2021-2022 Priority Area	2021-2024 – 3 Year assessment Priorities and Recommendations
Human Trafficking– Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3 Recommendation 4
Children with Disabilities	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3 Recommendation 4
Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) – Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B), and (C).	Recommendation 3 This is a requirement in the CJA program instructions. The documents have been provided to the GTF members for review, and a chair participates in the APSR process. Additionally, the CJA grant application is provided to the CFSR professionals at the Child Welfare agency each year.
Court Improvement Plan – Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B), and (C).	This is strongly encouraged at the CJA grantee meeting. The documents have been provided to the GTF members for review. Both of Connecticut’s CIP monitors sit on the GTF.
Child Fatalities	Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3 Recommendation 4
Cultural Competency, Racial Disparities, and Implicit Bias– Addresses 107 e (1) (A), (B) and (C).	Recommendation 1 Recommendation 2 Recommendation 3 Recommendation 4

2021 Three Year Assessment Addendums:

- The GTFJAC 3 Year Assessment Full Report and Executive Summary from the consultant. (Addendum I and Addendum II)
- 2021 Connecticut Three Year Assessment Members Agency Results (Addendum III)