

Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission (CJPAC)

Thursday, March 13, 2025

9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Legislative Office Building/Microsoft Teams / YouTube

1. Welcome and Introductions

Undersecretary Daniel Karpowitz opened the meeting, marking the first in-person gathering in four years. He welcomed attendees and highlighted the need for renewed collaboration, coherence, and accountability within the criminal justice system.

2. The Historical Origins and Statutory Purpose of CJPAC

Andrew Clark, Director of the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP) at UConn, presented a historical overview of CJPAC's formation. He traced the evolution from the Prison and Jail Overcrowding Commission to CJPAC, emphasizing bipartisan efforts, re-entry strategy mandates, and the integration of budget and policy goals into criminal justice planning.

3. Connecticut Criminal Justice Trends: Past, Present, and Near Future

Kevin Neary, Research Director at OPM CJPPD, provided detailed data trends. Crime and arrest rates have fallen by over 60% since the 1990s, but correctional populations are trending upward post-pandemic, driven by pre-trial detentions. He emphasized the 'puzzle' of rising incarceration amid falling crime, citing longer pre-trial stays and systemic shifts.

4. Reviving the Policy Commission's Focus on Re-entry

Undersecretary Karpowitz reiterated the importance of re-entry as a policy priority. He called for interagency collaboration and emphasized using existing legal authority rather than new legislation to strengthen re-entry services and reduce recidivism.

5. Brief Update on Federal Grants

Valina Carpenter, Grants Unit Director, provided a cautious outlook on federal grant funding. While active grants remain in effect, uncertainties regarding DOJ directives have led to a pause on new applications, particularly for Byrne JAG funds from 2017–2020.

6. CJPAC Member Updates

Department of Correction Update: Deputy Commissioner Sharonda Carlos, District Administrator Craig Washington, and Director of Engineering Christopher Iwanik presented updates. Highlights included new trade education at Cybulski, culture change initiatives like Amend and Chicago Beyond, facility internet infrastructure, and juvenile engagement programs such as Playdates with Dad.

Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division Update: Gary Roberge expressed concern about FY26-27 budget projections and their effect on diversion and supervision programs. He highlighted increasing reliance on pre-trial detention, high bonds, and gun variable bonds as significant contributors to recent population trends.

7. Legislative Guests and Reflections

Representative Bill Dyson emphasized the moral responsibility inherent in budget decisions, reflected on past reforms, and urged risk-taking leadership.

Senator Len Fasano stressed the increasing need for mental health and addiction diversion programs, citing past successes in New London's prosecutorial diversion efforts.

8. Closing Comments and Adjournment

Undersecretary Karpowitz thanked participants and reiterated the commission's role in bridging values and governance. He extended invitations to veteran legislators for continued involvement and closed the meeting at 10:59 AM.