

**Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force**  
**Dually Adjudicated Youth Roundtable**  
**August 24, 2020**

On August 24, 2020, the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force conducted a roundtable discussion with three youth who are currently or formerly adjudicated both dependent and delinquent. The meeting was facilitated by Task Force co-chair Representative Tarah Toohil and Task Force members Haundray Muir and Jonathan Rubin, deputy secretary of the Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth, and Families.

➤ ***Strengths of the Juvenile Justice System:***

- **Positive interactions with probation officers:** One youth shared that his relationship with his probation officer was “how [he] was able to stay connected.” The juvenile probation officer (JPO) “went the extra step to make sure everything was good.” Youth reported that probation officers were helpful in laying out the overall process and were able to connect them with needed services and programming in the community.
- **Pennsylvania court system provides a “voice” for youth.** One youth reported that upon entering the Pennsylvania court system from another state, he felt the Court heard him—something that had not happened before. Another youth shared that once he had the right resources, thanks to his JPO, he was able to speak up and say what he needed.

➤ ***Areas in Need of Improvement:***

- **Earlier identification of youth needs:** One youth reported that only after interacting with the delinquency system several times was his JPO able to identify that dependency issues were a root cause of his actions. “I wish I could have been in foster care sooner rather than going straight to probation.” One youth recommended that school systems receive better training to identify youth who might need help and support.
- **Inadequate education services.** Youth reported that education opportunities in placement were insufficient and youth had issues transitioning back into the school system. “I had a lot of anxiety and a lot of feelings of alienation with my peers in schools because I was the only one in my situation, being on probation, being in the system.”
- **More focus on placing dependent youth with family members:** Both youth reported that the foster care system could have done a better job trying to place them with members of their extended family instead of in a dependent care setting. “I personally felt that a lot more could have been done because I have a lot of family that live not in the same town, but in the same county.” “My uncle tried to get me out of foster care many times, but my case worker wasn’t hearing it.”
- **Poor treatment in residential facilities.** Youth reported troubling interactions within their respective placement facilities. One youth, who is currently in a group home, was unable to fully participate in the roundtable for fear of retribution. Another youth reported that he never experienced abuse in facilities but heard about it. “When I got there, I knew someone that was there. He said, ‘stay away from him, he’s going to slam you.’ If you break any of the rules or get out of line, he’d give you one warning and then slam you.”
- **Juvenile records create lasting consequences.** Youth reported issues stemming from their juvenile record. “It took me two years to get a job after that. No one wanted to hire me because

I had something on my record.” One youth noted specific issues with college enrollment because of his juvenile record. “One thing on your record can stop so much from happening in your life and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

➤ **Notable quotes:**

- On the positives of the system:
  - “If I would not have been in the system, I probably wouldn’t be here speaking to you all today.”
  - “I’m involved with both [systems] in a way...Since then, I’ve been able to make great strides, do events like this, go to my youth advisory panels and stuff.”
- On the need to improve court processes:
  - “It was a lot because I didn’t understand a lot of what the judge was saying. But I wanted to go along with it. I’m not going to lie, the first time I went to court I felt very intimidated because I was alone.”
  - “I don’t want to say I was powerless, but I didn’t think I had much say in it...I felt like my life was in the hands of someone else. It was basically being dictated by someone else.”
- On why youth run away:
  - “Part of the reason they do that is because they feel alienated in a way. And they can’t stand it, they’re sick of it. So, they want to escape that reality of feeling alone and thinking like nothing will ever get better.”
  - “I was running away from home, I ran away several times, and that’s when my probation officer said we need to take him out of the environment and put him in foster care.”