

Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force
Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers Roundtable
October 6, 2020

On October 6, 2020, the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Task Force conducted a roundtable discussion with 17 members of the Executive Committee for the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. The roundtable was facilitated by two Task Force members, Richard Steele, executive director of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC), and Russell Carlino, chief juvenile probation officer for Allegheny County.

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

- **County probation departments' use of evidence-based practices:** According to numerous chief juvenile probation officers, one of the biggest strengths of juvenile probation is the use of evidence-based practices. One chief said that county probation departments have embraced evidence-based practices and have shown a willingness "to take a look at the research and incorporate that research into practice." Many chiefs believe that the successful implementation of the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES) by the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers has been vital to the proliferation of evidence-based practices.
- **County probation departments have good partnerships with each other, which helps with the sharing of best practices and services:** Multiple chiefs mentioned that county probation departments have partnerships that help with the sharing of resources and services as well as best practices. The working groups that are a part of JJSES have been the main conduit for county probation departments to share best practices and resources. One chief stated that the JJSES working groups are "where the beneficial learning oftentimes occurs" and allow counties "to share their resources and strategies." The creation of these partnerships and the sharing of these resources is important because as one chief says, "half of the state pretty much is rural, so we do a lot of work...mentoring them and problem solving with them about how to handle certain issues that come up."
- **Implementation of the JJSES has been a collaborative process:** Numerous chief juvenile probation officers said that the implementation of JJSES has been a collaborative process amongst all counties and that it is not a "top down model." One chief juvenile probation officer stated that, "99% of the decisions [that county probation departments] make are collaborative decisions that are made through discussion" and that "no one is really working in silos."
- **Dedicated juvenile probation officers that are dealing with an influx of "complex" cases:** Chiefs said that juvenile probation officers are "dedicated" and are willing to work after hours in order to help "with issues that affect families' and youths' lives." One chief said these dedicated JPOs have been particularly helpful with the influx of kids who are coming into the juvenile justice system and "have more complex issues than they did before."

➤ ***Areas in Need of Improvement:***

- **There is a need for greater state oversight of the juvenile justice system to ensure practices that work are implemented in every jurisdiction:** Chiefs spoke about the challenge of extending evidence-based practices that work to counties that have resisted them. One chief stated, "That's a strength and a weakness of our juvenile justice system. We let progressive counties take the lead and sometimes make mistakes. But I do support a stronger state system, state oversight. You talk about mandates, but the only thing we've mandated was the use of the YLS

and the one county that didn't do it lost funding." Chiefs spoke about increased funding for JCJC to strengthen oversight of how juvenile justice is implemented across Pennsylvania.

- **Some chiefs have seen an increase in charging youth as adults, when those youth could be better supervised and served in the juvenile justice system:** Some chief juvenile probation officers said that they have seen an increase in the amount of youth who have been directly filed to the adult system. However, chiefs believe that the juvenile court is best suited to treat and supervise youth who are directly filed to adult court. One chief said, "We've seen an all-time high in our county this year" in youth charged as adults. Another chief said "that the juvenile justice system can better serve [youth who are directly filed to adult court and that]...the adult system is light years behind [the juvenile system] in terms of treatment and services."
- **Fines and fees are inconsistently applied due to lack of statewide guidance:** Chiefs said fines and fees vary county-to-county. Multiple chiefs believe that counties should discontinue the use of fines and fees and instead focus on the collection of restitution. As one chief said, "We never charge fines or fees because youth already have a hard time paying off restitution, which is what the focus should be." Another chief said some counties do not factor in whether the financial obligations impose undue hardship, noting, "Some counties have a willingness to acknowledge undue hardship for whether a kid can pay. That's not in every county." The chief went on to say that "there's really a need for a conversation about what is the best practice around [issuing fines and fees] and make sure the courts across the commonwealth are consistently applying this [practice]."
- **More funding is needed to divert more youth from the delinquency system:** Numerous chiefs discussed the necessity for more resources to implement diversion programs to divert youth from the system entirely. One chief stated, "prevention dollars need to come into play at somewhere in this conversation because we need to prevent them from even coming into the delinquency perspective."
- **Costs averted from reductions in out-of-home placement are lost rather than reinvested into areas that are most effective:** The chiefs discussed how savings from fewer youth going to placement had not necessarily been reinvested. Because [the Department of Human Services] is so large, that money goes into a deep, dark hole and we never see it again," one participant said. "We've not seen anything in the way of grant-in-aid increases."
- **Funding more alternatives to detention would reduce the number of youth in detention facilities:** Chiefs said there is a need for a "wider array" of alternatives to detention. One mentioned that in order to successfully implement JJSES, juvenile probation "really [needs] that true array of [detention alternatives that are] available and right now that just doesn't exist."
- **Not all counties are using the Pennsylvania Detention Risk Assessment Instrument (PaDRAI):** Chief Juvenile Probation Officers said that not all counties are utilizing the PaDRAI. One chief commented that if counties do not use the PaDRAI then they will be unable to address disproportionate minority contact within the juvenile justice system. Another chief said that they should provide more incentives for counties to utilize the PaDRAI.
- **Private providers are refusing to accept and serve youth with "complex" needs, forcing those youth deeper into the juvenile justice system:** Chiefs reported that they are unable to "find providers who are willing to work" with kids who have "complex" needs even though these youth "are the ones who need services the most." One chief said that the lack of willingness by private providers to serve these youth results in them being placed in "state secure units because [juvenile probation] can't find any other option [for treatment]."
- **A more streamlined funding process with standardized incentives for juvenile probation departments is needed:** Chief juvenile probation officers said that the funding for juvenile

probation comes from “disparate sources” and that the standards for receiving funding also comes from a “variety of sources.” Chiefs believe that the funding and oversight process should be streamlined and “under one roof.” A couple of chiefs said that this streamlined funding process could standardize incentives for implementation of evidence-based practices.

- **Funding should be allocated for better juvenile defense counsel:** One chief stated, “In my mind juvenile is more specialized and you need to know more to represent a juvenile than the adult side. Their systems should provide them more training on the juvenile side.” She added that there is funding for counsel in the child welfare system.

➤ **Notable quotes:**

- **On relationships with stakeholders:**
 - “We can galvanize our stakeholders in counties to really push our initiatives forward, which strengthens JJSES overall.”
- **On working with schools to prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system:**
 - “We need to work closer with each individual school district.”
- **On youth ending up in the deepest placements in the juvenile justice system because private providers decline to accept them:**
 - The thing that is most sad about that is that those kids are the ones that end up in the secure units because we can’t find any other option for them. That’s so unfortunate. It’s something we really need to be focusing on.”