



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

Connecticut Commission on Children Minutes of Meeting

Legislative Office Building, Room 1-C
Hartford, Connecticut

Tuesday, January 9, 2007

Voting members present: James P. Cordier, Mary Fox, Dr. Alex Geertsma, Alison Hilding, Josh Piteo, Laura Lee Simon, and Leslie Wolfgang.

Ex officio members (or designees) present: Rudy Brooks, for the Department of Children and Families; George Dawaliby, for the Department of Education; Anne Foley, for the Office of Policy and Management; and Mary Marcial for the Department of Corrections.

Members absent: Judith A. Busch, George Coleman, Representative Andrew M. Fleischmann, the Department of Social Services (Sylvia Gafford-Alexander), the Department of Public Health (Norma Gyle), Senator Mary Ann Handley, Representative Michael Lawlor, Judge Michael Mack, Senator Christopher Murphy, the Department of Mental Retardation (Commissioner Peter O'Meara), the Attorney General's office (Susan Pearlman), Mary Grace Reed, and John Yrchik.

Guest Speakers: Hartford Police Chief Daryl K. Roberts, Representative Toni Walker, Representative Juan Candelaria, Interim Associate Education Commissioner George Dawaliby, Child Advocate Jeanne Milstein, and Cephus Nolen Jr. of the East Hartford Juvenile Review Board and East Hartford Youth Service Bureau.

Commission staff present: Elaine Zimmerman, Thomas Brooks, Patricia Estill, Kevin Flood, Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, and Rachel Levy.

Handouts: agenda; minutes of the November 14, 2006, meeting; "Youth Violence: Connecticut Schools Respond," published by the Governor's Prevention Partnership; "Enhancing Academic Performance of Black and Hispanic Males," an article by George Coleman of the Department of Education in *The Journal*, a publication of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education; "Building a Positive Future for Black Boys," an article by Rosa A. Smith in the September 2005 issue of the *American School Board Journal*; "From America's Front Line Against Crime: A School and Youth Violence Prevention Plan," a handout published by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; "Targeting Poverty: Aim at a Bull's Eye," an October 2006 report by Jodie Levin-Epstein and Webb Lyons, published by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP); "Caught in the Crossfire: Arresting Gang Violence by Investing in Kids," a 2004 report from Fight Crime:

Invest in Kids; January 2007 progress report from the Connecticut Child Poverty and Prevention Council; “America’s After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime, or Youth Enrichment and Achievement,” a 2000 report by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; “New England After 3 P.M.: Spotlight on Connecticut,” a 2006 report by the Afterschool Alliance; “Fact Sheet on Crime, Race, and Juvenile Justice Policy in Perspective,” by the Justice Policy Institute; “Juvenile Justice Costs,” a handout from the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance; “A Look at Connecticut’s Data,” a presentation by Dr. Adrian R. Wood, Ph.D., state Department of Education; and a January 9, 2007, memo from Hartford Police Chief Daryl K. Roberts to the Commission on the Hartford Police Department’s truancy program.

Meeting Convened

Chair James Cordier called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

Chairman’s Report

Mr. Cordier said the Commission today would be conducting a symposium entitled, “Bringing Safety Back to Youth in 2007.” News of youth violence in cities and towns across Connecticut has become commonplace, he said, so the Commission will hear presentations from police officials, lawmakers, and others with insights on the issue.

Bringing Safety Back to Youth in 2007

Interim Associate Education Commissioner George Dawaliby said his agency understands the role of education in preventing youth violence. The earlier a child succeeds in school, he said, the more likely he is to continue that success, which in turn is likely to ensure his success as an adult. Unfortunately, the academic “achievement gap” between the average Connecticut student and minority-group males only grows over time, he said. Mr. Dawaliby said the Department of Education is taking a number of steps to address the issue: presenting data to local school officials, who often don’t realize how serious the achievement gap is in their districts; targeting those districts that “over-identify” minority-group students who require special education, including raising the question of whether race plays a part in the identification; and improving attendance by devoting more staff energy to anti-bullying and “drug-free schools” programs.

Representative Toni Walker spoke of her work on the Juvenile Justice Planning and Implementation Committee. Though the committee is still reviewing data, she said, some ideas for keeping youth out of the criminal justice system already have emerged. Among them: expanding juvenile review boards – which have proven successful in the towns that have used them – to more towns, and relying more on mentoring programs. The committee’s proposals will be crafted into bills by the legislature’s Judiciary Committee, she said, with the overall goal of ending Connecticut’s status as just one of three states that treat 16- and 17-year-old offenders as adults.

Hartford Police Chief Daryl K. Roberts reported that his department recently launched an aggressive anti-truancy initiative, dedicating several officers to investigating truancy reports. He also called on Connecticut adults to listen to children and, most importantly, raise their expectations for them. Though he came from a so-called broken home, he said, no one ever called his family “dysfunctional” – a circumstance that he credited for his career success.

Representative Juan Candelaria spoke of the youth crime plaguing New Haven. Under his proposed legislation, school districts could apply for “early intervention” grants to identify and assist those students who are in danger of dropping out and falling into delinquency. Parents have to be involved in any solution to truancy, he said, and students

with discipline problems must be suspended, he said, the suspensions should be served in school, since leaving them at home puts a burden on parents and leaves the children vulnerable to bad influences. In addition, he called for beefed-up anti-bullying programs, noting that children who feel threatened often seek refuge by joining gangs.

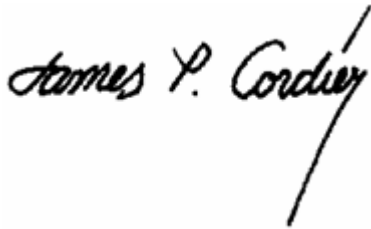
Child Advocate Jeanne Milstein provided statistics on the cost of “leaving children behind.” For instance, she said, there are 45 girls 18 and under at the York Correction Facility for Women.

Deputy Commissioner of Corrections Mary Marcial said the number of 16- and 17-year-olds incarcerated at the John R. Manson Youth Institution in Cheshire has increased by more than 60 percent since 2002, to 122 as of December 1, 2006.

Meeting Closed

Mr. Cordier closed the meeting at 11:59 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James P. Cordier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends downwards and to the right.

James P. Cordier, chairman