



## **Domestic Violence Criminal Justice Response and Enhancement Advisory Council Offender Program Standards Subcommittee**

### **MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

**ATTENDANCE:** Joe DiTunno, Honorable Kevin C. Doyle, Shauna Harrington, Merit Lajoie, GERALYN O'Neil-Wild

#### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

- GERALYN O'Neil-Wild called to order at 1:41 PM.

#### **II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS**

- GERALYN O'Neil-Wild offered welcoming remarks and Council members introduced themselves.

#### **III. SELECTION OF TWO CHAIRPERSONS**

- Motion to nominate Joe DiTunno and Shauna Harrington to serve as co-chairs of the Subcommittee made by Merit Lajoie, seconded by Honorable Kevin C. Doyle, and unanimously approved.

#### **IV. HISTORY AND APPLICATION OF THE OFFENDER PROGRAM STANDARDS**

- Joe DiTunno provided the subcommittee with the history of the Offender Program Standards Subcommittee including:
  - A DV expert came to Connecticut and suggested that there were no standards, which is how the group was originally formed;
  - Nancy Turner was tasked with reviewing and updating the standards to serve as a foundation;
  - Over the years, the subcommittee built an approved providers' list, but providers did not sign up to be eligible like the subcommittee had hoped;
  - It was suggested that the onus be on the defendant to find an approved program and engage with that program rather than putting the responsibility on providers, but that model did not last;
  - The focus became: "How are we going to implement the standards and what programs are out there that are not on the list?";
  - A Family Relations Counselor (FRC) at Central Office began doing research and comparing Connecticut's standards to those of other states;
  - The FRC began updates by enhancing Connecticut's standards with ideas from other states to ensure that Connecticut's standards met or exceeded those of other states;
  - Many of these updates included cultural competency and accessibility for the LGBTQ+ community;
  - That FRC abruptly left before the subcommittee could vote on the changes;

## V. REVIEW AND DISCUSS UPDATES TO PROGRAM STANDARDS

- Joe DiTunno informed the group that another FRC is making sense of the previous FRC's notes and it is not yet ready to be presented to the subcommittee.
  - The group agreed it would make sense to meet again after the FRC is ready to present the updates.

## VI. FUTURE SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING DATES

- The subcommittee will determine a time to meet based on the availability of the members after the Offender Program Standards are ready to be reviewed at a date in the near future.

## VII. OTHER BUSINESS

- The group discussed the issue that there are rarely enough offenders of the LGBTQ+ community to fill a class and that the purpose of expanding the standards to be more inclusive was to ensure that providers may not have been equipped to address the specific challenges they may face.
  - The issue was also raised that the standards are predominantly geared toward male offenders and that providers who can serve female offenders has presented challenges as well.
- Honorable Kevin C. Doyle shared that he and several other judges met as part of a focus group centered around Connecticut court practices and inquired as to whether or not the findings from those groups had been published.
- Geralyn O'Neil-Wild answered to notify him that the intention was to conduct another round of the focus groups with more stakeholder participation and that the findings would be published and shared thereafter.
- Discussion surrounded the benefit of data to support where the offender programs are being utilized and in what capacity.
- The group also discussed the "cap" system, where an offender would plead to a lesser sentence, complete an offender program between plea and sentencing, and upon successful completion, would be sentenced to that lesser sentence. If the offender did not successfully complete the program, they may be facing a harsher sentence.
- The issue was raised that there is a lot less senior experience in the system and that some practices and knowledge surrounding offender programs is not as widespread.
- The group discussed the intended purpose of offender programs such as Evolve and Explore and their utilization in the courts.
  - It was suggested that reinstating a dedicated domestic violence docket throughout the state would be beneficial for consistency and accountability in handling these cases.
- The group discussed expanding the focus of the subcommittee for future discussions on eligibility criteria for the Family Violence Education Program (FVEP), what, how, and when offender programs are being used, and programming offered to incarcerated people.
  - The concern was raised that first-time offenders with serious charges are technically eligible for the FVEP and perhaps the eligibility criteria should be reviewed.
  - Another concern was raised that offenders sometimes get multiple chances to complete the same programs and how exceptions are made for certain offenses.
  - It was also discussed that, generally, recidivism rates are low for first or second offenders who have utilized this program and that those numbers are not difficult to produce.
- It was decided that it would be necessary for a designee from the Chief's State's Attorney's Office to sit on the subcommittee to discuss their process in determining what, how, and when offender programs are utilized.
  - It was also decided that it would be beneficial to hear thoughts from legislators regarding eligibility criteria, utilization of providers, challenges, and analyses surrounding offender programs.

## IX. ADJOURNMENT

- Motion to adjourn made by Merit Lajoie, seconded by Joe DiTunno. The meeting adjourned at 3:03 PM.