

## April JJPOC Meeting Minutes

April 10, 2026

10:30-12:00

Virtual - Zoom Option Available

### Attendance

|                     |                   |                  |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Amy Marracino       | Heriberto Cajigas | Paul Cicarella   | TYJI Staff       |
| Anthony Nolan       | Jillian Gilchrest | Sharmese Walcott | Andrew Zhebrak   |
| Betty Ann MacDonald | Joshua Bernegger  | Susan Hamilton   | Namandje Wali    |
| Charles Hewes       | Melanie Dykas     | Tais Ericson     | Erika Nowakowski |
| Christina Ghio      | Michael Pierce    | Tammy Nguyen     | Ryan Connick     |
| Colleen Violette    | Martha Stone      | O'Dowd           |                  |
| Daniel Karpowitz    | Renee Cimino      | Toni Walker      |                  |
| Elizabeth A.Bozzuto | Anthony Nolan     | Veron Beaulieu   |                  |
| Erica Bromley       | Toni Walker       |                  |                  |
| Gary Roberge        | Veron Beaulieu    |                  |                  |
| Hector Glynn        | Ray Dancy         |                  |                  |

### Overview of the Meeting

The April meeting reviewed the Gender Responsive Connecticut Landscape Analysis Report, which examined current conditions and emerging trends affecting justice-involved girls and young women across the state. Afterwards, a Gender Responsive Panel provided expert perspectives to inform and enrich discussion of the report's findings.

### Setting the Stage

TYJI's Executive Director introduced the day's focus and welcomed partners joining in person and virtually. The co-chairs of the Incarceration Work Group provided context on the gender responsive subcommittee's formation and legislative charge. They explained that the subcommittee began as a joint endeavor between the JJPOC and the TIP Council to examine the needs of young women, particularly given observed patterns of human trafficking, compounded trauma, and continued vulnerability. In 2024, the subgroup was formally tasked with producing four items, including a landscape analysis and gap assessment, a human trafficking data framework, and policy and legislative recommendations for the JJPOC. This

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information was also shared with the Transforming Children's Behavioral Health Policy and Planning Committee. The gender responsiveness work group was incorporated into the Incarceration Work Group to consolidate efforts.

Prior to the report presentation, TYJI distributed fact cards to members, who read them aloud to reinforce the "if you can see me, you can be me" theme. Facts included: that many behaviors resulting in girls' arrest or suspension are evidence of abuse and trauma, that Black girls are incarcerated at over three times the rate of white girls; that Indigenous girls have the highest incarceration rate of any racial group; that 75–81% of girls in juvenile detention meet criteria for at least one mental health disorder; that three in four girls in the system have a history of sexual or physical abuse; and that the number of incarcerated women in the U.S. increased 600% between 1980 and 2023.

#### 2025 Gender Responsive Connecticut Landscape Analysis Report Overview

Ryan Connick presented the Gender Responsive Connecticut Landscape Analysis, developed pursuant to Public Act 24-139, which charged the JJPOC's gender responsive work group to complete a landscape analysis meeting seven statutory provisions, including defining gender responsiveness, receiving input from impacted youth, families, and communities, reviewing national best practices and prior legislation, identifying gaps; reviewing existing statewide practices, and building a data profile of girls in state systems.

Gender responsiveness is defined as a multidimensional, strength-based approach that considers girls' distinct pathways into systems, acknowledging that girls enter and experience systems differently than boys. Connecticut was a national leader in this work approximately 20 years ago, but since then, efforts have waned and gender responsiveness has become more initiative-based than systemic.

Key data highlights: the majority of youth in DCF foster care from 2022–2024 were girls, sexual and physical abuse accounted for 11.5% of removals of girls versus 6.2% for boys, Non-Hispanic Black girls made up 43.6% of all court referrals involving girls in 2024, 309 girls were identified as dually involved in both child welfare and juvenile justice systems, with New Haven having the highest count; mental health was the most common need identified, with 52.3% of girls above the needs threshold, all girls admitted to York Correctional Institution between 2022–2024 were unsentenced, with a mean stay of 56 days; and human trafficking reports to DCF's HART team increased 200% since 2022, with 94% of identified victims in the greater Hartford region being female and 84% of those being youth ages 13–17.

Youth voice is being addressed through a Phase 2 process with the Judicial Branch CSSD and DCF. A voluntary survey is in development with deidentified results will be returned to TYJI with findings anticipated in fall 2026. A committee member asked how family and community voices would be incorporated. TYJI leadership confirmed this is a Phase 2 priority, including outreach to community programs serving girls and direct engagement of families.

### Gender Responsive Panel

A panel of invited experts offered reflections on the landscape analysis. Panelists included national clinicians specializing in gender responsive and trauma-informed practice, a researcher and co-creator of a validated risk and needs assessment tool for justice-involved women, a person with lived reentry experience who now leads a reentry organization, a juvenile probation officer specializing in gender responsive practice, and a residential program director certified in gender responsive curricula.

On the national landscape, a panelist noted that federal funding cuts and political resistance to the term "gender" are significantly impacting state-level services. She urged Connecticut to examine what caused the deterioration of its prior gender responsive infrastructure so that this time, changes become embedded rather than dependent on individual administrations.

On assessment, a panelist argued that framing system decisions around risk for recidivism masks the true driver of girls' behavior. Girls of color are disproportionately harmed by risk-centered approaches. The panelist advocated reframing assessment around resilience and stressed leadership must commit to staff well-being and address vicarious trauma at every level.

On residential environments, a panelist described safety as emotional and relational, where girls are known, valued, and protected. Consistency in staff response builds trust that allows healing to begin. She cautioned against compliance-oriented approaches, arguing the goal must always be long-term change.

On family engagement, a probation officer described family engagement as beginning on day one of supervision and continuing throughout the supervisory period, including through team meetings structured and driven by the young person herself, where she identifies her own supports, decides who is present, and focuses on her goals and accomplishments. Cross-system coordination with child welfare, housing, and education was emphasized as essential, with careful differentiation of which system should lead depending on the nature of the concern at hand.

On reentry and peer support, a panelist with lived experience called for warm handoffs rather than cold referrals, person-first language, and expansion of peer mentors with both lived experience and professional training. Housing was identified as the foundation, as without it, education, employment, and healing are nearly impossible to sustain.

On policy, panelists collectively called for ending placement of youth under 18 in adult correctional facilities, eliminating isolation in any setting serving girls; shifting policy frameworks away from risk-based models designed for boys, codifying gender responsive practices into statute, and investing in early intervention. Committee members raised questions about parity in services for detained youth, data tracking, and the role of school resource officers in creating justice system entry points. State agency representatives noted new data dashboards under development and described prevention models enabled by the Family First Prevention Act.

#### Closing Remarks

TYJI's Executive Director closed by naming the meeting's central finding: girls in Connecticut's systems are not failing, but that the systems are failing them. Girls enter child welfare and juvenile justice with significantly higher rates of trauma, mental health needs, and histories of abuse, yet too often encounter systems not designed to meet those realities. The overrepresentation of girls of color, girls with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ youth reflects inequities in how services are designed and delivered. She called on legislators and state agencies to invest in sustainable funding, require cross-system alignment through legislation, set measurable outcomes, and ensure every girl has access to the services she needs to heal and thrive. The question is now no longer what girls need, but whether Connecticut is willing to build a system that can truly and sustainably deliver on that knowledge.

Representative Walker closed with a charge to the committee, as the era of "we can't" must end. The conversation must move beyond identifying problems to taking concrete, funded, and sustained action. The work now is to determine how, where, and with whom and to move decisively forward together.

Next Meeting – 5/21