



North Carolina Department of Public Safety

Governor's Crime Commission

Roy Cooper, Governor
Erik A. Hooks, Secretary

Robert Evans, Chairman
Caroline C. Valand, Executive Director

**Children's Justice Act Task Force
Virtual Meeting Via WebEx
1201 Front Street
Raleigh, NC 27609
Thursday, October 8th, 2020
1:00 pm -3:00 pm
Meeting Minutes**

Attendees:

Wendy Sotolongo, Christy Malott, Deborah Flowers, Donald Cureton, Keisha Crawford, Kella Hatcher, Matt McKay, Rhonda Morris, Kristine Sullivan, Vicki Foster, Victor Maynard, Kathy Stone, Jennifer Evans, Gaile Osborne, Kathy Stone, Susan Robinson.

GCC Staff:

Caroline Valand, Diane Barber-Whitaker, Toni Lockley, Nicki Livingston, Jaysia Noels

Welcome: Overview of Meeting introductions. Chair, Wendy Sotolongo.

- Chair, Wendy Sotolongo called meeting to order at 1:05 pm.
- Chair Wendy Sotolongo asked members to introduce themselves.

Approval of 7.9.20 Minutes. CJA Task Force

- Susan Robinson made a motion to approve last meeting minutes
 - Matt McKay seconded.

DSS Update. Kathy Stone

- Shared data on how COVID impacted child protective services:
 - In April, May, and June DSS noticed a significant drop (33%) in the number of abuse and neglect cases being reported. They believe this was due to schools being shut down.
 - School facilities are able to see children on a daily basis to observe if abuse or neglect is taking place. However, DSS projects that they will see an increase of abuse/neglect reporting when schools reopen.
 - Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) – aims to prevent kids from entering the foster care system by allowing federal reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skill training.
 - Goes into place October 1, 2021

Other Agency Updates. Various members

Court systems:

- Matt McKay (Charlotte)– explained the schedule for Juvenile Court. The court has four days for dockets. Lately, the court has been on half days. In- person hearings are a constitutional right: for the accused to confront witnesses and to assess the credibility of a witness. In person hearings are reserved for the mornings. Otherwise, hearings are heard in the afternoon remotely.

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- The plan is to gradually go into a schedule of all-day remote hearings and some days will be full in-person hearings.
- Expressed that some cases are difficult to conduct on half days or remotely because there are a lot of different factors that can present themselves in court.
- There is a fear that remote court hearings could possibly be exploited, for example, people giving access to people who are not supposed to have access. Also, some attorneys do not turn their cameras on, etc.
- Judge Cureton (Charlotte) – Discussed the impact of COVID on various Courts.
 - As of now, there is no criminal court going on except domestic violence. However, they are working with judges, clerks, and defense attorneys to set blocks of time to hear cases. Other court rooms have accepted virtual pleas, in certain matters, this has helped to relieve some of the back log but it is still substantial.
 - Civil court – virtual
 - Family – virtual and in-person
 - Civil Domestic violence – virtual and in-person
- Jury trial has been an issue because of the need for safety precautions due to COVID-19.
- Christy Mallot (Durham)– They can do cases remotely upon requested. She heard that abuse, neglect and dependency (A/N/D) court is backed up.
- Keisha Crawford (Statewide)– Explained that CIP funds were available and they are trying to find a solution to remote (hybrid) hearings. This fix costs about \$600 (microphone, camera, and WebEx). Those in need of this service can still reach out but there is no guarantee that everyone will get equipment.

Disability Rights

The core work of this team is to go into facilities to monitor for abuse /neglect and rights violations. If they find suspected cases of abuse or neglect, they will do a more in-depth investigation.

- Kristine Sullivan – monitoring more closely with schools for kids with disabilities. Since COVID, they have modified investigations, focusing more on remote monitoring – phone calls, information from staff, and remote school tours.
 - There is a lot of talk with the three residential schools for the deaf and blind about getting these students back into school.
 - She expressed that resuming in-person monitoring is in the works.

Child Advocacy Centers:

- Rhonda Morris – Explained that they are still doing evaluations as normal, although they use some use virtual platforms. Their in-house evidence-based therapy services have been changed to a remote platform. They have seen physical abuse increase and notice unusual abuse occurring. There were concerns about kids not being able to report abuse. There have not been many cases presented to the court because of COVID-19.

Law Enforcement:

- Victor Maynard – Elaborated on the increased purchase of handguns. He mentioned that his county – Guilford County had issued more gun permits from January until the present with more pistol carry permits and carry conceal in past nine months than in the last 3 years.
- Expressed great concern about Raise the Age and teens committing larceny of motor vehicles and breaking and entering of motor vehicles.
 - The issue that police are facing is: The owners of these motor vehicles are leaving their handgun unconcealed.
 - The ages of people committing these crimes are between 14-17 years old.
 - They would like to see the General Assembly make an enforceable law about leaving firearm(s) unsecure in cars.
 - He suggested that people leave their cars locked; most of these break-ins are coming from those who leave their car unlocked.

Other Agencies:

- Kella Hatcher – Explained how their agency was facing the same issue as everyone else regarding doing things remotely.
 - There are concerns about child abuse/neglect reporting, gun purchasing, suicide prevention, student mental health, and mental health in general.
- Susan Robinson – Shared resources Hope for NC: 1-855-587-3463
 - Open 24/7 to provide emotional support.
 - TTY 711 and translators available.
- Hope for Healers – for essential workers and school personnel & family – they will provide brief therapeutic sessions.

2021 Applications and FY 2020 CJA Award – Update. Toni Lockley, GCC

- 2020 Awards:
 - NCCDCA Child Abuse Resource Prosecutor
 - 10/1/2020-9/30/2022
 - Safe and Secure Schools (SASS)
 - 10/1/2020-9/30/2021
- Request for application and details on how to apply for a 2021 CJA grant is now on the GCC website.

Three Year Assessment Update - CJA. Toni Lockley, GCC

- The new Three-Year Plan is in the works for 2021.
- This assessment provides information to the Children Bureau, ACF on the updated CJA recommendations and what the CJA Task Force focus will be for the next three years.
- Chair, Wendy Sotolongo wants to update membership list, members description, and priorities.

Task Force Membership. CJA Task Force

- Chair, Wendy Sotolongo informed members that the task force needs a parent representative.
 - Ask Family United about the parent representatives
- Susan Robinson volunteered to follow up with family organizations to fill the parent representative

- Gaile Osborne, Board Chair of Foster Family Alliance, offered to help fill the parent representative.
- Chair, Wendy Sotolongo reviews the process of adding a new committee member.

New Business/ Old Business. CJA Task Force

- Chair, Wendy Sotolongo wants to hear a more in-depth presentation in January.
 - Federal liaison, Lauren Fishman – what it means to have a CJA Task Force, what other states are doing.
- Chair Wendy Sotolongo wants regular updates from grantee recipients.

Adjournment

- Chair, Wendy Sotolongo called meeting at 3:00 PM

2021 Meeting Schedule:

1/7/2021

4/8/2021

7/8/2021

10/7/2021

Meeting Minutes Taken By: Jaysia Noels