



Our mission is to: prevent youth legal system involvement, shield youth from the adverse impact of a criminal record, eliminate racial and ethnic disparities, and reduce the risk of reentering the system.

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Council for Equitable Youth Justice

Draft Meeting Summary

February 18, 2026, 10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Public Location: Waterbury State Office Building, Waterbury, VT

Attendees: Karen Vastine, Donn Hutchins, Sparks, Julia Brand, Kate Hayes, Linda Johnson, Matt Wolf, Mercedes King, Mike Loner, Peter Brown, Zoe Souder, Amy Davenport, Jessica Barquist, and Stu Berry

Absent: Laurey Burris, Paul Groce, Katherine O'Day, Hudson Ranney

Partners: Sheri Lynn (Dept for Children and Families), Hunter Hurst (NCJFCJ, NCJJ), and Vanessa Quince, Kamilla Smith (Mathematica)

Meeting Called Order

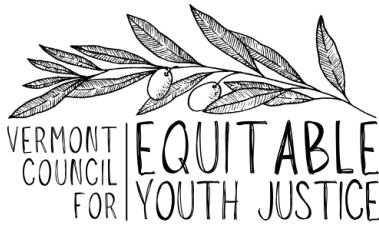
- Meeting commenced with a quorum at 10:35.

High End System of Care (Hunter Hurst, NCJJ)

- NCJJ has focused on interviews with DCF since the last Council meeting.
- Site visits with southern and northern care facilities scheduled for March 23-27.
- Plans to meet with judges and State police.
- Council members can email Hunter to schedule in person time.

Legislative Updates

- **H 721:** Concerns about overcharging youth and high recidivism rates if the youth opt to take a plea agreement in criminal court. Motion to oppose in light of more information on recidivism due later this year and potential for overcharge youth. Motion passed with 1 abstention.
- **H 642: Youthful Offender (YO)**
 - Acknowledgment of harm by Youth Seeking YO status: While we support conceptually that a youth would acknowledge that their alleged conduct caused harm, we have concerns that to expect this kind of admission without any intervention does not align with best practices and adolescent brain development research.
 - Opposition to mandatory revocation of YO status for alleged violence. We oppose this as written - it would create due process concerns because the act is alleged and we have concerns about the language being overly broad such that a youth who commits an



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alleged act of violence could be penalized for acts ranging from shove to something as serious as murder.

- Revocation of YO status for failure to appear at a probation revocation hearing: The Council is opposed to this.
- The Council is in support of the victim's right to appear at YO hearings.
- Motion to take the position as was described in this discussion. Motion passes.

CJJ Conference (May 27-30) Washington DC

- Reviewed agenda.
- Council may submit a workshop proposal.

FFY 2025 Sight and Sound Violation

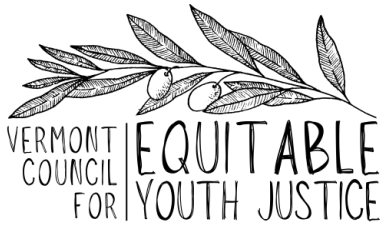
- Discussed compliance issues and potential solutions like education summit and mobile options to hold youth while waiting for hearing and other short term residential secure options.
- Expect continuation of the noncompliance with Juvenile Justice Reform Act sight and sound separation of youth from adults in Vermont adult facilities. The council has advocated to change the threshold because just one violation puts Vermont in non-compliance. The sight and sound violations were with 18-year-olds.
- DCF will discuss with Dept of Corrections about possible infrastructure support.

Council Business

- Approved January 15 minutes and Annual Report with edits (correct reference to sight and sound separation).
- Approved sending up to 6 council members to CJJ Conference May 27 – 30 in Washington DC.
- Contact Sheri or Karen if you wish to attend.

Committee Reports

- **Governance:** Recruitment efforts ongoing. Let Mike know if you know individuals on the recruitment list. The committee will coordinate with who will reach out to recruit each individual for committees or council roles.
- **Youth Services:** Progress on Youth Engagement contract negotiations and youth stipends for the HESOC project interviews with youth. Reminder to submit biography forms to be included in the new member orientation. The committee will continue to discuss rainy day funds concept.



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- **System Improvement:** Met with staff at the Hartford Community Justice Center, Domestic Violence and Accountability Program (Circles of Peace for Youth). Low use of the program and the committee plan to meet regularly to keep momentum. Discuss legislative bills regarding elimination of expungement, governor's proposal to repeal Raise the Age, and modifying youthful offender process.
- **Ethnic & Racial Disparities:** The meeting for February was canceled but will pick up at March meeting on committee's focus to advance goals and define the action plan for the year.

Racial Equity Road Map (Vanessa Quince and Kamilla Smith, Mathematica)

- Presentation on advancing racial equity supplements the roadmap document that is a compilation of the work from the sessions, retreat and interviews with council members.
- general reactions: continue to work on shared understanding of anti-racism (e.g., onboarding materials for new members); consensus decision making is implemented; continue with training; use racial equity impact analysis tool; bring in experts to guide the work; different priorities among members need to be addressed; availability of resources to implement activities; written policy; and look at every decision through racial equity lens.

Public Comment

- None

Other

- Recognition of Matt's last day on the council.

Adjournment: 12:37 p.m.