

Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Oversight Board

Board Meeting Record

Wednesday, August 28, 2024, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., virtual meeting & Helen Sommers Building

Member Attendance: Barbara Serrano, Dr. Ben de Haan, Justice Bobbe Bridge, Co-Chair Sen. Claire Wilson, Danielle Johnson, Co-Chair Dr. Diane Liebe, Sen. Judy Warnick, Katie Biron, Ruth Kagi, Rep. Tom Dent

Staff in Attendance: Dr. Lyscha Marcynyszyn, *Executive Director* & Nickolaus Colgan, *Administrative Coordinator*

Public in Attendance: Rashida Robbins, *community member*, Jeff DiDonato, *community member*, KL Demmings, *community member*, Ayan Muse, *community member*, Nicole Hoffman, *community member*, Luna Williams, *community member*, Tony Omar, *community member*, Amanda Wilson, *community member*, Jeanette Obelcz, *Washington Federation of State Employees*, Evelyn Naomi, *community member*, Kelly Johnson, *community member*

Only public attendees who chose to identify themselves during the meeting, or who made public comment, are recorded in the official meeting minutes.

Welcome, Roll Call, & Opening Remarks

The meeting was called into order at 2:00 p.m. Co-Chair Senator Claire Wilson started the meeting welcoming new board member Barbara Serrano, Senior Policy Advisor, as the non-voting member from the Governor's Office and the board's new Executive Director, Dr. Lyscha Marcynyszyn. Lyscha did roll call of DCYF Oversight Board members, quorum was met. Lyscha proposed approval of the July 2, 2024 meeting minutes and asked for any edits to the draft minutes. With no edits provided Lyscha requested a motion be made for approval, Justice Bobbe Bridge made a motion to approve the minutes and Ruth Kagi seconded. Lyscha requested all in favor to approve, all members in attendance voted yea.

DCYF Presentation: JR to 25 Update | Ross Hunter, Secretary (DCYF); Jenny Heddin, Deputy Secretary Chief of Staff (DCYF); Felice Upton, Assistant Secretary Juvenile Rehabilitation (DCYF); Robert Long, DOC Director of Security & Emergency Management; Allison Krutsinger, Director of Public Affairs (DCYF)

Co-Chair Senator Wilson introduced the panelists presenting today and explained that today's topics were brought up by board members concerned over recent news stories regarding the removal of young adults from juvenile rehabilitation facilities due to overcrowding and transferred to the Department of Corrections which goes against the JR to 25 legislation signed into law under House Bill 6160.

Action items/follow-up:

- Ben de Haan: regarding the 24% increase in juveniles arrested for crimes, what percentage of these are first timer's vs youth who have already been through the system?
- Senator Wilson: regarding the "Who are we serving in JR" slide has the demographics changes post pandemic, or are these trends following historic trends? Might need to do some disaggregating to see a more specific group of youth who are in need.
- Diane Liebe: regarding the "Risks of Overcrowding" slide, do we know the where the staffing ratio has gone in relation to the aggressive acts from the youth?

Q&A with DCYF | Co-Chairs Dr. Diane Liebe & Senator Claire Wilson

Action items/follow-up:

- Ruth Kagi: notify the board on any policy related legislation to this matter in the future.
- Ruth Kagi: any realistic options for creating capacity, both by diversion efforts and physical location wise? Continuing updates on additional locations to help with overcrowding, if there are any.
- Bobbe Bridge: DCYF is the end of a long line of complicated systems. What/if meetings are going on with the other ends of the systems, like judiciary, probation, other system partners. Continuing to be updated on what parts of the system DCYF is meeting with.
- Representative Dent: DCYF doesn't receive information about who will be coming to their facility until they are charged to be there. This makes being proactive and ensuring space challenging. There is a risk to the community if dangerous folks are not able to be fit into a facility and left in community housing. Need to follow up on who gets the data and who analyzes the data so DCYF can accurately predict the needs they fill. What does DCYF need to collect from counties to make better predictors, no unifying data system.
- Diane Liebe: when looking at data and trying to predict what the needs will be, it is important to look at intrinsic factors, for example, the fentanyl epidemic, how do intrinsic factors play a roll in your data collection and predictions?
- Video that Green Hill students did about fentanyl mentioned by Ross Hunter.

Public Comment | Co-Chair Dr. Diane Liebe

Rashida Robbins, community member, Rashida is the parent of a youth in Green Hill and stated that the facility is in need of urgent intervention, or someone will get injured. She expressed disagreement with the measures Ross Hunter and Felice Upton have taken in the facilities stating she does not care about the youth getting to touch grass with their bare feet as an activity, but rather wants to know that her child is being fed. She continued that as a mother it is hard to sleep knowing her child is hungry, without access to always running water and at risk of guard beatings in a state-run facility. Finally, Rashida questioned how any of the leaders in DCYF still have a job.

Jeff DiDonato, community member, Jeff addressed lawmakers in the judicial system stating that this is a systemic failure and not a problem of the youth. Jeff continued that it does not make sense to be tough on crime and fight for lower taxes when it is still insisted upon to jail these youth. He stated that Green Hill is not a school, it is a prison and an underfunded one. He encouraged law makers to either look at sentencing practices or look at funding the system appropriately. He finished that overcrowding is a systemic failure and asked that in the meantime look over the sentences of current inmates.

KL Demmings, community member, KL stated they have a loved one in Green Hill. KL continued that the story DCYF leadership tells about Green Hill is not the reality. She continued that the kids in Green Hill are terrorized everyday and she wants to know when Ross Hunter and Felice Upton will step down so that someone can come in there and turn the facility around. She stated that she is scared someone in the facility is going to get killed if nothing is done. She concluded saying this is just the beginning of groups of parents showing up and demanding justice.

Ayan Muse, community member, Ayan stated that every elected official needs to wake up because they are going to need community support to get reelected. She continued that as a social worker she has been part of many meetings with DCYF leaders and agrees that they all need to step down. She finished by saying that all the people in leadership have children, or grandchildren, families and friends who if they were in a facility like Green Hill they would be making a difference right now.

Nicole Hoffman, community member, Nicole started that she and her husband have a son in Green Hill who was one of the youths moved into DOC custody. She asked Ross Hunter what her son did to deserve getting

transferred stating he had no infractions and was part of many groups within Green Hill to better himself. She continued that Ross mentioned he was scared the youth may have to sleep on the floor due to overcrowding, but her son was terrified everyday due to the treatment during the transfer. She finished stating she wants to know how many of the youth transferred had any infractions, and even if they did, they were supposed to be in a place where they could learn and be better not stripped and forced onto a bus and placed in an adult facility without anyone telling the parents what was happening.

Luna Williams, community member, Luna participated in Gateways for incarcerated youth through The Evergreen State College. She continued it was frustrating that for a facility who claims to be a school how often that program was threatened to be cut and how students were not able to attend classes because they were punished for being reactionary to conditions that leadership put them in. She finished that it seemed inappropriate that snacks were not allowed to be brought in during class, but staff have managed to bring in drugs.

Tony Omer, community member, Tony started by saying Ross Hunter needs to be doing the right thing in child protection services. He continued that his three grandchildren were removed from their mother and stayed with their grandmother for no reason. He expressed frustration over the harm coming to children in a system that is supposed to protect them and agreed with all the others who said Ross Hunter should step down.

Amanda Wilson, community member, Amanda started by saying she has a child in Green Hill and has had many conversations with Felice Upton around improvements coming to the facility that have never happened. She asked what kind of help it is to the youth in these facilities when you take away everything from them including access to food and being able to hug their parents. She continued that if you claim to be a school this shouldn't happen. She finished saying that as a former youth in Green Hill this is no longer rehabilitation and so much more can be done and should be done, and that leadership should step down.

Jeanette Obelcz, Washington Federation of State Employees, Jeanette read a letter expressing frustration and encouraging the removal of Secretary Ross Hunter from DCYF due to his lack of action in supporting the well-being of the children in the system and the employees under DCYF.

Evelyn Naomi, community member, Evelyn started with saying she wants answers from Ross Hunter and Felice Upton. She continued that she is the wife to a young man in Green Hill whose mental health is deteriorating every day he is in the system, and she fears for his well-being. She continued that so many youths in Green Hill have mental health needs that the facility is not treating. She stated that even when she visits, she is not able to hug her husband anymore due to restrictions. She finished stating she wants answers from leadership and to know why they are held accountable and a specific ask around why staff doesn't have to go through scanners and family does.

Kelly Johnson, community member, Kelly started saying that it seems very clear to her that DCYF leadership is failing and reminded everyone that these are children being talked about. She continued that these environments are inherently traumatizing due to the systems and conditions. She stated that the solution to overcrowding is not expanding, that creates more beds that will be filled. She stated that the solution is letting people go and investing in community resources, when people have their needs met crime goes down. She finished asking how youth are supposed to get better when there are so many ways to get in the system and so few ways to get out.

Written Public Comment:

Jeanette Obelcz, Washington Federation of State Employees, Jeanette sent a letter from her chapter of the WFSE expressing frustration and encouraging the removal of Secretary Ross Hunter from DCYF due to his lack of action in supporting the well-being of the children in the system and the employees under DCYF.

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

Co-Chair Senator Wilson thanked all attendees for their important comments. Senator Wilson let the board know staff will be prioritizing filling the empty roles on the board and will be sending info to the board on recruiting. Senator Wilson noted as a reminder the board is having a retreat on Friday, October 18.

Adjourned at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 28, 2024.