**Juvenile Justice Reform Act Implementation Commission Meeting**

**November 16, 2022**

**Meeting Minutes**

The Juvenile Justice Reform Act Implementation Commission met in a regular session on Wednesday, November 16, 2022 at the Louisiana State Capitol in the Governor’s Press Room. The meeting was called to order by Co- Vice Chairman Gina Womack and a roll call was taken by Amaiya Ewell.

Members Present: Richard Pitmann, Gina Womack, Bridget Denicola, Tracie Woods, Courtney Meyers (James Lemoine)

Members Absent: Marcus Bryant, Heather Cloud, Royce Duplessis, Piper Griffin

Other Members Present: Amaiya Ewell, Legislative Staff

Visitors: Jay Dardenne, Curtis Nelson, Karl Dunmore, Janet Chiancone, Teneane Bradford, Courtney Myers, Stephen Phillipi, Storm Ehlers, Evan Alvarez, David Utter, Liz Ryan, Tom Cortaeuza, Gena Lewis

1. Welcome/Call Meeting to Order: Meeting was called to order by Vice-President Gina Womack
2. Roll Call – Legislative Staffer Amaiya Ewell did roll call, without a sufficient members present there was no quorum
3. Approval of March 11, 2022 minutes: There was no quorum present to approve the meeting minutes
4. Parent/Youth Testimony: Gina Womack presented a video of youth and parents who shared remarks on the decision to move youths to Angola. Ms. Womack reiterated what youth and family shared that the youth should not be moved to Angola; instead our state should follow its mandate which is fulfill Act 1225 of 2003, the commission Juvenile Justice Reform Act which will help our youth and prevent future harm and the need to make such hasty decisions that are contradictory to National best practices. She stated that we could spend more time dreaming how we could help the young people thrive, which youth have requested. Additionally, we need to make sure that they are receiving the education and services they deserve. This Commission was debunked for several years and we are witnessing the failure of a lack of over sight of the Office of Juvenile Justice, the Public Welfare and Education systems that we are charged to reform; and now it has been revitalized we are hopeful in moving forward we can provide better oversight. To offer assistance to the Commission in our charge, Ms. Womack introduced from the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention, Administrator Liz Ryan to the floor for remarks. For the record, did not have a quorum present during the meeting to amend the agenda to change “testimony” to “remarks”. However, Ms. Womack stated for the record that Ms. Ryan will share remarks.
5. Remarks: Elizabeth Ryan, Administrator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the U.S. Department of Justice, (OJJDP). Mrs. Ryan stated the federal grant funding given to Louisiana in the fiscal year of 2021 was to improve and reform the Juvenile Justice system with long-term solutions. She stated that her office is offering no-cost training and technical assistance to their grant recipients. She then followed up with recommendations for the Office of Juvenile Justice:
   1. Children should be removed immediately from Angola,
   2. an assessment of OJJ’s incarcerated youth population to identify which youth can be immediately and safely released to the community,
   3. monitoring of Louisiana’s juvenile court judges,
   4. Office of Juvenile Justice and the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement should partner with effective community-based organizations to keep youth in their homes and communities,
   5. OJJ implement programs to help youth with fewer than six months on their custodial sentence transition or step youth down from restrictive housing to less restrictive environments,
   6. Recommend OJJ implement specialized training and technical assistance for leadership and facility managers to address facility management and conditions of confinement for young people.

Ms. Womack opened the floor to public comments:

Curtis Nelson, (Assistant Secretary OJJ) asked for Administrator Ryan to clarify the 4 Million grant that OJJ and LCLE is receiving.

Administrator Ryan stated that Louisiana is receiving a combination of resources through competitive grants and formula grant with the Law Enforcement Commission. Also stated that her staff is willing to go into full details about grant funding as requested.

Dr. Stephen Philippi stated that Louisiana lost some of the grant funding and are discussing solutions to find out why the money is lost and steps it would take to be restored.

Question: Richard Pitmann asked if other states in the Covid and post-Covid environment, have seen similar issues within the juvenile justice system to what we’ve seen and what those other states have done to navigate in the juvenile justice system.

Answer: Administrator Ryan stated that youth incarceration rates across the Country are continuing to drop as well as crime among young people. Additionally, there is a drop in youth arrests overall and youth arrests for violent crimes. This trend, is due to systems shifting from punitive responses to youth offending and to State investments in the community-based alternatives.

1. Testimony: Attorney Allison Zimmer, presented a PowerPoint focusing on the education provided over the past two years within OJJ Secure care facilities. She started with a story of a client that had been in OJJ Secure Care and he would share about not receiving the education he was entitled to because of the many issues within the system. After getting the good grades within the OJJ Secure Facility, he returned home to find out that he would not graduate and would have to repeat a grade. Which then led to him dropping out of school. Attorney Zimmer reiterated that students in OJJ care are not getting the proper classes they need to proceed on their graduation pathway. She is looking to hold OJJ accountable to provide accurate data on attendance and discipline within facilities. Making sure OJJ and Special School District are held responsible for general education and includes special education in all facilities.

Questions were taken from the floor:

Question: Gina Lewis asked what year attorney Zimmer’s research began

Answer: Ms. Zimmer stated it began in 2021.

Question: Gina Womack asked about education and IEPs prior to juvenile facility.

Answer: Ms. Zimmer stated that it is hard to get good figures on the children with IEPs or 504 plans but she estimated 30-50 percent of them did have IEPs before custody. She also stated that the IEP process is slow in OJJ because of the relationship between the Special School District and OJJ.

1. Testimony: Otha Curtis Nelson, Assistant Secretary OJJ. Mr. Nelson stated that children need advocates and advises this Commission to advocate. He also stated that OJJ is looking into the recommendations presented by Administrator Ryan. He shared with the Governor prior to his position that if children are just sitting around not having their needs met then they will act out and will soon see behavioral problems. Deputy Summers appointed new directors within OJJ. There is a new director of the education department, Chanel DeVille, PHD. Special Education director Jessica White and she is working with SSD to ensure all educational needs are being met. There is also a new title one coordinator to ensure that OJJ is taking advantage of all funding opportunities. To assure Mrs. Zimmer that OJJ is making sure that students are on the correct graduation pathway, Secretary Nelson stated that since summer there has been five youth in BCCY that has achieved their high school diploma and are eligible for Tops. There are two youth at BCY achieved their High set. At the Monroe facility, there were three youth graduates, four were able to obtain their High set at Columbia. Columbia is a fast track program. There were three youth that were able to obtain their diploma and be eligible for Tops. At the Acadiana facility, there were four youth to graduate and eligible for Tops vocational training. He stated that OJJ reached out to Juvenile court judges across the state to let them know that currently OJJ is at a bed space capacity for both secure and non-secure placement. According to Article 898, which was passed by the legislature to mandate adjudicated youth cases that are not serving a mandatory sentence after nine months. Secretary Nelson also stated that according to the data there are children that should not be in OJJ’s custody. He assured the Commission that the West Feliciana (Angola Facility) was temporary placement facility until the new facility in Monroe is up and running. Ending his testimony, Secretary Nelson thanks both Attorney Zimmer and Administrator Ryan for their recommendations for the children in OJJ.
2. Sub-committees report: Ms. Womack shared a report on the work of the sub-committees. Please find report attached (I will send the report to attach to the minutes)
3. **Announcements: No announcements were made**
4. **Confirm next meeting date: Date was not confirmed**
5. **Public Comments: There were no additional public comments**
6. **Adjournment: There was no further business brought to the floor, Mrs. Gina Womack declared the meeting adjourned**