

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
Thursday, May 25, 2023**

**MINUTES**

The Board of Directors of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council held its regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday, May 25, 2023 at 11:30 am at the Shaw Center for the Arts.

Directors in attendance were John Spain with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Major Anthony Ponton with the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Rhonda Belone with the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, Dianna Payton with the YWCA of Baton Rouge, Jennifer Carwile with Together Baton Rouge and CJCC Engage, Deputy Chief Myron Daniels with the Baton Rouge Police Department, Brandi Lawrence and Judge Yvette Alexander with Baton Rouge City Court, Margaret Lagattuta with the East Baton Rouge Parish Public Defender's Office.

Additional attendees were Christopher Csonka, Niles Haymer, and Brianna Jeansonne with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), and Hunter Thomas with the East Baton Rouge Parish Public Defender's Office.

**CALL TO ORDER**

A quorum being present, Judge Alexander called the meeting to order at 11:36 am.

**FOR APPROVAL**

Mr. Spain moved to approve the meeting minutes from the previous meeting on February 2, 2023. Ms. Lawrence seconded the motion and the previous meeting minutes was moved without opposition.

**DIRECTOR UPDATES**

**JMI Site Visit**

Mr. Csonka reported a recent visit was conducted last week to present the implementation of a pretrial services unit and a risk assessment tool based on national standards. Several meetings were held, including discussions with judges, public defenders, prosecutors, and a community meeting. Chief Judge Donald Johnson informed the attendees that the existing bail bond program would transition to a pretrial services unit. Additionally, the first step is to seek court approval, followed by the selection of a risk assessment tool. A vote on the matter will take place in the June meeting. The recommendation is to adopt a pretrial services unit and the public safety assessment. The CJCC is awaiting feedback on how this will work with screening at the parish prison. Finally, Mr. Csonka stated the CJCC should strive to establish a collaborative system to mitigate confusion caused by various types of screenings without a unified approach.

**Pretrial Risk Assessment**

Mr. Csonka provided an overview of the pretrial risk assessment tool, which measures a person's risk of reoffending and the likelihood of appearing in court. The goal is to ensure that judges, public defenders, and prosecutors have access to the same information when making informed decisions about bail and conditions for release. Risk factors are assigned based on the assessment's score, ranging from 1 (lowest risk) to 6. Chief Judge Johnson mentioned resistance to the tool is diminishing as more knowledge is

shared. Proper training and execution, along with empirical data, will help prevent racial bias when applying the risk assessment tool.

### **Jail Tour and Needs Assessment**

Chief Judge Johnson stated a jail tour is scheduled for Friday, June 2nd, at 1:00 PM. Ms. Carwile requested that the needs assessment be incorporated into the tour and considered when determining release conditions. Mr. Csonka assured her that efforts would be made to implement this feature. The needs assessment will provide valuable information to the court, ensuring that they have a comprehensive understanding of the individuals involved. The details of the needs assessment will be included in the full report.

The board discussed the three levels of the evaluation process: screening, assessment, and prognosis. There was also a mention of adding mental health evaluations as a condition of bond. This topic will be further discussed during the pretrial services working group meeting. Additionally, it was suggested to organize a "Lunch and Learn" session before the next board meeting to discuss mental health evaluations for the turnkey program.

### **Review of SIM Report**

Mr. Csonka announced that the board will review the SIM report before finalization. Once reviewed and finalized, the report will address the topics discussed during this meeting.

### **SJC St. Louis Convening Recap**

Mr. Csonka reported about the recent Safety and Justice Challenge Convening in St. Louis, Missouri. Nine delegates attended the convening, where over 60 jurisdictions gathered to exchange ideas and network. The sessions covered meaningful topics, and the discussions emphasized the role of race in the criminal justice system. The insights gained will inform the redevelopment of the local system with an intentional focus on addressing racial inequalities.

### **SafeBR Update**

Mr. Csonka reported an update on the SafeBR collaborative. He reminded the board that the SafeBR group is a new coalition formed with the support of BRAF (Baton Rouge Area Foundation), BRAC (Baton Rouge Area Chamber), and other business owners. The coalition aims to invest in long-term community initiatives that improve the justice process. Collaboration with the Mayor's office and community violence interruptions is underway, with the goal of creating a violence interruption and prevention plan by the end of fall, in partnership with Cities United.

### **Case Navigator Update**

Mr. Csonka reminded the board of the recent hiring of two new Case Navigators. Two case navigators have been hired, thanks to grant funds secured from the Wilson Foundation, and their role is to engage with individuals going through the first appearance process at the jail. Case Navigators will identify and address any needs that may have been overlooked for individuals who cycle through the jail quickly. The Case Navigators make resource connections and follow up with released individuals to ensure they receive the necessary support. The program is funded for three years, during which sufficient data will be collected to support its continuation as a permanent fixture. Coordination with the pretrial diversion program is overseen by Ms. Burns, LCSW and Case Manager for the Pre-Trial Diversion & Recovery Program.

### **Lights On! Update**

As of the latest update, 83 vouchers were issued by BRPD (Baton Rouge Police Department), and 114 vouchers were issued by EBRSO (East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office).

## **AGENCY UPDATES**

### **BRPD**

Chief Daniels reported the agency press conference, initially planned to start the summer, will be rescheduled due to an increase in shootings. The violent crime rate prior to the recent uptick was at 45%, which is an improvement compared to the 20% decrease. Recent shootings have involved family members targeting each other, indicating a shift in the nature of the incidents. The agency will address these specific cases and emphasize the changed message.

### **19th JDC**

A specialty court Continuing Legal Education (CLE) event will take place on June 15th to provide insight into the functioning of specialty courts. Additionally, Chief Judge Johnson proposed addressing the issue of driving under suspension (DUS), which affects a significant portion of the population. The DMV's revised system has made it more difficult for individuals to navigate the process of fixing their license in person. A grant proposal to prepay the fees upfront and reinstate licenses in the most underserved zones was suggested.

### **City Court**

Ms. Lawrence reported that there were no updates regarding their efforts related to House Bill item 309. The court continues to make best efforts, including having a prosecutor and a public defender present daily to handle warrants and probable cause cases during the jail callout.

### **Public Defender's Office**

Ms. Lagattuta announced the hiring of Charise Hale, who is bilingual attorney and attends both callouts for both the 19<sup>th</sup> JDC as well as City Court. Having Ms. Hale's presence has improved the efficiency of the process. Ms. Lagattuta concluded with her concern of Judges beginning callout in a timely manner.

### **EBRSO**

This meeting marked Major Ponton's last attendance. With an applause and standing ovation, the Board of Directors wished the best and thanked Major Ponton for his service with the Sheriff's Office.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to conduct, the CJCC Board of Directors meeting was adjourned at 1:06 pm.

Christopher Csonka  
Executive Director, CJCC  
May 25, 2023