

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
Thursday, July 27, 2023**

**MINUTES**

The Board of Directors of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council held its regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday, July 27, 2023 at 11:30 am at the Shaw Center for the Arts.

Directors in attendance were Chair Honorable Judge Yvette Alexander with Baton Rouge City Court, Aislyn Taylor with the City Prosecutor's Office, Mike Mitchell with the Louisiana Public Defender's Board, Lindsay Blouin with the YWCA, Tommie Gipson with the Public Defender's Office, Judge Gail Grover with East Baton Rouge Juvenile Court, Myron Daniels with the Baton Rouge Police Department, Jermaine Guillory with the District Attorney's Office, Judge Don Johnson with the 19<sup>th</sup> JDC, Dennis Grimes with the East Baton Rouge Parish Prison, and Jennifer Carwile with CJCC Engage and Together Baton Rouge.

Additional attendees were Margaret Lagatutta with the Office of the Public Defender, Tristi Charpentier with the Wilson Foundation, Robert Vehock with the Department of Corrections, Christopher Csonka, Niles Haymer, Brianna Jeansonne, and Griffin Stevenson with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC).

**CALL TO ORDER**

A quorum being present, Judge Alexander called the meeting to order at 11:33 AM.

**FOR APPROVAL**

Motion to approve May 25, 2023, meeting minutes was made by Deputy Chief Daniels, seconded by Mr. Guillory. With no opposition, the motion is carried.

**DIRECTOR UPDATES**

Judge Alexander called upon Chris Csonka to deliver Director Updates.

After brief introductions from the Board, Mr. Csonka led the meeting off with several updates to the Board.

Mr. Csonka announced Ms. Blouin as the new Director of Legal Services for YWCA and now serves as Ms. Payton's delegate on the board. Next, Mr. Csonka welcomed Mr. Gipson, Interim Chief of the Public Defender's Office to the board.

**REENTRY**

Mr. Csonka then informed the board of Ms. Charpentier and Mr. Vehock's presence to discuss grants through Department of Corrections for reentry initiatives. He noted the Wilson Foundation's vital role in coordinating reentry services at a local level and Ms. Charpentier and Mr. Vehock were invited to attend today's board meeting due to a previous conversation about grants through the DOC for reentry.

The Capital Area Reentry Coalition (CAPARC), established in 2008, was discussed, emphasizing its goal of including all organizations serving returning citizens to address their needs. A proposal was made for

the creation of a new Community Coordinator position under CJCC to enhance the alignment and connectivity of reentry efforts. Mr. Csonka noted the importance of expanding CJCC's scope to include reentry, with the idea of incorporating CAPARC as a subcommittee under CJCC. The potential Community Coordinator position would be an employee of the CJCC, working closely with CJCC Engage and other community reentry partners to strengthen resource connection and successful transition for individuals leaving prison and reentering their communities.

### **MID-YEAR FINANCE REPORT**

Mr. Csonka informed the board that the mid-year finance report indicates our spending remains in line with our annual budget. Additionally, Mr. Csonka mentioned it is important to note, as previously discussed, our funds will decrease as the grant cycle concludes. Initially, MacArthur grants covered 80% of our expenses, but now only account for 30-40%.

Mr. Csonka noted City-Parish has been supportive by creating a specific line item for our Pre-Trial Diversion & Recovery Program and increasing funding to cover operational costs for the CJCC. Mr. Csonka expressed his optimism about addressing our financial requirements in the future by securing additional funds from the City-Parish and additional funding sources.

### **SIM REPORT**

Mr. Csonka shared that in March, the CJCC conducted a day and a half exercise, with technical assistance provided by PRI to improve our comprehension of service coordination in East Baton Rouge Parish.

He also mentioned that we are in the process of establishing a workgroup to address the recommendations stemming from this exercise. This workgroup will focus on identifying gaps and needs within the parish, with a specific emphasis on the intersection of behavioral health and the criminal justice system.

In addition, Mr. Csonka highlighted that a similar exercise had been conducted back in June 2019, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. He suggested the possibility of having the same partners return to observe any changes in the landscape and to reassess our strategies in the next few years.

### **SAFETY AND JUSTICE COMMUNITY SURVEY**

Mr. Csonka reported as part of our budget allocation, we contracted with LJR Custom Strategies to conduct a public safety survey. To make the survey results more accessible to the public, we had a pamphlet created for the survey results in a user-friendly format. This booklet is now accessible on our website and serves as a gauge of the parish's sentiments on various matters.

Mr. Csonka noted that this survey will continue to inform our decision-making at CJCC as we refine our initiatives. In consideration of the upcoming election cycle, we plan to hold off on conducting the survey until a more suitable time.

Furthermore, Mr. Csonka pointed out that we have not previously produced an annual report. However, we intend to include the results of this community survey in our inaugural annual report next year.

### **CITY-PARISH / SAFE HOPEFUL HEALTHY BR, SAFE BR**

Mr. Csonka reported that CJCC Engage has been actively involved with the Mayor's initiative to reduce violence since February. This initiative involves conducting a roadmap academy with the aim of developing a comprehensive 5-year plan to address violence. The plan encompasses short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals.

As part of this process, we recently organized a well-attended community lab to gather input from the community regarding their expectations for this plan. Over the next 60 days, there will be six subgroups working on various aspects of the plan. Notably, Mr. Csonka is chairing the subgroup focused on criminal justice and juvenile justice reforms.

## **NNCJCC**

Mr. Csonka mentioned that he and Niles had the opportunity to attend the NNCJCC annual network meeting in June. They were able to interact with representatives from 30 other CJCC agencies and engage in valuable information sharing. This experience highlighted the common challenges and experiences shared by other CJCCs, reaffirming the importance of these collaborative efforts.

## **LOUISIANA NETWORK MEETING**

Mr. Csonka reported the CJCC is actively collaborating with JMI as part of our partnership with the MacArthur Foundation to establish a state-level CJCC collaborative body. This initiative has been successfully implemented in other jurisdictions and given that both Orleans and East Baton Rouge Parish are part of the Safety and Justice Challenge (SJC), the first step was to convene a meeting involving law enforcement and prosecutors.

This meeting took place for half a day, with representatives from both NOLA and EBR coming together to discuss shared experiences between the two parishes. Universal challenges were identified, and participants benefited from the opportunity to engage in open dialogue and gain insights into each other's agencies.

While acknowledging that the meeting could have been longer, Warden Grimes found the discussion interesting and agreed that it allowed for a better understanding of each other's roles and the obstacles they face to work efficiently. Mr. Guillory echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the need for continued dialogue and healing even among our own group to acknowledge shared experiences.

Chris mentioned that during the meeting, participants initially split into smaller groups and then reconvened. The Baton Rouge law enforcement representation was strong throughout the session. The goal is to replicate this type of meeting for other affinity groups, such as judges and community members, from both parishes. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) led the discussion on the police aspects, and a representative from Everyday Democracy, a component of the MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge, was also present.

## **PRETRIAL SERVICES UNIT**

Mr. Csonka reminded the board of ongoing efforts to establish a pre-trial services unit within the 19th Judicial District Court (19th JDC). The primary objective is to implement a validated risk assessment tool and employ dedicated staff to oversee individuals on pretrial supervision.

Mr. Csonka noted that House Bill 217 has passed, granting permission to add two additional commissioners to the 19th JDC. Funding for this expansion is currently in progress, with the aim of these two commissioners serving as a vital component of the Pre-Trial Services Unit (PTSU).

JMI conducted a comprehensive needs assessment, outlining the essential requirements to bring the parish up to national standards for effective pretrial services.

Mr. Csonka urged the board's attendance at the Metro Council meetings to advocate for funding for these two commissioners and the necessary staff. The overarching vision is to have commissioners equipped to

handle bonds and provide support for specific cases. By working collectively and ensuring that all areas are connected and labeled effectively, we anticipate having the funding and the infrastructure in place before the end of this year.

Lastly, Mr. Csonka underlined the integral role of the Office of the Public Defender in this initiative, as it will ultimately streamline their work and enhance the decision-making process for judges and prosecutors by providing comprehensive risk assessments.

With no further comments or questions, Mr. Csonka concluded the Director Updates

## **AGENCY UPDATES**

### **PARISH PRISON REPORT**

Warden Grimes reported to the Board that we have returned to COVID protocols, particularly in the female facility. Currently, we have had 7 or 8 females test positive for COVID.

Warden Grimes emphasized that one of the challenges we are facing is a space shortage. He reported that the older part of the jail is no longer in use, and staff are experiencing a rapid increase in inmate numbers, particularly from the outer parish. Warden Grimes expressed these individuals often have violent crime charges and limited alternative facilities available to them.

To address these issues, Warden Grimes stated that staff are making changes to the central booking area and have implemented the use of a body scanner to prevent contraband from entering the facility. Warden Grimes also mentioned that fights have become a significant concern, often stemming from conflicts originating in the community.

Furthermore, Warden Grimes noted that the inmates being admitted are showing an increased level of violence and mental health issues. Given the nature of their charges, he stated they cannot be processed through any other facilities.

East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office has issued 146 Lights On! vouchers to date.

### **BRPD**

Deputy Chief Daniels reported to the board that we are observing an overall reduction in crime, especially during the first half of the reporting period. Notably, homicides have decreased by 15%, and non-fatal shootings are down by 25%.

However, he highlighted a significant concern regarding a substantial increase in domestic violence-related crimes. Deputy Chief Daniels reported at least half of the reported homicides have been linked to domestic situations. The Deputy Chief emphasized that while BRPD is doing everything within means to address this issue, domestic violence remains a considerable challenge.

Additionally, he stated that simply increasing arrests will not fully resolve the problem, and the department acknowledges the need for a comprehensive approach to address the root causes of these issues.

Finally, he noted that BRPD has issued 128 Lights On! vouchers to date, which aims to enhance community safety through improved lighting in key areas.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Christopher Csonka  
Executive Director, CJCC  
July 27, 2023