

ESSEX COUNTY YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION MEETING

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THURSDAY, June 19th, 2025

2:00 PM- Via ZOOM <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85956421449>

and/or In Person 50 So. Clinton St. East Orange, NJ

Suite Samuel Okparaekwe, 2nd Fl

Attendees: **Hon. Philip J. Degnan** - Designee for Presiding Judge, **Chief Ana Rivera** - Chief Probation Officer, **Asmeret Ghebremicael**- Designee for Highest Elected Official of County Government, **Anthony Higgins** -Designee for County Prosecutor, **Michelle Callari** -County Public Defender, **Laura Mattia** -Designee for County DCP&P District Manager, **Valentina Richardson** -Designee for County Human Services Department Director, **Todd Barcliff** -Youth Detention Center Director, **Det. John Patino** -Law Enforcement, **Colette DeGrazia** - Designee for County Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Director, **Apryl Caldwell** -Workforce Investment Board Representative, **Alle Reis** -Business Representative, **David Armstrong** - Parent or parent organization of at-risk or justice-involved youth, **Kenneth Douglas** -Representative of a non-profit community organization of the most densely populated areas within the county , **Lori Scott Pickens** - Education Sector, **Laquanda Williams** – Domestic violence, and/or victims’ rights group, **Rev. Bernard Wilkes** - Clergy, **Jasmine Joseph-Foreman** - Education Sector, **Eric Cashew** -Education Sector, **David Sims** – Child advocacy, **Isaiah Fudge** - Civic Organizations, **Sarah Cruz** -Municipal Youth Services Commissions, **Reginald Bledsoe**, **Taieta El-Amin**, **Dr. Adejobi Odeneye**, **Shelton Thurman**, **Josephine Garcia**, **Caryl Lucas**, Representative with knowledge, experience, or interest in local youth, the local community, or the juvenile justice system. **Amanda Compton** – Court Liaison - Youth Justice Commission,

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Jason Martinez -Youth Services Commission Administrator, Nayellie Collazo, Alicia Holman - MDT Convenors, Karina Silva, RTJ Pilot Program - Community Service Aide,

Sergeant Edwin Diaz -West Orange Police Department, Nicole Williams - Leaders for Life, Rhona Vega - Parent Matters: Exposure and Opportunities Organization, Nekechi Onwudinjo - Juvenile Probation, Jamal Williams, Leigh Dym -Steampack, Curtis Moore -YAP Inc, Wilfredo Guzman - Aspira Inc, Patricia Sermon -Urban League, Malika McCall, Lavon Smith -Team Resurrection -UCC, Alexander Wolfe

“This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 -10:4-21. Notice of this meeting has been provided on the Essex County Website.

Approval of Minutes: The motion to approve the minutes from the April 17th, 2025 meeting was made by Ana Rivera and seconded by David Armstrong. The motion subsequently passed with no opposition.

New Business: Mr. Martinez stated that there was no new business to report on at the time of the meeting.

Subcommittee Reports Summary:

1. *Planning:* Laquanda Williams reported that the Planning Committee seeks to institute a Fire Junior Academy for boys and girls on the 2026 Planning Update. They are reviewing all areas within the continuum that have been completed in the planning update to ensure all are in sync with what must be submitted to the Youth Justice Commission. Mr. Martinez added that an immediate future meeting was planned.
2. *Monitoring:* Lori Scott-Pickens thanked the volunteers for their commitment; to date, there have been eight programs monitored, with more planned for June, July, and one in

December. The subcommittee has gotten good insight into service delivery coming through the programs. Mr. Martinez added that as of the meeting, 12 programs have been monitored, and further thanked new volunteers for monitoring; he also stated that some programs hadn't performed as they should have, which will be discussed at the next Youth Services Commission meeting.

3. *Allocation/Proposal:* Michelle Callari shared that there were no new immediate updates, but that the subcommittee would be meeting soon in anticipation of a more comprehensive report at the next YSC meeting.

Presentations:

1. ***Team Resurrection: New Pathways:*** Malika McCall and Lavon Smith presented this program emphasizes a hands-on focus on the whole family of the youth to aid mentor understanding, including exploring situations to determine how to keep the youth from going on a delinquent path. Available 24 hours to the at-risk youth as needed.

Accompanying every child to court so parents can feel more comfortable with the process. Advocates can help inform courts about the actions of youth. The Director of Youth Pathways expounded on seeing the mitigation of the children through intimate court visits. The approach is holistic with an understanding of traumas that must be addressed. The doctor sends comprehensive reports on a specific child depending on their specific scenarios.
2. ***Youth Advocacy Program Family Engagement:*** Curtis Moore stated the goal of the program is to provide detention alternatives for family engagement. The objective is to make youth families more involved in the court process and to reduce overcrowding in

the juvenile detention center. Furthermore, another priority is connecting families to different resources within the community to navigate the process of the juvenile justice system.

3. *Urban League of Essex County, Life Skills and Job Readiness:* Patricia Sermon

presented that the Program is about exposure of young people to different paths.

Elaborated on orientation activities and assessments, with acknowledgement that no one model fits everyone. Heavy emphasis on financial capability workshops, including

incentives for opening a bank account, getting a credit card. Risk assessment for those 18 and 19 (program is 16-19) focused on the question: how do we keep from recidivism?

Training the youth on how to fill out online job applications, interviewing techniques, making sure youth can speak to their resume, how to upload a resume, how to use

technology at the tech center, basic computer skills, podcasting, etc. The program will

also be sponsoring field trips to expose the youth to things happening in New Jersey and

potential paths (permission slips for those under eighteen), and providing a light breakfast

and lunch. The Judge asked how to connect youth to the Urban League program, to which

Mr. Martinez responded that referrals to the program are through the JDI Grant for youth

currently on probation. The program is reaching out in the hope that they will have at

least ten participants. Ms. Forman expressed gratitude that this program is using the

Modify software and further asked if the program has partnered with land institutions or

if items are still entirely digital; it was answered that the latter was correct. Ms. Forman

also asked if there are talks about partnering with any brick-and-mortar, which the

presenter could not speak to. Curtis asked if it's a conflict of interest for him to refer kids

to the Urban League program; Mr. Martinez doesn't see it becoming an issue.

ECYSC Updates: Jason Martinez, YSC Administrator:

1. ***April 30th***: Attended the Board of Commissioners to introduce stakeholders at the Board of Commissioners Meeting to be appointed as 2025 voting members.
2. ***May 1st***: Monitored the Evening Reporting Centers.
3. ***May 12th***: Discussed fiscal reports with Aspira Inc.
4. ***May 14th***: Attended the Board of Commissioners to request approval for contracts of Team Resurrection and YAP.
5. ***May 16th***: Met with Probation and the Urban League to discuss the Job & Life Skill program
6. ***May 22nd***: Joint meeting with representatives from the City of Newark and Probation to discuss the Urban League's service and referral process. On the same day, there was monitoring of probation.
7. ***May 30th***: Monitored IMatter Inc
8. ***June 3rd and 4th***: JAMS training conducted for service providers.
9. ***June 5th***: Monitored three programs from Leaders for Life.
10. ***June 12th***: Monitored Aspira Inc. Prevention Program
11. ***June 17th***: Monitored Home Detention Monitors and Electronic Monitors.
12. ***June 18th***: Follow up on training.
13. ***June 19th***: Monitored Family Engagement and the Summer Recreation Program.

Mr. Martinez noted that the Committee Chairs would meet next week. He further noted that a lot of work went into the JDAI Grant and expressed gratitude for the Urban League contract,

explaining that all those meetings were to ensure probation and family comfort with the Urban League program.

Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program

Updates: United Community Corporation, Equal Justice USA, Rutgers University:

Jacqueline provided brief updates with regard to RTJ Hub. Referrals are going well, outside of engagement hiccups with one or two individuals. The homework center was still running Monday-Friday, with an end to that with the end of school. Young people will have access to the hub Monday-Friday for the full day during summer. The team is planning tutoring and recreation activities to keep the youth engaged. Recent work has focused on social and emotional learning with engaging mental health professionals and providing parents with resources. The initiative seeks to have a backpack drive on August 22nd. The judge asked how many young people are involved, with Jacqueline responding that 64 are currently involved, with most of them not being referred to by the courts (some are referred by the YJC, returning home, and other community partners). Ms. Williams asked which Youth Justice Commission Unit was being met with, to which Jacqueline responded that it is someone from inside the institution (parole).

State Community Partnership and Family Court Program (Updates/Announcements):

1. *Township of West Orange Police Department: Junior Police Academy:* Sergeant Edwin Diaz reported that the Academy is June 23-June 27 at Liberty Middle School with 92 children participating. Seven/eight agencies are coming in to do demonstrations in addition to in-house demonstrations. Off-site activities include visits to a Yankees Game,

a Mets Game, a water park, an aquarium, and a fishing trip. The program is monitoring the heat.

2. *Aspira Inc Recreational and Evening Reporting Center*: Wilfredo Guzman reported the recreational program has openings in a boxing gym, a recording studio, etc. and doesn't cost anything for the children. Jamal Williams introduced himself as a successful participant in the program from 2014, noting his gains in confidence and self-growth. Mr. Williams, who participated in boxing, seeks to see the program restored to how it once was. Ms. Scott-Pickens commented that she felt Aspira was being too modest with regards to their accomplishments, remarking that she thinks Aspira is a model and congratulating Mr. Williams.
3. *IMatter Early Prevention Program*: Curtis Moore reported that presently servicing children regardless of number (no rejection policy). Put together a panel to teach children about gun violence for gun violence prevention month. Other activities have included financial literacy programs at the flea market (giving children \$50 to teach them about budgeting). Helping the youth reach employment but also teaching how to sustain a job. The program's focus is on sustainability, whether that's mental health, financial literacy, or emotional intelligence.
4. *Leaders for Life*: Nicole Williams reported on their day and evening Prevention program. As referrals come in, parent meetings proceed so that intakes can be completed, especially with the summer program coming up. Future trips include HBCU tour and a trip to the African American museum. Police and children had a recent successful anti-violence intervention (three hours voicing concerns). Spring Cohort graduation takes

place June 20th, 2025 at Beth Israel Auditorium, including one program member graduating with his High School diploma.

5. *Multi-disciplinary Team Convenors*. Alicai Holman reported that training is scheduled June 30th. The monitoring session of MDT went well.
6. *Superior Court of New Jersey Essex Vicinage Probation*- No updates at this time.

Youth Justice Commission Announcements: None at this time.

Public and Youth Service Commissioner Announcements: Public Portion of the Meeting

Apryl Caldwell noted the ECYSC's technology room and larger body of work, with features including VR glasses for career exploration, opportunities to obtain high school diplomas and certificates, work with the Department of Labor and shared opportunities in the field of job training and development. Ms. Caldwell encouraged the Urban League Program to use her program's resources where needed.

Ms. Erica Cashew noted that she has been impressed with Essex County's Youth Services Commission and their work, having come from Passaic County, noting inspiration at a whole county coming together to serve a population, applauding the individual work from each team/individual as a part of the whole.

Ms. Cashew spoke of her work as the City of Newark's Director of Alternative Education and her background in adult and alternative education, noting that her goal is to come in with a fresh set of eyes and involving a holistic approach to youth education with all stakeholders involved in order to best serve the student rather than just writing them off as "bad".

Mr. Martinez noted that Essex County is working with Bergen and Passaic Counties to set up a youth summit for December.

Ms. Joseph-Forman stated that she feels Aspira is a service that is quite overlooked, and asked for Mr. Martinez to circulate Mr. Williams' information. She further asked a clarifying question with regards to where the high school equivalency program is located: it was answered that there's both the Newark GED online program and the in-person program within seven city libraries. It was stated that students not officially enrolled in the Newark Public School system seeking to utilize the programs were dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Ms. Joseph-Forman also asked that if someone needs their high school diploma, could she reach out with regards to alternative education. Ms. Cashew noted that she can connect the youth with the proper resources/individuals/places within the system. She noted that she hopes for children to be connected to services during home instruction periods, keeping safety and academic progress in mind.

Rhona Vega introduced herself as being with the organization: Parent Matters: Exposure and Opportunities. She acknowledged that she and her husband raised five children who received scholarships and are now seeking to expand their approach to other parents and aid them with upbringings and college exposure to create future opportunities for the children. She noted that her program is presently funded by the Bergen County Youth Services Commission and is seeking to bring her programs to Essex and Passaic Counties to connect young people with mentorship programs. Their motto is "Youth can't be what they can't see", and the organization is seeking to prevent the youth from coming to the table with the correct questions but too late. Ms. Vega noted her approach of putting her own children in safe but uncomfortable situations in order to aid them in obtaining a college education and internships. She seeks to continue dialogue with the Essex County Youth Services Commission. Mr. Martinez asked all those online to put their information in the ZOOM chat so he can conduct further outreach.

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Parent Matters: Exposure and Opportunities programs: <https://blinq.me/5C85JYJ526n4>

[Exposureandopportunities.com](https://blinq.me/5C85JYJ526n4)

Leigh Dym, STEAMpark (leigh.dym@steampark.org) - we run STEM enrichment programs in Trenton, Red Bank, Asbury Park and Jersey City school districts. Thx!

Jacqueline Henry Jacqueline.henry@uccnewark.org

Judge Degnan thanked all participants for their time and hard work.

Adjournment: Lori Scott-Pickens moved to adjourn the meeting, with Jasmine Joseph-Forman seconding the motion. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting: July 24, 2025 Via ZOOM <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87138238255>

and/or In Person: 50 S. Clinton St, East Orange, NJ 07018- Suite Samuel Okparaeke, 2nd Fl