



**CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL  
Youth Justice Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, March 11 2026  
1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.**

**Call to Order, Roll Call, Announcements**

Co-Chair Harris convened the meeting and welcomed attendees. She also welcomed new committee member Mercedes Perez. Staff then provided instructions to committee members for participation and for public comment and took roll. The following members were present: Co-Chair Brooke Harris, Co-Chair Katherine Lucero, Dr. Carly Dierkhising, Virginia Corrigan, Frankie Guzman, Danielle Lowe, Elizabeth Calvin, Chief Jennifer Branning, Hon. Sharonda Bradford, Hon. Tilisha Martin, Tyee Griffith, Chief Rachelle Gayton, and Chief Melissa Romero.

The following members were not present: Kasey Halcon, Rosalinda Vint.

Members who were present briefly introduced themselves and their roles to welcome new member Mercedes Perez, and also for the benefit of the three new members who joined the previous meeting for the first time.

**Action Item: Approve January 28, 2026 Meeting Minutes**

Chief Romero moved to approve the January 2026 meeting minutes and Chief Gayton seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

**Action Item: Select Co-Chair**

Co-Chair Harris called for nominations for a third Co-Chair to replace departing probation chief Robert Reyes. Co-Chair Lucero estimated an approximate time commitment of 90 minutes per quarter to participate in agenda planning and meeting preparation. Chief Romero indicated that given that clarification about time commitment, she was willing to serve as co-chair and no other nominations came forward. Co-Chair Lucero thanked Chief Romero and noted that staff would reach out with additional information about next steps.

**Co-Chair Updates**

Co-Chair Lucero provided several updates from OYCR. First she shared that the Forward Change Education report, [Fewer Chutes, More Ladders](#), that the YJC reviewed and approved was officially published and available on OYCR's website and encouraged members to read the final version. She also encouraged members to review the [Juvenile Arrest Brief](#) that OYCR recently published. The brief includes an overview of youth arrest trends for misdemeanor and felony offenses in California for the past two decades, unpacking data that underscores the fact that California has and continues to sustain a decline in juvenile arrests. She highlighted an upcoming webinar on March 23 that will highlight this data at the state level, as well as national youth arrest trends.

She then highlighted two upcoming publications: the first is the annual JJRBG Summary report, which pulls together information from counties about their plans for supporting SYTF populations. OYCR has also developed a soon-to-be released technical assistance briefs on the types of programs that JJRBG funds can be used for.

## **Diversion Presentation**

Jessica Ellis, Executive Director, Centinela Youth Services (CYS), provided a presentation about the history of CYS's pre-booking diversion program, or pre-arrest diversion program, which started in 2011, including key outcomes they have achieved and lessons learned. CYS has been doing diversion work for 50 years. Until 2011 that work was all after the arrest and most youth were being diverted to the program by probation or the courts. When CYS began also doing pre-booking diversion, this opportunity was made available to all young people under the age of 18, and possible for all misdemeanors and a range of certain felonies. CYS worked over a long period to build partnerships with law enforcement, the bench, the District Attorney's Office, the public defender's office, civil rights attorneys, and other stakeholders and families to structure the pre-booking diversion program so that it could be highly effective and meet the needs of multiple stakeholders. Ellis noted that while this program did start out focused on first-time offenses and more minor misdemeanors, it evolved over time when data demonstrated that their program was able to achieve lower recidivism rates than the court system and probation supervision were getting.

In the pre-arrest diversion process, a young person does not get a booking number and they are not logged in the statewide database of arrests. If they complete CYS's services successfully, the arrest is not completed, and they can legally state they were not arrested. If they do not complete services successfully, continue to harm others and miss appointments multiple times when they have the capacity to attend, then law enforcement will complete the arrest.

CYS provides a range of services, starting with a needs and risk assessment to gauge underlying needs and allow the team to individualize the services they provide. Youth and family input and cultural relevancy are important components of the design. Restorative Justice also plays an important role, in most cases, youth have the opportunity to meet with the person or entity that was impacted by their offense and make things right directly. This has resulted in high satisfaction rates from the youth and the victims involved. She noted that they share a lot of information with law enforcement partners about the efficacy of diversion for youth at this stage, including helping to develop impulse control, empathy and improved behavior. Working with this type of diversion, Ellis noted that they are able to provide data-driven, data-informed examples of each of these things to help them see the benefits of diversion over the traditional justice processes, including consistently lower recidivism rates and higher completion of community service and/or monetary restitution. She also noted that CYS is able to start services immediately while sometimes youth being processed through the system in their county have to wait weeks or months. She shared that the program usually lasts from 3-9 months, depending on risk and need level. Ellis also shared her email address and welcomed questions and/or follow-up: [jellis@cys-la.org](mailto:jellis@cys-la.org).

Chief Romero asked which risk assessment tool CYS uses. Ellis said, with the caveat that they found the tool to have some strengths and some weaknesses, that they use the Youth Levels of Service/Case Management Inventory (she believes it is now called GEARS). She noted that they use the tool at the beginning of the program to get a sense of where things are, sometimes in the middle, but then always again at the end of a relationship to get a sense of how the risk

level has shifted – this dictates the next move, which could include extending services or providing new services if a new issue has emerged.

Co-Chair Lucero asked Ellis if she had a preferred definition of diversion and of restorative justice.

Ellis said that they define diversion as “interrupting the next legal step the case otherwise would have taken.” She explained that a key distinction is that it is not just additional services being provided, but an alternate pathway for a situation that would have otherwise moved forward. This requires CYS to build strong relationships with law enforcement partners. She also noted the importance of ensuring access to this type of diversion in communities that are overrepresented in the law enforcement system currently, which is often where such options are not available and where CYS tries to center their work in LA.

She described restorative justice as being about meaningful repair of harm. This is operationalized in the CYS programs by making every effort to contact the person or people harmed by the youth’s offense. In a case where the direct harm party is not interested in being involved, volunteers step in and the process focuses on helping the youth focus on the impact to the community, ultimately with an eye to establishing meaningful accountability in the community.

Ellis then responded to a question in the chat about ensuring that services do not result in mandates that lead to diversion failure. Ellis explained that they work with referral partners (courts, DAs, probation and law enforcement) to ensure that they just come with referrals, not with pre-tagged sanctions. That allows CYS to complete the risk and needs assessment and work with the family to provide supports as needed (including family therapy, mediation, supports etc.).

Dr. Dierkhising asked via the chat if law enforcement requires a report back in the pre-booking model or if it is a direct handoff.

Ellis explained that CYS does a report back of either complete or not complete for misdemeanors and felonies. For status offenses it’s a direct handoff without a report back. She also noted that according to the Welfare and Institutions Code, in theory, law enforcement could just do a direct handoff with no report back, other than confirming the young person enrolled in the program or not. She said ideally, with more resources and support, programs could get to essentially no-fail diversion. In this model, instead of sending a case back into the system, organizations providing diversion programming could continue to escalate services and have more, intense wraparound and supports for young people with much higher needs.

### **Discussion on YJC Priority Area: Diversion**

Member Frankie Guzman, Managing Director, Youth Justice & Equity, National Center for Youth Law facilitated a discussion with members about diversion as a priority area for the committee, offering the following questions for consideration: What do we mean by diversion? What does the evidence tell us about when diversion works best? How do we implement diversion effectively across the state? How do we measure when diversion is working?

Guzman noted that diversion can occur at multiple decision points, starting from first contact with law enforcement. He also noted that data has consistently shown that the earlier diversion occurs, the better the outcomes for young people. He encouraged the committee to consider

what decision points it should focus on with respect to diversion, which populations it wanted to focus on and which kinds of services diversion should connect youth to, citing common examples such as mentoring and youth development, which could include education and employment, family stabilization and supports, and restorative justice. He also encouraged the committee to be focused on ensuring equitable access to diversion and avoiding net widening. He shared some additional grounding research for the discussion in the chat:

[Juvenile diversion holds youth accountable for their behavior without resorting to legal sanctions, court oversight or the threat of confinement.](#)

*California Statutes:*

*WIC § 827.95 (a)(1)(A): A minor who has been diverted by police officers from arrest, citation, detention, or referral to probation or any district attorney...*

*WIC §1457 (d): "Diversion program" means a program that promotes positive youth development by relying on responses that prevent a young person's involvement or further involvement in the justice system. Diversion programs aim to divert youth from justice system engagement at the earliest possible point. Departments or agencies that may refer youth to diversion programs include, but are not limited to, schools, service organizations, police, probation, or prosecutors.*

Dr. Dierkhising noted that there is a general understanding about what diversion is but not as much clarity about what it looks like in practice. She thought it might be helpful for the committee to lay out the different off-ramps and the full trajectory across the system, making sure people truly know where the off-ramps are. She also observed that even when there are off-ramps to community organizations, there is oversight from the system. She emphasized the importance of encouraging more direct handoffs so the community is truly leading and increasing awareness of all available off-ramps for youth via diversion options.

Commissioner Bradford underscored the importance of who makes the decision, expressing concern that some agencies would buy in to pre-arrest diversion while others might not. In LA where there are many different arresting agencies this would be especially relevant. She suggested the committee also work on ensuring all youth who are eligible for certain types of diversion have access, rather than leaving the decision to independent arresting agencies.

Chief Romero agreed with Commissioner Bradford about the possibility of different responses by different agencies and suggested engagement with an organization such as Cal Chiefs or Cal Sheriffs as a possible touchpoint to help ensure more consistency across agencies.

Judge Martin added via chat that diversion should be an opportunity to prevent a youth from touching the justice system and led by community in which the youth resides to support continuity for the youth in their environment.

Frankie Guzman asked at this point if there was consensus that the committee was interested in focusing on diversion at the earliest possible point with community-based services outside of formal processing. Co-Chair Harris noted that there was consensus on this point and no objection from members.

Frankie Guzman shared some additional data from the California Youth Reinvestment Act. In which, the state allocated about \$37 million for pre-arrest diversion, between 2018-19 which was law enforcement-driven diversion. 16,000 young people across the state were serviced by this program with encouraging results regarding post-completion re-arrests.

Guzman then asked members about diversion data, namely, what diversion data should jurisdictions collect to measure outcomes and how can that data be collected in ways that supports learning, but without overburdening local, programs and administrators.

Chief Romero acknowledged recidivism data as a common indicator but suggested that an even better source of information would be well-being indicators, such as school attendance and family engagement, and other indicators revealed through a validated risk assessment.

Tyee Griffith recommended also collecting whether the diversion is community-based; the total number of referrals vs the number of youth that are actually eligible; and the number of youth offered the opportunity for diversion, disaggregated by race, gender, age, offense type, location and school district, if possible.

Judge Martin suggested collecting data around risk and protective factors. Co-Chair Harris added a question about the need to identify who holds the responsibility for this data as well.

Danielle Lowe agreed with the points suggested and noted that community-based providers have specific models they use to look at outcomes and impact related to family engagement and recidivism. She also noted the use of social determinants of health and ACEs scored.

Frankie Guzman then noted the importance of law enforcement partnerships and asked members to consider what some of the barriers might be for law enforcement agencies in trying to use diversion services as an option.

Chief Romero noted she couldn't speak directly for law enforcement and encouraged direct outreach to hear from them. She noted that it might be possible to provide training and information about some of the resources available to them within the community, the need for collaboration with child welfare departments and behavioral health, as well as schools is another consideration that adds complexity. She suggested a possible needs assessment for each jurisdiction.

Chief Gayton also noted the responsibility of law enforcement to consider the needs and experiences of victims and when engaging with them about diversion, that has to be a part of the conversation and addressing the impact on victims is important.

Tyee Griffith suggested that one barrier could be lack of clarity about eligibility for diversion and/or administrative requirements involved. She suggested a possible need for some clear eligibility criteria.

Judge Martin suggested helping to share information with law enforcement agencies about what diversion actually could offer youth involved in criminal conduct.

Chief Branning asked if diversion were community-led would the system still be able to refer someone. Co-Chair Lucero noted that she didn't think a youth already involved with the system should be precluded from community-led services and that the probation officer should be able to make that determination.

Frankie Guzman then asked the group about funding resources for diversion, mentioning as one example funding available for Behavioral Health Services through Medi-Cal and Cal-AIM. OYCR Health Policy Staff member Lisa Tadlock shared that counties are currently writing their county behavioral health plans and can apply for funding to develop strategies for, youth behavioral health as well as adults. She shared a link to more information about these [Integrated-Plans](#). She noted that OYCR is encouraging CBO Partners and Probation Partners to provide input on these plans so they can help ensure funding for the programs they know youth need. She also

noted a few other opportunities for funding through Behavioral Health systems at the state level that are examples of what jurisdictions and CBOs might be able to use to fund diversion programming: the California Health and Human Services Behavioral Health Commission, and the California Behavioral Health Commission are putting out an RFP at the end of the month, focusing on helping CBOs access these behavioral health funds, which are part of a \$100 million over 5-year initiative (the Innovation Partnership Fund). CDPH, is getting approximately 120 million in Prop 1 funding which will also go toward an RFP related to behavioral health programming. She noted that she would share both RFPs with the committee when they become available.

OYCR staff also shared a Fact Sheet on Proposition 1 BH Initiatives and how the funds are being distributed. [FAQ-Prop1](#)

Tyee Griffith shared in the chat that diversion works best when it's treated as a behavioral health and youth development strategy, and not solely a public safety tool. It should be aligned with all youth health initiatives.

Guzman then proposed that the committee move forward with one or both of the following deliverables:

- Convening a diversion practice panel to include law enforcement leaders, community leaders, other administrators and stakeholders to discuss how when and why it works in practice (think of like an education summit)
- Developing a diversion white paper or guide to include evidence supporting diversion, how diversion programs operate, implementation guidance, data and evaluation frameworks, funding strategies, and the like.

Dr. Dirkhising expressed support for both ideas, adding that for the practice panel a specific focus could be around law enforcement and probation buy-in and for the white paper to include examples of how diversion actually works in practice at each of the off-ramps. Co-chair Lucero recommended that the diversion white paper be highly California-specific.

Co-Chair Harris noted that there was consensus from the group and did not hear specific objections, so the committee would move forward with the deliverables member Guzman suggested, a diversion practice panel and a diversion white paper.

### **Data with a focus on outcomes**

Member Dr. Carly Dirkhising, Professor at the School of Criminal Justice and Criminalistics and Cal State Los Angeles, led the committee discussion about the second priority area, Data with a focus on outcomes.

She started by noting the range of what “data” means in the field, from agency-level administrative data, collected by child welfare and probation and other public agencies, to individual-level data that is collected directly relating to individual youth and families, including perceptions, mental health and experience.

She noted that while administrative-level data is much more widely available, it has clear limitations in terms of the depth of what can we learn about the impact of systems and program on individual youth and families. Conversely, while individual-level data allows for a deeper dive into how youth and families are experiencing the system, there is not widespread infrastructure set up to be collecting that type of data.

She asked the committee to consider: what are we interested in learning from the data? are we trying to ask a question or offer some recommendations about collecting certain types of data?

Co-Chair Harris remarked that being able to see both positive and negative impacts based on system involvement would be helpful to collect along a young person's journey. Being able to look at outcomes for youth that are involved at all levels of the system, from misdemeanors to adjudication to SYTF, etc. would help provide insight on what is effective and where there are pressure points.

Dr Dirkhising noted the difference between looking at impact outcomes (did a program work?) vs process outcomes (was the program implemented with fidelity?). She also talked about the importance of defining what success looks like to ensure the right outcome metrics to look at in the short and long term.

She shared an example of a Youth well-being framework <https://www.ytfg.org/well-being-framework> and [accompanying report](#). The framework serves as an example of both system level and individual level outcomes that the committee might want to consider when they think about well-being indicators.

She also noted that it is helpful to think about the development of a logic model; what a program does and what it expects to accomplish in the short term and the long term. For example, if the committee were to focus on data relating to SYTFs, they would need to consider what they are supposed to look like (per legislation), how is that operationalized, and what are the outcomes we would expect? This could also apply to the Stepping Home Model as well. Alternatively, she noted the committee could seek to make specific recommendations about what type of data agencies or CBOs should be collecting.

Danielle Lowe noted the work happening in LA county under FFPSA, involving child welfare data and the impact of older youth being connected to more disciplinary services vs preventative services. She suggested that the committee could consider partnering with them to look at some of that data and think about the impact of making connections to the community pathways a lot sooner. This work already includes multiple systems meeting together, including CBOs, and probation on a monthly basis.

Judge Martin reflected on the fact that the purpose of the justice system for youth who touch it is to provide rehabilitative services or prevention. She asked how we capture what our system offers to youth and their families and whether or not it is effective. She suggested potentially looking at a cohort of youth from different agencies and following them to see how are they doing when they are no longer with the system and really considering what has been beneficial for them as they move forward.

Dr Dirkhising expressed excitement about the idea of collecting this type of data for a pilot cohort but noted it might be beyond the scope of what the committee had the capacity to do from a research standpoint. She suggested a more feasible alternative of putting together a specific layout for collecting data for youth on a secure track and identifying some community or county partners willing to do some data collection that would allow the committee to do some data tracking.

Tyee Griffin noted that education is one of the strongest predictors of long-term stability and wanted to make sure that was part of the discussion relating to well-being indicators.

Dr Dirkhising agreed educational outcomes are important and that there are ways to capitalize both on agency-level data being collected and at the individual level, school enrollment and grades, as well as student satisfaction and well-being indicators.

Co-Chair Lucero recapped a few of the deliverable suggestions that she heard thus far:

- Developing a framework/logic model around the data
- Looking at existing county collaboratives with a focus on what they are collecting especially related to well-being and education
- Developing a model on how to collect data on youth going through the SYFT process to see if they are getting what they need

Judge Martin reiterated her focus on looking at the needs of youth and what they actually are being provided. She suggested that maybe looking at SYTFs is the right level, especially given the recent shift in how they operate.

Co-Chair Harris and Dr Dirkhising expressed support for the idea of focusing on the SYTF data. Co-Chair Lucero noted that there may not currently data points available related to well-being indicators and SYTFs but noted that OYCR is working on a new data dashboard and may be able to come back with additional ideas in this area related to higher education etc.

Danielle Lowe also shared in the chat that we can take a look at the impact of FFT and MST models as they are typically utilized for youth that are at risk or involved in the juvenile justice system... they are models identified by the state as well as part of the prevention plan and include outcomes related to academic performance, family engagement.

Co-Chair Harris noted that the co-chairs would synthesize the takeaways from the data discussion and come back with a concrete proposal in the next meeting.

### **Public Comment**

Co-Chair Harris then opened the floor for public comment. Chief Romero made a brief addition to her earlier suggestion of including Cal Chiefs as a touchpoint in the pre-referral process. She noted the decades of work CPOC has done in the diversion space, including at the pre-referral stage, making them another key partner. She also underlined the importance of the school's connection with child welfare as another important referral source.

### **Adjourn**

Co-Chair Harris thanked the members and staff, reminding participants that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, June 10, 2026. The meeting was adjourned.