



**JJDC Monthly Meeting Minutes
March 13, 2025**

Location: Rustin Conference Center
2085 Rustin Ave., Riverside, CA 92507

In Attendance: Laurel Cook, Amanda Wade, Patricia Watson, Georgia Hussein, Brian Ortiz, Cynthia Magill, Dulce Cendejas, Cari Shepherd, Michelle Wohl, Juan Ochoa, Matt Thompson, Javier Banos, Lucy Brito

Unexcused / Excused Absence: Pam Torres (excused), Joshua Angell (excused), Mike Belknapp (excused)

Applicants: Bobby Wheeler (excused), Jay Franklin (excused)

1. Call to Order

- a. With a quorum present, the meeting was called to order at 1:34 PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

- a. The pledge of allegiance was led by Chair Cook.

3. Roll Call / Welcome / Introductions

- a. Welcome:
 - o Chair Cook welcomed everyone, and each attendee introduced themselves and their affiliations.

4. Public Comment

- a. No public comments.

5. Motion to Approve Agenda

- a. M: Watson, S: Hussein, approved agenda of the March 13, 2025, meeting. Approved unanimously.

6. Motion to Approve Meeting Minutes (February 13, 2025)

- a. M: Hussein, S: Wade, approved minutes of the February 13, 2025, meeting minutes. Approved unanimously.

7. Presentation: Big Brother Big Sisters (BBBS): Juan Ochoa, Director of Community Based Programs

- a. Juan Ochoa, Director of Community-Based Programs, presented an overview of Big Brothers Big Sisters, highlighting the organization's mission to create and support mentoring relationships for youth.
 - o BBBS offers three core programs: Community Mentoring, High School Bigs, and Workplace Mentoring, all aimed at fostering academic, social, and emotional development. With a professional team rooted in psychology and social work, BBBS provides training and resources to support families and youth. In the Inland Empire, the organization serves approximately 4,600 youth annually with help from 3,000 volunteers and boasts a 98% graduation rate among participants.
 - o BBBS primarily supports youth from underprivileged backgrounds, with 55% living near the poverty line and significant representation from Latino and Black communities.
 - o Nationally, BBBS impacts 100,000 youth and has introduced new services such as family engagement, mental health resources, and career readiness training. Research confirms long-term benefits of mentorship, including improved behavior, reduced incarceration, and higher earning potential.
 - o Mr. Ochoa shared a family success story and encouraged community participation through mentorship or advocacy. During the Q&A, he noted all services are free, mentors receive extensive training, and the BBBS will host a Mental Health Summit on June 14. Currently, 80 youth are awaiting mentors.
 - o Individuals can also support the program by spreading the word about BBBS. More information is available on their website, www.iebig.org.

8. County Counsel Report

- a. Updates:
 - o It was noted; an email was forwarded from CDPO Doty to chair Cook stating that there would be no County Council representation at today's meeting due to reorganization after Bruce Fordon's retirement.

9a. Riverside County Probation (Institutional Services) – AD Matt Thompson (Data Included in Meeting Packet)

- a. AD Matt Thompson, covered updates institutional services, detailing the current population statistics, program updates, and positive developments at Riverside County facilities.
 - o Population Statistics: Current reports indicate a waiting list of 2 at the white tech program and 6 at the PTS program. There are vacancies for females at Southwest Juvenile Hall, where the female detention population is increasing.
 - o Wait List Efforts: AD Thompson mentioned that last month, Chief Doty mentioned the goal of decreasing the PTS waitlist within the next 90 days, and we are still within that timeframe.
 - o Critical Incidents: Recently documented incidents include 4 fights at Indio Hall, 2 at SW Juvenile Hall, and 9 at AMC YTEC indicating a decrease in altercations.
 - o Academic Programs: College classes are now active at Southwest Juvenile Hall, with 10 youth enrolled; 3 are confirmed enrolled in college courses. A campus visit to MSJ was organized for YTEC girls to inspire interest in college.
 - o Sports and Activities: Staff and youth engaged in sports tournaments have created a positive response. This month's sport is kickball, with past matches in volleyball and basketball noted staff lost in volleyball.



- Art Contests: An art contest has been reintroduced, awarding prizes for top entries each month.
- Reading Program: A reading program called "Women Who Read and Parlane" is being conducted biweekly, where young women read literature about impactful women.
- New Services: Collaborations with community-based organizations are in progress, including Kids in Konflikt set to provide services at SW Juvenile Hall and partnerships with The Happier Life Project and Kindful Restoration.
- b. Q & A - Riverside County Probation (Institutional Services)
 - The Commissioner asked about the win-loss record of recent matches. AD Thompson reported that the staff lost a volleyball match and, though busy, was uncertain about the basketball results but noted that they had additional skilled players on their team, with assistance from behavioral health. The Commissioner inquired whether field staff participated in the matches, to which AD Thompson replied that only institutional staff were included.
 - AD Thompson also shared that an art contest requested by the kids was reinstated, taking place almost monthly, with awards for first, second, and third places. Additionally, the DA's office has started a biweekly program called Women Who Read, where young ladies discuss literature about impactful women or those who have faced significant challenges.
 - In terms of programming, progress is being made with multiple community-based organizations (CBOs) to enhance services at SW Juvenile Hall. Kids in Konflikt has been cleared to begin services there, and they are finalizing a memorandum of understanding with The Happier Life Project. Conversations with Kindful registration are also ongoing, highlighting positive developments at SW Juvenile Hall. The Commissioner asked about the name Kids in Konflikt, confirming it is spelled with a K, and further clarified that the half wall issue mentioned was at YTEC-AMC, not their location.
 - There were no more questions for AD Thompson.
- 9b. Riverside County Probation (Field Services) Division Director, Dulce Cendejas (Data - included in meeting packet)**
 - a. Division Director, Dulce Cendejas provided an update on probation as of March 26th.
 - Currently, there are 26 youth at STRTPs, with two being dual status and none in foster family agency homes. There is one youth in a resource family home, 13 in extended foster care, and 21 in partnership with DPSS.
 - In response to a commission question about youth in extended foster care, Cendejas stated that probation officers from their division oversee these youth and provide support. She confirmed the total youth in placement is 26 as of March.
 - One commission member noted that having only one youth out of county is a good sign. Cendejas clarified that the majority of youth are out of county, with only one in county through a resource family home. She mentioned that they use Olive Crest, Beloved Ones, and California Family Life Center as STRTPs locally. The supervisors hope to revive the partnership with Beloved Ones for in-county placements.
 - A. D. Shepard mentioned that most youth are DPSS placements and noted that STRTPs have refused to accept delinquent youth. Field Services is involved in a support letter committee to consider placements for youth in foster care probation.
 - There were no further questions for Field Services.
- 10. Behavioral Health:** A representative from Behavioral Health was not in attendance.
- 11. Department of Public Social Services (DPSS): Deputy Director Children's Services, Michelle Wohl (Data included in Mtg. Packet)**
 - a. Deputy Director Wohl provided an overview of recent updates and data related to Children's Services. She emphasized the need for improved reporting methods due to inconsistencies across multiple reports that had led to confusion among partners. In collaboration with County Counsel, DPSS developed a clearer, more unified data presentation. The updated, multi-purpose report is now publicly available on the DPSS website and contains information relevant to staff and labor unions, including insights into caseload differences among offices.
 - The first two pages of the report remain consistent with previous versions and highlight the volume of hotline calls. The agency's goal is for staff to receive 8–10 new investigations per month, though some may carry over due to case complexity. January typically has fewer calls, but an increase is expected around school breaks—a trend referred to as "March Madness"—due to children expressing concerns while away from the safety and supervision of school. Schools remain the top source of reports.
 - Deputy Wohl also shared key statistics on child removals and placement exits. She clarified the distinction between removals and detention hearings, explaining that in domestic violence cases, one parent may be removed while the child remains with the other, still necessitating court hearings and provision of family support services.
 - Deputy Director Wohl reported significant improvements in data collection related to jurisdiction on disposition hearings, a previously underrepresented area. These updates are critical in reflecting the workload of staff managing complex legal cases involving family members and forensic teams, which are often challenging due to court jurisdiction requirements over a child's wellbeing.
 - In January, there were 3,277 open cases, demonstrating a substantial caseload. Average caseloads for both jurisdiction and open cases were included in the report. Wohl clarified that, while hiring has slowed due to budget constraints, there is no hiring freeze—only limited hiring.
 - Wohl discussed PPA (Planned Permanent Arrangement) cases involving youth awaiting adoption. These cases carry higher



workloads for social workers compared to reunification cases, as adoption finalization is still pending. She also highlighted the Youth and Community Resources (YCR) division, which collaborates daily with probation and serves youth with special needs, including medically fragile children. This division employs specialized staff, including embedded behavioral health and public health professionals.

- The report addressed Permanency Planning (PP), which includes children the court has determined will not reunify with their families. These children remain in the system until aging out or until a permanent arrangement, such as adoption or legal guardianship, is secured. Wohl also discussed non-related legal guardianship, where foster families care for children long-term without adopting. To maintain federal funding, these placements require biannual welfare checks, though the oversight standards differ from traditional casework.
- Additional report highlights included performance outcome measures, tracking timely family contact and compliance with federal standards. Overall, the data suggests the county is meeting or exceeding expectations in most areas. All data shared is publicly accessible.
- Deputy Director Wohl reviewed the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool, which is used during investigations to evaluate child safety and risk. This evidence-based tool reduces bias and ensures consistent, equitable decisions about reunification, supporting fairer outcomes across cases.
- b. DPSS Report Q&A: Deputy Director Michelle Wohl answered questions from commissioners about the DPSS data report.
- Adoption Trends: Adoption numbers increased in November due to National Adoption Month, a time when families often complete adoptions during a public event.
- SDM Completion Rates: Wohl reported an increase in the Structured Decision Making (SDM) completion rate from 60% in November to 80% in January, noting this is influenced by case urgency and staff workloads.
- Federal Standards: DPSS shows when families meet or don't meet the federal standard. Overall, the county performs well in most areas. This public data is accessible on the DPSS website.
- Permanency within 12 Months: The aim is for children to achieve permanency within a year after entering foster care, but legal issues can delay this, especially in severe abuse cases.
- Reentry to Foster Care: This metric tracks children returning to foster care over two years.
- Placement Stability: Riverside County is meeting compliance in some areas, while improvements are needed in others.
- Youth in One-on-One Care: Commissioners asked about the number of youths in one-on-one care; Wohl did not have that specific data.
- Harmony Haven: There are currently 21 kids present on campus, with 3 missing. The situation is improving, as the number of youth AWOL has decreased, possibly due to cold and rainy weather encouraging them to return. Additionally, 3 youth are in juvenile hall, and 2 are visiting family. These family visits are purposeful, aiming to potentially lead to placements, especially when support resources accompany the visits. Unfortunately, 4 kids are at ETS, with 2 in the hospital and 2 in a hotel. One of the hotel youths cannot be at Harmony Haven due to a trafficking involvement. Overall, the total count for Harmony Haven is 36 kids, but the current number on campus is 21, which can change frequently.
- Report Format Options: Wohl offered a choice of condensed or full monthly report versions. Chair Cook mentioned the Commission would discuss this after an executive session. Wohl also confirmed that reports are publicly accessible on the DPSS website under the Children's Services Division Monthly Dashboard and encouraged sharing this info with the community.
- The DPSS session ended with no further questions. Wohl thanked the Commission for their important collaboration in addressing complex needs of youths. Chair Cook highlighted the significance of interagency cooperation and expressed appreciation for the feedback. A short recess was announced, with participants invited to stay for the rest of the meeting.

12. Correspondence:

- a. None

13. Old Business:

- a. None

14. New Business:

- a. None

15. Activities of the Commission:

- a. Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) Report:
 - Chair Cook provided an update on the activities of the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council. She noted that she attempted to join the recent Parent Team meeting, which was held via Zoom and phone. However, she joined late, and the meeting had already concluded. She also reported that she also tried to join the JJCC Ad Hoc Committee meeting scheduled earlier today via phone, but the access code provided was invalid, preventing her from attending.
 - Q&A Session for the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) Report: Chair Cook responded to questions from commissioners regarding the JJCC's ad hoc meetings.



Commissioner Ortiz expressed interest in attending the ad hoc committee meetings, stating that if no one else is attending, he would like to participate. He also noted a lack of consistent Commission representation in recent meetings.

- Chair Cook responded she planned to attend the meetings. She confirmed that she did attend the last meeting via phone and explained that phone participation is common and shared that she had asked Commissioner Josh to attend the meeting on her behalf due to upcoming travel. However, he was also unable to join, leading her to try to join by phone, without success.
- Vice Chair Wade asked if the meetings were virtual (e.g., Zoom), Chair Cook clarified that participants can join by Zoom or phone, and she prefers to call in rather than use Zoom.
- Commissioner Ortiz questioned the delegation process, asking whether other commissioners had an opportunity to attend. Chair Cook explained that, as Chair, she represents the Commission on the JJCC and that the ad hoc committee is a subcommittee under JJCC. She was appointed by former Chair Chris and she then asked Josh to cover when needed. She acknowledged Commissioner Ortiz's interest and said future opportunities could be considered.
- Commissioner Ortiz and Vice Chair Wade both raised concerns over recent Commission absences at ad hoc committee meetings. VC Wade noted that during the last commission meeting, CBO members expressed frustration at the lack of a voting representative from the Commission.
- Chair Cook acknowledged the concern and confirmed her understanding of the importance of consistent representation moving forward.
- CBO Alliance: Chair Cook reminded the group of the upcoming CEO Alliance Raising the Future event on March 22nd.
- b. Committee Reports:
 - **Inspections:** Chair Cook noted that Commissioner Watson would provide the Inspection Committee update in Commissioner Belknap's absence.
 - Commissioner Watson reported that all inspection reports for Law Enforcement facilities holding minors in lockups are finalized, except for three that are still in progress. The inspection for the Colorado River Substation has not been scheduled, and Vice Chair Amanda Wade offered to conduct it.
 - Watson noted that finished reports have been submitted to the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), Chief Wright, and the Presiding Judge. The pending reports for the Secure Lockup for Minors will also be sent as required.
 - Watson shared that BSCC's associate analyst, Miss Peerson, confirmed future reports should go to a new centralized email: FIRR@bscc.ca.gov, and clarified that the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) does not inspect facilities under Title 15 or 24. Miss Peerson will be the Commission's point of contact at BSCC.
 - During the Q & A, Vice Chair Wade asked if Cynthia was handling all tasks related to inspections, to which Cynthia confirmed.
 - Watson inquired about pending reports, and Cynthia indicated that Commissioner Belknap had not submitted them.
 - Watson concluded that all inspections and reports would be complete once the pending reports are received, and the Colorado River Substation was scheduled and report completed.
 - Chair Cook thanked all involved for their efforts and asked for further questions, none were raised.
 - **Diversion Committee:** VC Amanda Wade reported that the committee is working on developing a Flyer or guide to present to the Commission in June. They plan to include Big Brothers Big Sisters in the mentoring section and have identified six sections focused on reducing recidivism. Wade also spoke with Happier Life Projects to understand their services and staffing, which will likely be included under diversion services.
 - Chair Cook asked if the guide would have details on meeting times and locations for interested Commissioners to attend. VC Wade replied that they could provide this for organizations that share the information, but most services are not meetings; they are individual services, like mental health services.
 - Commissioner Wade mentioned that the guide will include titles, contact details such as phone numbers, websites, emails, and a brief description of each program.
 - Another Commissioner inquired whether Happier Life Project offers services inside or outside institutions. VC Wade clarified that they provide both but will mainly be listed under substance abuse services for diversion purposes.
 - **Awards:** Chair Cook asked Georgia to provide an update regarding the Awards. Awards Chair Hussein explained that due to Pam's inability to continue as the Awards Chair, she has agreed to step in as the new Chair for the Awards Committee.
 - Due to time constraints and Commissioner Hussein's new role with the Awards Team, Cynthia volunteered to quickly provide the award updates for clarity. Chair Cook approved this approach.
 - Cynthia reported that recruitment flyers were included in the over 180 nomination request and Award invitations sent to Schools, Board of Supervisors offices, Riverside County City Council offices, and other entities involved in submitting nominations and attending the awards event. She further noted that while efforts were made by Commissioner Angell to update the nomination materials using Canva, competing priorities prevented him from finalizing the forms. She was not informed until February 28th that the forms had not been completed. This setback delayed the email, mailing of nomination request and other award-related activities by approximately two weeks.



- Commissioner Wade inquired if there was sufficient time left to fulfill the requests related to the awards.
- Cynthia responded that while the timeline is extremely tight, she affirmed that the team will do whatever is necessary to complete all preparations in time.
- Key speaker confirmations include Michelle Paradise, Assistant Chief Executive Officer of Riverside County, who will deliver the introductory remarks. Judge Peterson's participation as keynote speaker remains uncertain; he may assign a representative if unavailable.
- In honor of PCO Santana, the Santana family will attend the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., and will not be present at this year's JJDC Awards Ceremony. Chief Probation Officer Christopher Wright will also attend the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. Assistant Chief Natalie Rivera, along with other members of Executive Team will represent the Probation Department at the 2025 JJDC Awards Ceremony.
- The Awards Team will request that Commissioner Belknap coordinate with Mrs. Beltran regarding the presentation of the Julio Beltran Memorial Award.
- Program drafts are currently in progress, and printing costs are expected to be slightly lower than the previous year. The Legacy Award will not be presented at this year's ceremony.
- Chair Cook raised the possibility of inviting Supervisor Karen Spiegel as a speaker, noting her past support of the Commission. Cynthia confirmed that Spiegel's senior legislative assistant will attend.
- Cynthia emphasized the importance of commissioner involvement in the awards ceremony, particularly in supporting event setup, trophy coordination, and general logistics. She noted that, while Cathy managed guest sign-in, she was behind the scenes reviewing the presentation with the Commission and the Judge, while also handling various other responsibilities related to event coordination. Chair Cook responded that additional support should be provided by Probation. Commissioners agreed to assign roles and responsibilities at the next meeting to ensure adequate coverage.
- The ceremony will be held at the Board of Supervisors Chambers. There will be no vendor booths, refreshments, or displays, as the venue layout is not conducive to such arrangements. The event will be open to the public.
- Additional Award Team Recruitment efforts included the production of 600 outreach materials (flyers, brochures, and award invitations) for the "Rising in the Future" event vendor booth to recruit youth and adult commissioners.
- The Awards Team remains steadfast in their commitment to ensuring a successful ceremony and is determined to overcome earlier setbacks.
- **Operating Policy Committee:** Chair Cook reported that a meeting with Chief Probation Officer Christopher Wright is pending confirmation. A tentative date has been set for next Monday, although availability from all committee members has not yet been finalized. The Chief has requested to hold the meeting via Zoom. Chair Cook noted her personal preference against virtual meetings but acknowledged the logistical convenience. She also reported that while a prior meeting with the judge had been scheduled, the judge had to leave early due to illness. In his absence, the Commission met with Marcus Walls, Juvenile Director for the Riverside Superior Court. The judge subsequently conveyed his support for the Commission's proposed changes and overall direction.
- Chair Cook initiated a discussion regarding the current meeting time, noting that the Commission traditionally meets at 1:30 p.m., but expressed openness to revisiting the schedule to better accommodate commissioners' availability. She cited examples from other counties, noting that San Mateo meets at 5:30 p.m. and San Bernardino meets at 4:00 p.m., likely to align with the end of the county workday. Chair Cook encouraged commissioners to share their preferences regarding meeting times.
- Vice Chair Wade and Commissioner Watson both expressed a strong preference for daytime meetings. Chair Cook acknowledged the feedback and noted that Commissioner Joshua was unable to attend the current meeting due to a work conflict. VC Wade proposed the idea of potentially holding quarterly evening meetings, such as between 5:30 and 7:00 p.m., to provide flexibility.
- AD Thompson added that if the Commission opted for a later time, Probation Department leadership would make necessary adjustments to accommodate attendance, but emphasized that meeting times should primarily reflect what is best for the Commission's work. Chair Cook suggested considering a meeting start time around 3:00 p.m. for interagency meetings involving county and state representatives and invited commissioners to submit their input via email. She confirmed that any changes to meeting schedules and frequencies would be addressed in the planning documents currently being developed, with a target of moving toward quarterly meetings, except for additional meetings related to the awards ceremony.
- Commissioner Watson expressed a preference for Zoom meetings; however, Chair Cook clarified that, due to the Brown Act, Zoom meetings are not permitted outside of emergency declarations such as COVID-19, which had temporarily allowed remote participation.
- Chair Cook invited VC Wade to provide a report on the recent statewide JJDC meeting. VC Wade summarized that two proposed legislative changes were discussed. The first involved the addition of a food and hunger assessment as part of



juvenile facility inspections, tied to AB 802. The statewide group recommended developing a standardized set of questions related to food quality, quantity, and nutrition across all counties. AD Thompson confirmed that while there are already dietary regulations in place, the new proposal would layer additional inspection requirements focused specifically on food sufficiency and quality. VC Wade noted the significant variation between counties in food services provided to youth.

- The second item discussed at the statewide meeting concerned Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTFs). Proposed updates would introduce additional reporting requirements, though they do not significantly alter existing operational standards. VC Wade emphasized that while the SYTF updates were administrative, the food and hunger assessment addition would have more practical implications during inspections.
- Chair Cook noted that previous statewide discussions on the placement of very young youth, such as 13-year-olds, also mirrored concerns observed locally. She thanked VC Wade for covering the meeting and sharing valuable insights.

16. Commission Member Reports:

- This topic was covered during the Activities of the Commission section.

17. Adjournment:

- Chair Cook called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Hussein moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Pat Watson. The motion was approved unanimously by commissioners, and the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Next Meeting:

Date: May 8, 2025

Time: 1:30 pm

Location: Rustin Conference Center (Entrance 1) Room TBD
2085 Rustin Ave., Riverside, CA 92507