



VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

Meeting Minutes

Commission Meeting

April 1, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

General Assembly Building, Senate Committee Room B

Attending:

Senators: Barbara Favola (Chair), Dave Marsden, David Suetterlein

Delegates: Joshua Cole, Holly Seibold, Irene Shin

Citizen Member: Mackenzie Babichenko

Attending Virtually:

Delegates: Carrie Coyner (Vice-chair) and Anne Ferrell Tata

Not Attending:

Delegates: Karrie Delaney

Citizen Member: Rita Jones and Jessica Jones-Healey

Staff Attending:

Amy Atkinson, Will Egen

I. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Senator Barbara A. Favola, Chair

Senator Favola welcomed the Commission members, speakers, and the public. Delegates Carrie Coyner and Anne Ferrell Tata attended the meeting virtually. Both members had personal obligations that made it necessary for them to attend virtually. Senator Favola explained that the focus for the meeting was on the current challenges at the juvenile correctional center at Bon Air.

II. Meeting Topic and Agenda Overview

Amy M. Atkinson, Executive Director

Amy Atkinson referred Commission members to the letters that Senator Favola and Delegate Coyner sent to the Director of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Ms. Amy Floriano. Copies of these letters, meeting presentations, and news articles are included in

the Commission members' folders. Ms. Atkinson explained the purpose of the meeting is to address concerns and give DJJ an opportunity to respond to questions posed in the letters from Senator Favola and Delegate Coyner.

III. Department of Juvenile Justice – Bon Air Correctional Center

Amy Floriano, Director, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

Amy Floriano provided an overview of Virginia's juvenile justice system in a 130 slide presentation. Because of the detailed amount of information provided, not all of the slides were reviewed during the presentation. Commission members directed the discussion during this presentation towards the staffing, safety, and well-being issues at Bon Air. Based on the concerns expressed by members during the presentation, Senator Favola recommended sending a letter to the Governor requesting an independent investigation into the situation at Bon Air. The recommendation was stated as follows:

- Request the Governor to initiate an independent investigation into the operations, staffing, programming, mental health services, and other practices at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center to assist the Department of Juvenile Justice in making the changes necessary to set the Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center on the path of becoming a national model for the rehabilitation of youth.

A motion to adopt this recommendation was made and seconded and it was adopted unanimously.

This presentation can be accessed on the Commission's webpage under the meetings tab.

IV. Prevention, Partnership, and Possibilities: State of Utah Perspective

Brett Peterson, Director, Juvenile Justice and Youth Services, Utah Department of Health and Human Services

Senator Favola next introduced Brett Peterson, Director of Juvenile Justice and Youth Services in Utah, to share his experience and knowledge. Mr. Peterson provides support nationally to juvenile justice entities and was the immediate past president for the Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators. His biography can be accessed on the Commission's webpage under the meetings tab.

Mr. Peterson provided a presentation and shared his philosophy of always doing what's best for the kids, using research-based policy, refining practices, and leveraging partnerships. In Utah, they shrunk the system dramatically by only serving the youth with significant criminal charges. He also shared the items that Utah considered when transforming their facilities.

This presentation can be accessed on the Commission's webpage under the meetings tab.

V. Law and Advocacy Perspective

Julie E. McConnell, Professor of Law, University of Richmond School of Law

Senator Favola introduced Julie McConnell, Professor of Law at the University of Richmond, for a law and advocacy perspective. Her biography can be accessed on the Commission's webpage under the meetings tab. Ms. McConnell started off her presentation by explaining that an ideal youth justice system encompasses—one that not only holds youth accountable but also instills prosocial values and supports their successful transition back into the community.

Her presentation went on to discuss how Virginia can design a system that:

- Leverages youth resiliency through evidence-based interventions.
- Integrates comprehensive mental health and trauma-informed services.
- Harnesses restorative justice principles.
- Prioritizes education as a life-changing opportunity for young people.
- Provides effective re-entry programs to help end delinquent involvement.
- Recognizes the diminishing returns of prolonged incarceration.
- And addresses the root causes of delinquency.

Following her presentation Senator Favola discussed working with Ms. McConnell during the summer in developing recommendations for the 2026 Virginia General Assembly Session.

VI. Department of Juvenile Justice Response

Amy Floriano

Amy Floriano responded to a couple of the points made by Ms. McConnell including the discussion on discharge planning for committed youth. Ms. Floriano also thanked the Commission for its support and desire to be involved in this topic

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.