



**Dallas County Criminal Justice Advisory Board  
General Membership Minutes for Monday, September 18, 2023**

**Welcome & Introductions**, Commissioner Dr. Garcia, called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM. All in attendance made customary introductions.

**Membership & Infrastructure:**

There were no changes to membership or infrastructure at this time.

**Meeting Minutes:**

The minutes from the CJAB General Membership meeting held on June 26, 2023, were made a part of the packet. A motion was made to approve minutes; the motion was seconded by Valencia Nash and approved.

**Presentations:**

**The Vehicular Crimes Unit-** Andrew James and Lauren Black

Commissioner Dr. Garcia and Ellyce Lindberg introduced the speakers and read their biographies included in the CJAB packet.

Andrew James conveyed his appreciation for the opportunity to serve the citizens in Dallas County. He detailed how he became involved in the Vehicular Crimes Unit in Dallas County under Judge Creuzot. The unit, comprising specialized unit of prosecutors, investigators, and a paralegal, focuses on handling vehicular homicide cases to assist law enforcement in investigations and successful prosecutions.

The unit's goal is to handle all vehicular crimes, including intoxication assault cases. Mr. James highlights the challenges in prosecuting vehicular crimes, emphasizing difficulties in proving intoxication, especially in cases involving drugs. Causation and crash reconstruction are identified as intricate areas of the law, characterized by complexities that contribute to the overall difficulty of handling these cases. Mr. James outlined the current team members, including the prosecutors, an investigator, and a paralegal, detailing their roles in handling various cases involving DWI, felony murder, intoxication manslaughter, racing deaths, vehicular manslaughter, and hit-and-run incidents.

The presentation includes examples of cases, emphasizing the severity and consequences of reckless driving, racing, and driving under the influence. Mr. Andrew James advocates for the unit's expansion to handle more cases and improve outcomes. The importance of specialized knowledge in navigating the complexities of vehicular crimes is highlighted, and the speaker concludes by presenting a video example illustrating the impact of intoxication on a fatal crash.

Mr. James discussed the significant number of car crash fatalities in Dallas County and emphasizes the complexity of vehicular crime cases, requiring specialized knowledge for effective prosecution. Having specialized personnel helps ensure informed decisions in filing charges, avoiding assumptions, and checking the accuracy of crash reconstructions. The unit's mission is to address the challenges associated with prosecuting vehicular crimes, contribute to public safety, and seek justice for victims of these incidents.

Mr. James reflects on his career transition to vehicular crimes, expressing a passion for helping families affected by tragedies navigate the criminal justice system with respect and compassion. Vehicular crimes are highlighted as violent crimes due to the severe forces involved in crashes, impacting innocent lives.

Data on car crash fatalities in Dallas County from 2010 to 2022 is presented, indicating a disproportionate number compared to other large Texas counties. Despite having fewer residents than Harris County, Dallas County consistently records higher fatality rates in car crashes and alcohol-related incidents. Mr. James acknowledges the efforts of law enforcement agencies in addressing these issues but underscores the need for collective action to improve road safety.

The presentation includes a case example from Garland PD involving a high-speed chase resulting in a fatal crash. The defendant, with a history of prison escapes and criminal activity, caused the death of a young woman and left her son in a vegetative state. The defendant received a life sentence after a trial, illustrating the unit's commitment to seeking justice in such cases.

Future plans and goals involve expanding the unit, increasing personnel, and engaging in educational outreach, potentially visiting schools to educate students about the consequences of reckless driving. Mr. James concludes by inviting additional input from their colleague, Lauren and opening the floor for any questions. Ms. Lauren Black mentioned their grant applications for unit expansion.

Judge Autry inquired about the previous existence of the DWI squad. Mr. James highlighted its potential benefits and the effectiveness of visible enforcement based on studies. However, recognizing staffing challenges and the need to prioritize resources, he understands there may not nearly as many folks given the constraints.

Mr. James ended the presentation by expressing gratitude towards the Dallas Police Department (DPD) and all other agencies, commending their efforts and acknowledging the valuable work they are contributing.

### **Committee Project Updates:**

#### **Criminal Justice Administration & Jail Population Management Update:**

LaShonda Jefferson began her update with reiterated The Dallas County Criminal Justice Department is a neutral entity, tasked by the Dallas County Commissioner's Court with collaborating with all Criminal Justice Stakeholders and community agencies to address system bottlenecks, barriers, and help create solutions, to ensure timely and efficient justice. Historically the Dallas County Criminal Justice System has operated in departmental silos. Recently, substantial collaborative efforts have been established with internal and external partners to assist with jail population management to avoid justice delays while managing public safety. William Gladstone said it best "Justice Delayed is Justice Denied." The Jail Population Management team operates under this premise every day. The Jail Population committee meeting was held on Friday, September 15. The Jail Population packet was distributed. Excerpts from that packet can be found on pages 25 through 32 of the CJAB packet. The jail population for today is 6,681, which is 98% of our reduced total jail capacity. The average jail population for August 2023 was 6,601 and our yearly average for 2023, so far, is 6,140. The Criminal Justice Department continues to collaborate with stakeholders to manage our jail population.

#### **Fair Defense:**

Mr. Paul Blocker delivered an update, informing CJAB members of a recent grant received from the Texas Indigent Defense Commission aimed at reducing caseloads in misdemeanor cases. This funding will facilitate the recruitment of additional attorneys, effectively lowering the caseload from one hundred to fifty per attorney per month. Mr. Blocker also discussed a recent report by the National Association of Public Defense, highlighting that the existing 50-year-old recommendations are now considered too high. The Public Defender's office currently exceeds the new recommendations, set at 150 low-level misdemeanors and 59 felonies per attorney per year. Efforts are underway to align with these updated standards, exploring potential departmental or governmental interventions to approach these recommended figures. Ms. Rice added to the discussion by sharing news of an additional grant designed to enhance handling competency and standard mental health cases. She noted the presence of bilingual staff and ongoing efforts to expand staffing while improving technological resources within the Public Defender's office.

#### **Justice of the Peace:**

Judge Valencia Nash presented a brief update, noting that since the last meeting, they have successfully onboarded their analyst. While progress has been made in reducing issues with Odyssey, a few challenges still require attention. One of the JPs' priorities is to conduct monthly meetings. Judge Nash

also discussed the importance of reclassifying certain positions, expressing the hope of retaining the best employees and ensuring their satisfaction.

**Law Enforcement/Jurisprudence:**

Ellyce Lindberg provided the update, noting that since the last meeting, there hasn't been a formal gathering. The team maintains close communication with law enforcement partners, particularly regarding cases where the defendant is in jail. This involves an extensive manual process, contributing to the mentioned delays in manual processing times. Since the Odyssey transition, there hasn't been a system in place to display arrests and closures on the website. This is crucial for compliance by every August 1st to meet grant requirements. Ellyce expresses hope for a potential contract with a vendor to address and resolve these issues.

**Pretrial:**

Pretrial was unable to attend, but they submitted their update via email. The CJAB packet includes their statistical summaries. The current figures for Pretrial Services are as follows: Alcohol monitoring has 1,567 registrations, Electronic Monitoring has 552, Mental Health has 226, and General Pretrial has 180 cases, totaling 2,525 defendants currently under supervision.

**Reentry:**

Christina Crain was unable to attend the meeting but sent a brief email indicating that there is no formal subcommittee report. She continues her commitment to assisting individuals in making a fresh start by helping them secure employment, housing, and healthcare.

**Program Update:**

Mr. Dave Hogan expressed gratitude for the opportunity to present an update on the Dallas Deflection Center, providing an overview, a year's worth of operation, demographics, and challenges. The center serves as a jail diversion project, streamlining the process for low-level criminal offenses to reduce time and cost. The collaboration between law enforcement and the criminal justice system is emphasized, addressing mental illness and substance abuse.

After a year of operation, handling 272 clients, Mr. Hogan elaborates on de-escalation techniques, the goal of diverting individuals from jail to treatment facilities, and collaboration efforts with police agencies. Demographics reveal a high percentage of mental health and substance abuse disorders among the homeless population served. Mr. Hogan identified patterns of mental health disorders and emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach.

Plans to expand the center's operation to 24/7 were discussed, addressing questions in the Q&A session about the participation of other law enforcement agencies and potential office expansion. The focus is on intentional expansion and obtaining funding before considering 24/7 operations.

**Public Comments:**

None.

**Announcements:**

The next CJAB meeting will be held on December 18, 2023, at 2:30pm.

**Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:46pm.