



**Dallas County Criminal Justice Advisory Board
General Membership Minutes for Monday, March 25, 2024**

Welcome & Introductions: Commissioner Dr. Elba Garcia called the meeting to order at 2:32 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 December 18, 2023, were made a part of the packet. A motion was made to approve minutes by Christina Crain; the motion was seconded by Paul Blocker. The approval of the meeting minutes was unanimous.

Presentations:

Wellness Unit at Dallas Police Department

Officer Joe King informed the group that the unit was created in response to numerous high-heat complaints and alcohol-related incidents involving officers. Chief Garcia tasked Chief Ramirez with assessing the department's overall health and wellness initiatives. After conducting several focus group meetings over many months, Chief Ramirez reported back, stating it was not great.

In response, Chief Garcia allocated five full-time staff positions, along with a sergeant and a lieutenant, to address these issues. The team, on paper, reports directly to Chief Eddie Garcia. Chief Ramirez then developed the structure and guidelines for the Officer Wellness Longevity (OWL) unit. The unit's logo, an owl, symbolizes wisdom, time, transition, and change, qualities that are much needed.

Officer Joe King provided a brief overview of his career and state of wellness. With over 27 years of service in the Dallas Police Department, Officer King spent nearly 20 years pursuing drug dealers in the Southeast Division around Fair Park and Pleasant Grove. During this time, he neglected his own wellness.

Officer King explained the workings of the OWL unit, which provides education and critical response to officers involved in shootings and other incidents. The unit also contacts officers experiencing a death in the family. Unlike past reactive

peer support models that relied on volunteers, the OWL unit uses a proactive approach called "checkpoints."

Checkpoints involve 37 selected informal leaders from various ranks and departments, chosen for their reputation and respect among peers. When a critical incident occurs, these leaders are notified to check on the involved officers, ensuring a more trusted and effective support system. This proactive strategy has resulted in about 200 monthly checkpoints, with 10-12% of contacted officers seeking further resources like counseling.

Officer King introduced photos of the new wellness K-9, an ex-racing greyhound from Australia, part of a program called Aussie Mates in the States. In Australia, retired racing dogs are rehomed and some are trained as PTSD and therapy dogs for first responders. This successful initiative is now being introduced to the United States, with Dallas PD as a key participant due to its large size. The program covers all costs for first responders, including vet care, food, and training. Several other agencies, such as Duncanville, White Settlement, and South Lake, have shown interest. Greyhounds, known for their calm demeanor, are ideal for helping individuals with anxiety, providing a soothing presence without excess energy.

Officer King discussed the new alcohol leave policy initiated by Chief Garcia. The policy encourages officers to seek help for alcohol issues before an incident occurs, offering paid leave for rehab programs lasting 30-45 days. This proactive approach has resulted in a dozen officers seeking help over the past year and a half. The department has researched local rehab facilities and provides comprehensive support, including intake forms and transportation. Additionally, an AA-style program for officers is held weekly, led by an officer who has successfully completed rehab. This program is open to all first responders, not just Dallas PD, and maintains strict confidentiality to encourage participation.

Officer King spoke about the lack of education regarding the physiological impact on officers involved in shootings or critical incidents. Officers often face a "rollercoaster" of stress, returning home expected to be normal. A doctor compared the police profession to a "bad human experiment," with officers repeatedly exposed to traumatic experiences over decades. To address this, the department now educates officers, especially rookies, about these physiological effects and includes their families in counseling and education services. Officer King also runs a newsletter, issued every six to eight weeks, filled with educational content, videos, and new resources to help officers and their families understand and manage these challenges.

Officer King launched a podcast in 2021 aimed at motivating, inspiring, and educating listeners, while also providing entertainment. The podcast features a wide range of guests, including Navy SEALs, Chief Garcia, near-death experience firefighters, mental health experts, and police supporters. Despite being a street cop and not a professional podcaster, King's show has reached

audiences in over 80 countries and is ranked in the top 1.5% globally. The podcast has garnered positive feedback from both civilians and first responders, with some crediting episodes for encouraging them to seek counseling or rehab. The podcast also gathers feedback from the department to tailor programs, leading to initiatives in spiritual and physical fitness, and financial wellness. These programs address common issues like financial stress among officers.

When asked about the greatest area of need, Officer King identified family and counseling support. Since the incident on July 7th, 2016, there has been a 300% increase in officers seeking counseling. Financial records from the ATO show expenditures of \$183,000 on counseling services in 2022, which rose to \$261,000 in 2023, reflecting both rising costs and increased demand. Officer King noted there was no pushback in creating these programs because they were introduced by respected and trusted individuals. Participation levels vary by gender depending on the type of help requested. Officer King shared his contact information and can be reached at Joe.King@dallaspolice.gov.

Electronic Data Reporting Update

Commissioner Garcia introduced Charlene Randolph and Ellyce Lindberg.

Ms. Randolph and Ms. Lindberg, along with other stakeholders including district and county clerks, have been actively engaged in a collaborative effort to achieve a 90% completion rate for the Electronic Data Reporting (EDR) project by August 1st, 2024. The efforts are focusing on open arrest and disposition reporting from the years 2018 to 2022.

Ensuring this completion rate is crucial for securing grant funding, which supports various community initiatives. The project involves two primary categories: open arrest closures and submitting case dispositions within 35 days. Both categories must achieve a 90% completion rate. Ms. Lindberg explained the critical status of Electronic Data Reporting (EDR), as it directly influences the eligibility of all government and nonprofit organizations in the county to obtain grant funding from the governor's office. Ms. Lindberg also detailed the process of handling open arrests within Dallas County such as resolving cases promptly, through legal means, such as dropping charges or processing them through the District Attorney's office or courts.

Challenges have been addressed through coordinated efforts involving multiple entities, including courts and law enforcement agencies. For instance, last year, 6,300 cases were needed for compliance, but now approximately 27,000 are required. Meetings, resource allocation, and collaborative troubleshooting sessions have been instrumental in advancing progress towards the established goals. The stakeholders have been working tirelessly, engaging in significant manual work to meet their obligations. This effort involves various entities across Dallas County, demonstrating a collective effort to overcome external challenges and achieve the 90% completion rate.

Ms. Lindberg shared that lists will be distributed to all law enforcement agencies to verify the status of open arrests due to system discrepancies. Law enforcement agencies will need to research the status of these arrests. Changes in legislation and the inclusion of cases from entities like the City of Dallas Municipal Court, which the county does not control, have complicated the process. For instance, 3,300 class C cases that are currently affecting the compliance rate.

Gary Fitzsimmons provided an update on the work being done at the District Clerk's Office, praising the staff and IT department. He mentioned that Nathan Dillinger from the IT Services Department, along with the LaFayne from the DA's team, have been working diligently to address issues. Mr. Fitzsimmons explained that two major issues are being managed by the District Clerk's Office: Office of Court Administration (OCA) reporting and EDR compliance. He highlighted that 21,000 cases from 2018 to 2022 are being processed for disposition, but a configuration issue with the new case management system has caused delays. Mr. Fitzsimmons expressed confidence in their progress, noting that a bulk download solution from Tyler Technologies is expected soon, which should expedite the process. He also stressed the importance of ensuring data accuracy to avoid errors that can significantly delay compliance. Collaboration with various stakeholders, including the sheriff's department, is crucial to address these errors and improve overall efficiency.

Commissioner Garcia inquired about the duration and manual nature of corrections. Gary Fitzsimmons explained that fixing a single error can take at least three weeks. He suggested revising the LDA document due to outdated processes, emphasizing the need for transparency and clear stakeholder responsibilities. A vendor response on the timeline for relief is expected soon. They aim to balance 2018 to 2022 open arrests against Odyssey for dispositions, using mass uploads to expedite the process.

Ms. Randolph expressed optimism about the upcoming weeks and thanked the dedicated stakeholders, including clerks, the IT department, the DA's office, and the sheriff's office, for their collaborative efforts to meet the 90% compliance goal and secure grant funds. Ms. Randolph acknowledged Mr. Fitzsimmons' recent involvement in the project and the hope his ideas have brought to the initiative. Commissioner Garcia expressed her gratitude to everyone involved in the project. She acknowledged Dr. Watkins for securing funds to hire additional personnel and administrative support.

Committee Project Updates:

Criminal Justice Administration & Jail Population Management Update:

LaShonda Jefferson provided the update. The Jail Population committee meeting was held March 15, 2024, excerpts from that packet can be found on pages 39

through 46 of the CJAB packet. The jail population for today is 6,278, which is 88% of our reduced total jail capacity. The Criminal Justice Department's Jail Population Management team continues to manually review and research individuals in jail across multiple systems to determine who is in custody and why. The Jail Population team uses email inquiries to partners to raise awareness when appears action is needed. The objective is to prevent justice delays and unnecessary costs to the county. The most common results from the jail management inquiries are court dispositions asking for a reset to the Dallas County Sheriff's Office for processing, court settings are requested and provided for criminal case movement, unnecessary release holds are removed and individuals are released from custody and individuals are released timely to special programs, just to name a few. Ms. Jefferson responded to Commissioner Garcia's inquiry about having enough personnel to do the manual work. The Commissioner was surprised to learn about the extent of the manual work involved, and Ms. Jefferson explained that additional positions would help facilitate these duties.

Fair Defense:

Lynn Richardson provided the update. The Public Defender's office continues to work with all their partners in the criminal justice area to ensure fair defense for everyone. Recently, marking their 14th year of partnership, the Public Defender's office collaborated with the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association to host the annual Indigent Defense seminar. This event invites all attorneys in this field, including those from the defense bar. This year, about 179 participants attended, receiving valuable training that benefits all forms of legal representation. Last Friday, the Public Defender's office live-streamed a presentation by Betty White, who lost her 19-year-old son to fentanyl poisoning. She highlighted the increasing number of young people dying from unknowingly consuming fentanyl, which is now the leading cause of death for people under 50. Ms. Richardson concluded by announcing a change in the Public Defender's office: Mr. Paul Blocker has become the Interim Chief Public Defender.

Justice of the Peace:

Judge Valencia Nash reported ongoing efforts to fully integrate the Odyssey system. Two training rooms, at the North Dallas Government Center and the South Dallas Government Center, are dedicated to training clerks in Odyssey. Currently, five courts have gone live with e-filing, and another five are set to follow. Despite operational challenges, they are now back on track. Rashonda has been diligently ensuring smooth progress. Six courts are now paperless, with four more to transition. Judge Nash shared that they will be fully operational for partial payments by April 1st, with court training sessions rescheduled to proceed over the next 30 days.

Law Enforcement/Jurisprudence:

Ellyce Lindberg provided the update, indicating that there has not been a formal meeting. This marks the conclusion of the updates for this subcommittee.

Pretrial:

Miguel Canales presented the update. As of March 21st, Pretrial Services supervised a total of 2,345 defendants broken down as follows: 1383 cases in the Alcohol Monitoring unit, 541 cases in the Electronic Monitoring Unit, 249 cases in the Smart Justice or Mental Health unit, and 172 cases in the General Pretrial unit. Regarding staffing, Mr. Canales shared Pretrial Services is fully staffed.

Reentry:

Christina Crain reported a significant increase in individuals seeking assistance, highlighting close collaboration with TDCJ and other organizations to promote available services. She mentioned April's designation as second chance month and ongoing efforts with Dallas County and other groups to raise awareness about available services for individuals reentering society. Mrs. Crain emphasized the critical need for correctional healthcare. She mentioned ongoing conversations with UT Southwestern and Parkland, expressing a desire to meet with Commissioner Garcia to further explore this topic. Highlighting the importance of addressing health needs within Dallas County Jail to prevent potential public health issues, she proposed setting up a meeting with doctors and Pat Jones from Parkland to discuss potential funding and pilot programs targeting prevalent health issues. Ms. Crain highlighted the provision of testimony in the sentencing phase of trials to inform juries about post-release services and expressing interest in discussing the opportunity further with the public defender's office.

Program Update:

Mr. Charles Reed provided an update of the Dallas County Sexual Assault Response Team Biennial Report. Mr. Reed informed the membership about a law, passed as SB 476 by former Senator Jane Nelson, requiring Dallas County to create a sexual assault response team, which the county had already implemented through the DA's office. He noted that a recent requirement for a bi-annual report on sexual assaults and their dispositions caught many by surprise, and the Dallas Observer inaccurately criticized the county for this oversight. Mr. Reed emphasized the importance of addressing the SART Biennial Report well in advance of the next one due in late 2025.

Public Comments:

None.

Announcements:

The next CJAB meeting will be held on June 24, 2024, at 2:30 PM.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 PM.