

**ORANGE COUNTY JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSION
LAMOREAUX JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTER
COMMISSION CONFERENCE ROOM – 2nd FLOOR
341 The City Drive, Orange, CA 92868
Wednesday August 5, 2026
9:00 a.m.**

AGENDA

- 1) CALL TO ORDER**
- 2) GUEST**
- 3) APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
- 4) REPORTS FROM STANDING COMMITTEES/WORKING GROUPS**
- 5) REPORTS FROM INSPECTIONS/REVIEWS**
- 6) REPORTS FROM LIAISON ACTIVITIES & WEBINARS**
- 7) MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS**
- 8) COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**
- 9) ADJOURNMENT**

**MINUTES OF ORANGE COUNTY
JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMISSION**

Wednesday August 5, 2026

The regular meeting of the Orange County Juvenile Justice Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair Winder. The meeting was held at the Betty Lou Lamoreaux Juvenile Justice Center, 341 The City Drive, Orange, California, in the second floor Commission Conference Room.

COMMISSIONERS

PRESENT:

Amy Crowley
Denise Churchill; Vice Chair
Judy Johnson
Silvestre Lopez
Connie Marshall
Lynda Perring
Madelyn Rodriguez
Briel Sayago
Dorothy Stafford
Mary Lou Vachet
Steve Winder, Chair

COMMISSIONERS

ABSENT:

Ryan Rising
Dolores Yost

STAFF: Emily Sanchez, Legal Processing Specialist
Owen Barry, Staff Aid II

GUESTS: Judge Katherine Lewis, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court
Kristal Valencia, Court Operations Manager, Juvenile Court
Stacy Ketell, Deputy Court Operations Manager, Juvenile Court
Shauna Ortiz, Deputy Court Operations Manager, Juvenile Court
Shannon Back, District Attorney
Richard Cheung, Supervising Public Defender (Juvenile Dependency)
Dana Stits, County Counsel
Isabell Gutierrez, Division Director of Juvenile Court Services (Probation)
Kristi Fiskum, Deputy Director of Children & Family Services (Social Services Agency)
Maureen Mutch, Senior Social Services Supervisor (Social Services Agency)
Grace Lizardo, Project Manager, Health Care Agency (Juvenile Health Services)
Dr. Maria Poulin, Chief of Alternative Education ACCESS (Orange County Department of Education Institutional Schools)
Raina Lee, Coordinator, Orange County Department of Education (Foster Youth Services)
Theresa Pereyra, Sergeant, Orange County Sheriff's Department
Amie Giusiana, Sergeant, Orange County Sheriff's Department
Martha Franco, Attorney, Juvenile Defenders
Mari Duque, Executive Director, Law Offices of Harold LaFlamme (Minors Counsel)
Manuel Gutierrez, Director of Program Strategy, Project Youth OCBF
Hether Benjamin, Chief of Program Office Youth Development Programs, Waymakers

Alison Jacques, Supervisor, Waymakers

COMMENTS BY PRESIDING JUDGE OF JUVENILE COURT

Judge Katherine Lewis, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court, introduced herself and expressed her appreciation for the Juvenile Justice Commission, describing it as a fantastic group with a meaningful mission and stating that she looks forward to working with the Commission. She shared that she began her legal career with the Public Defender's Office, where her first assignment was in Juvenile Court. Throughout her career, she has worked with collaborative courts and CSEC youth, serving in both dependency and juvenile justice courtrooms before becoming the Supervising Judge at the West Justice Center. Judge Lewis explained that she has spent the past several months observing operations and becoming acquainted with her new role. She noted that Juvenile Court has always been more collaborative than Adult Court and highlighted the significant decline in the Juvenile Hall population since 1996. She concluded by emphasizing that, while substantial progress has been made, there are always opportunities for the Court and the community to continue improving.

COMMENTS BY THE JUVENILE COURT

Stacy Ketell, Deputy Court Operations Manager, reported that there were no major updates to share and introduced her new counterpart, Shauna Ortiz. Shauna provided a brief overview of her professional background, sharing that she previously worked in criminal court and served in Juvenile Court from 2019 to 2020. She expressed that she is pleased to be returning to Juvenile Court and looks forward to becoming reacquainted with this part of the system. Shauna also encouraged stakeholders to reach out to her if they need assistance or have any questions.

COMMENTS BY THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Shannon Back, head of court for Juvenile and the Grit Program, reported that the District Attorney's office has been working with Cor Tech to transition more of its filing process to an online system. The anticipated go live date is currently scheduled for late September but may be postponed to early October. The transition is intended to improve efficiency and streamline the filing process.

COMMENTS BY THE PUBLIC DEFENDER (JUVENILE DEPENDENCY)

Richard Cheung, Supervising Public Defender (Juvenile Dependency), reported that his office is now fully staffed following the addition of a recent transfer. He shared that the transition has gone well and noted that the team continues to work effectively with families through ongoing collaboration with the Social Services Agency (SSA) and the Public Defender's Office.

COMMENTS BY COUNTY COUNSEL

Dana Stits, County Counsel, who represents SSA, reported that they continue to cover the nine Dependency courtrooms and that caseload numbers remain steady. He thanked the Commissioners for their continued service and shared that County Counsel will be meeting with the Judicial Council following an audit of minute orders to discuss opportunities for improvement and enhance current practices.

COMMENTS BY PROBATION DEPARTMENT

Isabel Gutierrez, Division Director of Juvenile Court Services, reported that there were not many updates to share. She highlighted the recent Cell Dogs graduation at YRC and recognized the significant amount of work and dedication it requires to train the dogs and support the program. She also introduced Jennifer Nelson, who has been newly promoted as her partner. Jennifer provided a brief introduction to the Commission and other stakeholders.

COMMENTS BY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

Kristi Fiskum, Deputy Director of Children & Family Services, reported that the budget outlook is improving and is better than expected. She shared that hiring will occur gradually, as Human Resources is currently experiencing staffing shortages and must prioritize filling those positions first. Kristi highlighted the recent Wraparound (WRAP) Program 25th Anniversary celebration, which recognized teams that have supported and worked with families. The program has served approximately 9,100 clients. She also provided an update on the new CWS Cares database, which is expected to go live on October 26, 2026. She also noted that there are ongoing concerns about the transition and potential challenges with implementation, but the best-case scenario is a successful rollout of the new system.

Maureen Mutch, Senior Social Services Supervisor, reported that the summer has been going well at Orangewood, with the current population at 46 youth and the average population remaining below 50 over the past two months. She shared that staffing continues to be a challenge, particularly when supporting children with higher needs who require additional services. Many of these cases involve younger children with autism, making it difficult to identify appropriate placements that can meet their needs. Maureen noted that there has been very little activity involving youth reported missing from care. She also announced that Orangewood will be hosting an open house for the holidays on December 2, 2026. Additionally, the Department of Education hosted a concert for the youth, which was described as a great experience and opportunity for the children. Maureen expressed concerns regarding delays in receiving timely mental health diagnoses for children, noting that these delays can impact the ability to provide appropriate services and support.

COMMENTS BY HCA, CHILD & YOUTH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

No updates to report.

COMMENTS BY HCA, JUVENILE HEALTH SERVICES

Grace Lizardo, Project Manager, reported an overall decline in population across facilities. She shared that the youth currently being served are presenting with increasingly complex medical and mental health needs. Grace noted that overall numbers continue to decrease and discussed the importance of continued collaboration and coordination among partners to support youth and address emerging needs.

COMMENTS BY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL SCHOOLS

Dr. Maria Poulin, Chief of Alternative Education ACCESS, provided updates regarding Career Technical Education (CTE) and educational programming. She shared that they are in the process of hiring a Digital Media instructor, with the goal of offering the program at both Central YRC and North YRC. The CTE programs provide youth with opportunities to explore career pathways, and the newly developed spaces at Central YRC and North YRC are well-equipped to

support these programs. Dr. Poulin also highlighted the LYON school program at Orangewood, which ensures students receive comprehensive reading experiences, and shared that they are partnering with various foundations to expand opportunities. Dr. Poulin reported two students participated in the summer showcase at the center. She recognized the 30-year partnership with OC Probation and shared that the program allows youth to learn singing and dancing, build confidence, and step outside of their comfort zones during the two-week program, culminating in a performance for the community. She also shared that they are working with Otto Fischer to develop a financial literacy class in partnership with the OC Credit Union. Raina Lee, Coordinator, provided updates on the Foster Youth Education Program. She shared that summer programming has been successful and that preliminary 2025–2026 school outcome data is being reviewed. The program provided services to 160 youth and delivered foster youth education training to more than 1,000 participants. The year concluded with an 84% graduation rate among youth ages 3–5 and an 87% high school graduation rate. Raina reported that the program has expanded direct services provided to youth in STRTPs and foster care settings. Among the youth served, 37 high school graduates were supported, and the program secured \$450,000 in resources for youth. All participating graduates completed at least one college application and confirmed post-secondary plans, including plans to attend college in the upcoming fall.

COMMENTS BY ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Theresa Pereyra provided an update on the SMART Team and shared positive news regarding recent training opportunities. The team applied for a grant to support School Resource Officers (SROs) attending specialized training and was awarded the funding. As a result, team members were able to attend a national threat assessment conference with approximately 2,000 attendees from around the world. The SMART Team was also selected to present at both conferences they attended. Sergeant Pereyra shared that the Sheriff's Department hosted a week-long SRO Summit with approximately 60 attendees from various agencies. During the summit, participants received training on threat assessments, tactical response, and emergency preparedness. The final day included active shooter drills focused on responding to various scenarios and improving coordination during critical incidents. Sergeant Amie Giusiana provided an update on school site vulnerability and safety assessments. She shared that, during the SRO Summit, experts provided training on the latest techniques for conducting site vulnerability assessments. SROs participated in evaluating school campuses to identify potential areas of concern and vulnerabilities. The team continues to work with schools to address these areas and ensure safety practices align with current standards, helping maintain secure environments that are prepared for evolving safety challenges.

COMMENTS BY JUVENILE DEFENDERS

Martha Franco, Attorney, reported that the office has hired two new attorneys and is now fully staffed. Both attorneys are currently in their training period; one recently passed the bar exam and is new to the field, while the other has several years of legal experience but does not have a background in Dependency matters.

COMMENTS BY LAW OFFICE OF HAROLD LAFLAMME (MINOR'S COUNSEL)

Mari Duque, Executive Director, reported that staffing continues to be a primary focus. She shared that the office is currently not fully staffed. Mari anticipates an increase in youth activity as students return to school and noted that the team continues to value its partnerships and collaboration with CASA and the Department of Education.

COMMENTS BY PROJECT YOUTH OCBF

Manuel Gutierrez, Director of Program Strategy, reported that the program has completed six successful months and has transitioned into the new fiscal year with a continued focus on serving youth and families. He shared that the various programs continue to work together to provide coordinated support, serving approximately 300 youth and 500 parents and caregivers. The program has supported 69 young people with developing high school and career plans, including several youth who secured paid internships. Manuel highlighted that 51 graduating seniors were supported and that the system has become more connected, with referrals becoming a regular part of the process. The team continues to provide ongoing support as youth pursue employment opportunities and other goals. He also shared that 325 youth have participated in the Short Stop program, with 17 youth currently participating in Project SELF. The goal is to continue expanding this approach and serve more youth through these programs. He concluded with a call to action regarding strengthening the juvenile diversion counsel and encouraged leaders who are interested in supporting this work to become involved.

COMMENTS BY WAYMAKERS

Hether Benjamin provided an update on the Orange County Juvenile Diversion Program, a new countywide program that began in May. The program is a collaboration between Waymakers and Boys & Girls Clubs which provides evidence-based strategies and individualized assessments aimed at reducing juvenile justice involvement and helping youth make positive and lasting changes. The program has a 3-year contract and focuses on connecting youth with appropriate services and resources within their communities. Hether shared that following the Fourth of July holiday, the Newport Beach Police Department referred approximately 100 cases to the diversion program. Of those referrals, only four involved Orange County residents. Youth from outside the county will receive classes and other resources within their own communities.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The July 15, 2026 minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

REPORTS FROM STANDING COMMITTEES & WORKING GROUPS

A. Education

Commissioner Johnson reported the commission will be meeting with Dr. Poulin at the end of August.

B. Non-Institutional Placements

No updates to report.

C. Law Enforcement Agency

Commissioner Vachet reported there are two remaining law enforcement agencies that still require an inspection.

D. Legislation

Commissioner Crowley provided an update regarding recent legislation that initially excluded foster youth. She noted that a subsequent bill may allow foster youth, including youth in placement and those in foster care, to be included under the provisions of the original legislation. She emphasized the importance of closely monitoring the bill and

giving particular attention to how it may affect youth in foster care who are also involved with the probation system.

E. Essay and Art Contest

Commissioner Vachet reported that the first planning meeting with Probation was held and that initial plans have been established for the October 22, 2026 award ceremony. A smaller committee will meet to coordinate the JJC's responsibilities and preparations for the event. Richard Berman, the Department of Education point of contact, will continue in that role. Asya Cordova, the new principal, will be handling the event for the first time, and education is once again actively involved in the planning. Vachet shared that Probation has been very enthusiastic about the art component of the event. An art exhibition will be held at Santiago Canyon College (SCC), and there is discussion of having youth from YGC and YLA attend the reception. With the event date now established, the team can begin coordinating with SCC regarding the installation of the exhibit. The commission also discussed the need to establish a clear rubric for judging the artwork and updating the letters that will be sent to youth, DOE and Probation. The subcommittee will continue working on determining whether the event will have a specific theme and discussing judging guidelines, including limiting the number of judges for the essay portion to approximately five to seven.

F. Annual Report

Commissioner Johnson emphasized the importance of taking photos when out on commission business.

G. JJC/ Probation Book Club

Commissioner Crowley shared that everything is going well and that the club is currently starting to read a new book, *Once We Were Brothers*, which was recommended by one of the youth. She noted that the youth have been looking forward to starting it together.

H. Substance Use Treatment Programs/Services

No updates to report.

I. High Needs Youth

No updates to report.

J. Educational/Vocational Programs and Services for Post-Graduate System-Involved Youth

No updates to report.

K. Reentry of Probation Youth

Commissioner Crowley will reach out to Officer Beiger to set up a tour of the new construction taking place at Juvenile Hall.

REPORTS FROM INSPECTIONS/REVIEWS

A. Rite of Passage (ROP) Joann & Baker

Commissioner Perring reported that the houses met the same standards as last year, with nothing unusual noted during the inspection. The youth appeared content, and the routine inspection went smoothly. Overall, everything was reported to be in good condition. No corrective action notice is needed.

REPORTS FROM LIAISON ACTIVITIES & WEBINARS

A) Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) Meeting

Commissioner Winder reported the meeting included discussion of approximately \$17.2 million in state grant funding and the fact that approximately \$2.5 million from the previous funding cycle remained unspent. The group discussed whether adjustments to the current budget may be needed, particularly for organizations whose programs and funding timelines are not aligned. Commissioner Winder also shared that District Attorney Todd Spitzer made a request for funding for the GRIP Program. The program typically receives approximately \$3 million in total funding, which has traditionally been supported by the County. This year, the County is providing approximately \$1.7 million, leaving a funding gap. A private foundation also provides funding for the GRIP Program. Commissioner Winder shared that District Attorney Todd Spitzer spoke passionately in support of the program, noting the strong partnerships it has with education and law enforcement. He also reported that the meeting included discussion about opening the funding process to allow other organizations to submit requests for consideration.

B) OCYR Webinar

Commissioner Crowley reported the webinar focused on ending the incarceration of girls. She noted that the webinar featured several speakers who discussed how girls involved in trafficking or gangs are often victims and may become involved because they do not feel safe within their families or communities. The discussion emphasized the importance of creating safe and supportive environments for youth and recognizing that certain behaviors may be expressions of underlying needs or experiences. Commissioner Crowley noted that there are currently five girls in Juvenile Hall and three at YGC, for a total of eight girls throughout the county.

C) Summer at the Center

Commissioner Rodriguez reported that the event hosted very emotional performances put on by new and returning participants. Along with the performers, former participants appeared as spokespeople, who gave very inspirational and encouraging talks, and whose sentiments were shared by many of the youth involved in the program. Commissioner Vachet reported that there were four probation youth in the program, which is a significant improvement from the absence of probation youth in the previous year. The continued involvement of more probation youth will be a top priority moving forward. Commissioner Vachet reported that there were approximately 30 youth who performed, with both court employees and judges in attendance. Commissioner Perring was able to

get a front seat and reported that as the evening progressed you could watch as their expressions change and came alive.

D) Cell Dog Graduation

Commissioner Winder shared that he was very impressed by the Cell Dogs graduation, describing the experience as fun and inspirational. He reported seven youth and three dogs attended the event and said he was unsure of what to expect but was pleasantly surprised by how meaningful the event was. Approximately 40 people attended, and one of the highlights was watching the dogs perform tricks. Commissioner Winder noted that the program has been operating for 18 years. Commissioner Crowley also discussed the positive impact the dogs have on the youth and how meaningful those relationships can be for them.

UPCOMING MEETINGS/WEBINARS/INSPECTIONS

Commissioners Churchill and Perring are planning to attend the CWSIP Meeting on August 6, 2026.

Commissioners Churchill, Crowley and Winder are planning to attend the CJJCC Statewide Meeting on August 10, 2026.

Commissioner Vachet is planning to attend the ERDD Meeting on August 12, 2026.

Commissioners Vachet and Yost are planning to attend the CSEC Prevention and Awareness Meeting on August 13, 2026.

Commissioners Marshall, Rodriguez and Stafford are planning to attend the Vera's Sanctuary visit on August 17, 2026.

Commissioners Rodriguez and Vachet are planning to attend the Ward Death review on August 19, 2026.

Commissioners Johnson and Yost are planning to attend the CAST Policy Meeting on August 19, 2026.

Commissioner Johnson is planning to attend the Court Improvement Committee Meeting on August 20, 2026.

Commissioner Perring is planning to attend the JRC Graduation on August 20, 2026.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Johnson provided a follow-up regarding recent news articles concerning Governor Newsom's response to sex trafficking and CSEC youth. She shared that, based on the information discussed, the goal appears to be to require nonprofits working with CSEC youth to coordinate and work more closely together within a 60-day timeframe. The focus is on improving collaboration and coordination among organizations serving this population. Commissioner

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Johnson provided an update regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), noting that UCI and Chapman University have identified two additional categories that may be considered when assessing adverse childhood experiences. These include exposure to ongoing stress and living in an unpredictable environment.

Commissioner Johnson also mentioned that law enforcement agencies are looking to prosecute parents whose children have been injured on e-bikes for child abuse/endangerment.

Commissioner Johnson provided an update regarding potential funding for mental health services for youth who have been exposed to gun violence or who have witnessed a crime. She shared that she plans to raise the issue at the CAST Policy Board meeting and ask about available funding and resources for therapy services for affected youth. She noted that the proposed legislation has not yet passed and that there are several proposed bills that may continue to move through the legislative process.

Commissioner Churchill raised the possibility of bringing back the Dependency Drug Court as a specialized collaborative court. She suggested involving the Health Care Agency and Social Services Agency to provide focused support to parents working toward reunification and noted that the program had previously produced positive results. Commissioner Churchill suggested that, if there is sufficient interest and funding, the idea could be brought to Presiding Judge Lewis for consideration, as it had previously been discussed with Judge Arthur before his transfer. She noted that this type of collaborative court would primarily focus on supporting parents rather than directly serving the youth. Commissioner Crowley also raised the possibility of a Mental Health Court, noting that many youth have unique and significant mental health needs. She expressed concern that there is currently not enough collaboration among the various systems serving youth with complex mental health needs and suggested that a specialized collaborative approach could help better coordinate services and support.

CLOSED SESSION

The executive session was convened from 11:05 am. – 11:15 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Steve Winder

Steve Winder, Chair