

CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION

Mental Health Committee

Monday, March 16, 2026

1:00 – 2:30 PM

Members: Jennifer Zito (Committee Chair), Gary Roberge, Dr. Janet Walker, William O'Connor, Thomas Canny, Jessica Waggoner

Staff: Rich Sparaco, Matthew Hono, Tommy Dowd

Guests: Rachel Mirsky, Tobey Partch-Davies, Howard Sovronsky, Jessica Thomas, Judge Courtney Chaplin

MINUTES

I. MEETING CONVENED

- Jennifer Zito convened the meeting at 1:05 PM.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE 3.2.2026 MEETING

- The meeting minutes from 3.2.2026 were not circulated in advance, so the Committee did not vote to approve.
- The Committee will vote on the minutes at its next meeting.

III. INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENT DISABILITIES REPORT

a. Review edits received

- Rich Sparaco reviewed edits received by the Committee.

b. Discussion

- The Committee discussed each recommendation.
- Recommendation 1: Provide education about identifying individuals with I/DD in the criminal justice system
 - Jessica Thomas suggested specifying that the training be mandatory.
 - Dr. Janet Walker and Jennifer Zito preferred the current language, which does not recommend mandatory training, noting that the potential fiscal impact could discourage lawmakers from advancing the recommendation.

- Judge Courtney Chaplin proposed that the state initially pursue a low-cost, readily available training module, such as one available online.
 - Zito and Gary Roberge agreed.
 - Roberge offered to share CSSD's I/DD training materials.
- Recommendation 2: Improve the State of Connecticut's data collection and estimation practices for individuals with I/DD
 - No comments on the existing language; consensus reached.
- Recommendation 3: Increase interagency collaboration for data reporting
 - Dr. Walker suggested clarifying the recommendation by adding the word "crime" before "prevention."
- Recommendation 4: Eligibility for an I/DD diversionary program should not be limited only to individuals with an IQ score below 69
 - Jessica Waggoner suggested moving the recommendation from the "statutory improvements" set of recommendations to the "implementing an I/DD diversionary program" set of recommendations.
 - Zito agreed.
- Recommendation 5: Create a presumption of outpatient competency restoration for individuals with I/DD who are found not competent but restorable and explore other inpatient options beyond Whiting Forensic Hospital when an outpatient placement is inappropriate.
 - Waggoner noted the significant fiscal impact of implementing this recommendation.
 - Dr. Walker agreed.
 - Dr. Walker reminded the Committee that WFH may be an appropriate placement for some individuals with I/DD, particularly those with a co-occurring psychiatric disability. She further noted that CVH previously provided certain competency services for specialized populations.
 - Waggoner cautioned against using the term "inappropriate," and members agreed to revise the language accordingly.
- Recommendation 6: Incorporate a statutory definition of developmental disability
 - Dr. Walker noted that the recommendation should reference the DSM-V rather than the DSM-IV.

- Recommendation 7: Develop and evaluate an I/DD Diversionary Model Demonstration/Pilot Program to test model efficacy as a short-term solution
 - Bill O'Connor expressed concern about introducing the program as a pilot, noting that problems arising from a hastily developed or poorly designed pilot could carry over into a permanent program.
 - Zito similarly raised concerns that a pilot approach could delay statewide implementation of a critical program.
 - O'Connor and Zito preferred removing references to a pilot program.
 - Rachel Mirsky noted, however, that pilot programs in other states have been useful for identifying and addressing issues prior to statewide implementation.
 - Members agreed that this point could be included in a footnote.
- Recommendation 8: Explore incorporating an I/DD diversionary program within Supervised Diversionary Program as a potential long-term solution
 - Bill O'Connor expressed concern about incorporating an I/DD program into the SDP, noting that participation requires individuals to waive critical rights, and that individuals with I/DD may lack the competency to do so.
 - Judge Chaplin agreed, emphasizing that the SDP statute would require significant amendment to accommodate individuals with I/DD.
 - Tom Canny agreed, noting that prior Commission proposals on this issue had significant shortcomings.
 - Rachel Mirsky acknowledged these concerns but underscored the importance of finding a way to better serve this population.
- Recommendation 9: Identify a single entity that should be deemed responsible for the program
 - No comments on the existing language; consensus reached.
- Recommendation 10: Expand I/DD research efforts to include a qualitative component and create an expert panel to recommend relevant policies
 - No comments on the existing language; consensus reached.
- Recommendation 11: Select and implement reliable, cost-effective screening tools and assessments for ID and ASD

- Waggoner asked whether the proposed screenings were intended to assess SDP eligibility specifically or to identify individuals more broadly within the criminal justice system.
 - Mirsky clarified that the screenings are intended to assess eligibility for SDP in cases where there is no prior diagnosis.
 - O'Connor raised questions regarding who would conduct the screenings, under what circumstances they would occur, and how the process would be handled if a defendant lacked appropriate counsel.
 - Dr. Walker agreed that screening is important but emphasized that it should serve only as an initial step in the diagnostic process. She also cautioned against recommending specific screening tools, noting that best practices evolve over time.
 - Canny explained that, under SDP, all potential applicants undergo a clinical evaluation to determine eligibility and to develop a treatment/service plan.
 - Waggoner suggested that this recommendation be included with the data-related recommendations rather than the diversionary program recommendations.
- The Committee will continue to review the recommendations at its next meeting.
- c. Vote to send report and recommendations to the full Commission
 - The Committee did not vote on this matter.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

- There will be another follow-up meeting to finalize the recommendations on March 23 at 1 PM.
- Jennifer Zito adjourned the meeting at 2:33 PM.