

CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION

Mental Health Committee

Monday, March 2, 2026

1:00 – 2:30 PM

Members: Jennifer Zito (Committee Chair), John Santa (Commission Vice Chair), Gary Roberge, Dr. Janet Walker, William O'Connor, Angel Quiros, Thomas Canny, Len Fasano, Jessica Waggoner

Staff: Rich Sparaco, Andrew Clark, Matthew Hono, Tommy Dowd, Jordan Oquendo, Valerie Gordon

Guests: Rachel Mirsky, Sen. Cathy Osten, Dr. Benjamin Howell, Tobey Partch-Davies, Howard Sovronsky, Jessica Thomas, Judge Courtney Chaplin, Dr. Kathryn Thomas, Denise Paley

MINUTES

I. MEETING CONVENED

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

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE 1.28.2026 MEETING

- The minutes from the 1.28.2026 meeting were approved.
 - Judge Courtney Chaplin, who was not in attendance on 1.28.2026, abstained from voting.

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 Waggoner suggested that additional education should be optional rather than required.
 - William O'Connor agreed.
- Recommendation 2: Improve the State of Connecticut's data collection and estimation practices for individuals with I/DD

- Waggoner, O'Connor, and Gary Roberge agreed with the sentiment but raised concerns about how these data would be collected and the fiscal cost of new reporting requirements.
- Jennifer Zito suggested that these data could be collected in the same way that data is collected on individuals with mental illness.
 - Roberge agreed.
- Waggoner suggested removing mention of population surveillance systems, which is medically sensitive information that is not appropriate to collect in this setting.
- Recommendation 3: Increase interagency collaboration for data reporting
 - O'Connor raised concerns about sharing sensitive information discussed between an attorney and client; Dr. Janet Walker raised concerns about sharing sensitive health information.
 - Zito agreed that Commission staff would make edits to address these concerns.
- Recommendation 4: Connecticut should update its statutory DDS eligibility criteria
 - Howard Sovronsky and Waggoner wondered whether this recommendation is beyond the Commission's scope.
 - Senator Cathy Osten noted that the legislature is already assessing the statutory definition of I/DD.
 - Rachel Mirsky clarified that the purpose of this recommendation is to ensure that all who are deserving of eligibility for an I/DD diversionary program would be eligible under the statute.
 - Zito suggested that the recommendation should endorse this goal without discussing the DSS eligibility criteria.
- Recommendation 5: Create a statutory provision whereby individuals diagnosed or evaluated by a qualified I/DD professional are not required to be evaluated for competency under CGS §54-56d
 - O'Connor, Waggoner, and Judge Courtney Chaplin shared significant concerns with this recommendation, specifically regarding defendants who are not competent making sworn statements and waiving rights.
 - Rachel Mirsky clarified that the purpose of this recommendation was to highlight that Whiting Forensic Hospital, which conducts inpatient competency restoration, is not an appropriate setting for individuals with I/DD.
 - Sen. Osten agreed with this conclusion and suggested that certain state-run group homes could house this population.

- Judge Chaplin suggested adding language about prioritizing outpatient restoration for this population.
 - Walker noted that, in certain cases, it is important to have a secure, inpatient facility like Whiting for this population.
 - Zito suggested borrowing language from the Commission's competency report.
 - 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 UPDATES

- a. Yale SEICHE Center Study Update - Evaluation of community mental health and addiction treatment use in individuals following release from incarceration or on community supervision, Connecticut, 2018-2022
- Dr. Benjamin Howell provided an update.
 - The research team has conducted 30 interviews with justice-involved individuals in the community seeking access to treatment.
 - Researchers will complete an initial draft of the qualitative section within the next few weeks.
 - The research team, in collaboration with the Office of Policy and Management, has made recent progress toward securing the data needed to conduct the quantitative analysis.
 - Researchers are hoping to sign a data agreement within the next few weeks.
 - A full report is expected in the summer.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

- The Committee will schedule another meeting prior to the full Commission meeting in April to continue discussing the recommendations.
- Members should continue to review the recommendations prior to the next meeting.
 - Rich Sparaco encouraged members to continue the discussions via email.
- The next full Commission meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 8, from 1-3 PM, in Room 1A of the Legislative Office Building.
- Jennifer Zito adjourned the meeting at 2:28 PM.

