

CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION

Steering Committee

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

1:00 – 3:00 PM

Hartford Times Building, Room 209

Members: Judge David Gold (Commission Chair), Jennifer Zito, John DelBarba (on behalf of John Day)

Staff: Rich Sparaco, Matthew Hono, Tommy Dowd, Andrew Clark, Mike Cronin, Ken Barone

MINUTES

I. MEETING CONVENED

- Judge David Gold convened the meeting at 1:20 PM.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE 1.21.2026 MEETING

- The Committee could not vote to approve the minutes because there were not enough members in attendance.
- The Committee will vote on the minutes at its next meeting.

III. FORMALIZE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

- Jennifer Zito reported that the Mental Health Committee reviewed its membership list and is requesting to add four new members: Judge Courtney Chaplin, proposed new co-chair; Senator Catherine Osten; Howard Sovronsky, Behavioral Health Advocate; and Jessica Thomas, Staff Attorney, Connecticut Legal Rights Project.
- The Steering Committee could not vote to finalize membership for the Criminal Procedure and Sentencing Committee and the Mental Health Committee because there were not enough members in attendance.

IV. COMMITTEE AND PROJECT UPDATES

- a. Criminal Procedure and Sentencing
 - Rich Sparaco provided an update.

- The Criminal Procedure and Sentencing Committee canceled its meeting on March 9. The Committee will hold its next meeting on May 11.
 - Commission staff are continuing to work on three studies that fall under the purview of the committee: (1) a two-part pretrial study; (2) a study on Connecticut's human trafficking statutes; and (3) a study on sentencing outcomes in cases of domestic violence homicide.
- i. Pretrial Working Group
- Rich Sparaco provided an update.
 - The working group responded to Representative LaMark Muir's request for a summary of its discussions with a report, primarily written by Dr. Lydia Wileden and Matthew Hono.
 - The Commission has not yet received a response.
 - The working group has explored trends in pretrial detention of defendants charged with misdemeanors, D and E felonies, and higher-level felonies, and has examined whether failure to appear is overemphasized as a risk assessment factor.
 - Steering Committee members also discussed potential explanations for the relatively unchanged unsentenced population over the past decade.
 - Judge Gold noted a significant increase in violations of protective orders, along with only modest decreases in higher-level felony arrests.
 - Matthew Hono added that unsentenced admissions have declined while pretrial lengths of stay have increased.
 - Zito asked whether bond amounts have increased.
 - Hono will ask Joe Greelish for data to answer this question.
 - Judge Gold wondered whether an expansion of the seven percent cash bail policy could effectively address length-of-stay concerns.
 - Hono also highlighted the administrative burdens preventing individuals from posting their bond.
 - The working group will continue to examine this complex issue.

b. Mental Health

- The Mental Health Committee remains focused on its intellectual and developmental disabilities report.
 - The Committee has met multiple times to finalize the report's recommendations.
 - Jennifer Zito reported that the Committee has struggled to decide how to handle competency issues for individuals who may be eligible for an I/DD diversionary program. She noted that, under the current SDP program, defendants must make certain sworn statements and waive certain rights to apply. Individuals with I/DD, who may not be competent, and may never become competent, may not understand the implications of these requirements.
 - Judge David Gold agreed that this presents a complex issue and raised the possibility that defense counsel could waive certain rights on behalf of a defendant as a strategic decision.
 - John DelBarba expressed concern that, if a defendant were unsuccessful in the program, the prosecution could revive the case.
 - Judge Gold added that the statute could be amended to provide that, for individuals with I/DD, the act of applying to the program would automatically toll speedy trial rights and the statute of limitations until the defendant completes the program, whether successfully or unsuccessfully.
 - Zito expressed support for this approach.
- The Committee is continuing to oversee two additional research initiatives: (1) a study on the experiences of individuals seeking mental health and substance abuse treatment after release from prison or while on community supervision; and (2) a study cataloguing and presenting data on behavioral health diversionary programs in Connecticut.
 - At the Mental Health Committee meeting on March 2nd, Dr. Benjamin Howell from the SEICHE Center reported that the research team completed its qualitative analysis and is making progress toward a data agreement with OPM to complete its quantitative analysis. A full report is expected in the summer.

c. Other reports

- Rich Sparaco submitted a letter to Judiciary Committee Co-Chairs, Representative Stafstrom and Senator Winfield, asking the Committee to

support ongoing efforts to improve the analytical capacity of the CISS data system.

- The Commission has not yet received a response.

V. FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION ON PUBLIC ACT 15-84 REPORT

- The Committee did not address this agenda item.

VI. DISCUSSION ON LEGISLATIVE SESSION

- The Committee did not address this agenda item.

VII. UPDATE ON EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SEARCH

- Ken Barone provided an update on the search process.
 - 19 candidates applied to the position; three have been identified for closer inspection.
 - Barone is also meeting with the UConn Human Resources Department next week to discuss reclassifying the position.
 - If the position is reclassified, it would likely need to be reposted.
 - The Commission will also hire another research assistant in the coming weeks.

VIII. UPCOMING SCHEDULE

a. Full Commission meeting on April 8

- Rich Sparaco previewed the agenda for the Commission meeting on April 8.
 - Rachel Mirsky will finish presenting the findings from the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Report.
 - Brian Austin from the Division of Criminal Justice will present on the Early Screening and Intervention (ESI) Initiative.
 - The Commission will vote to approve amendments to its bylaws.

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Any further amendments to Commission bylaws

- Judge David Gold raised opposition to language requiring members to notify the chair in advance if they plan to send a proxy.
 - He proposed that the chair should have discretion to approve a proxy in the absence of advanced notice.
- Judge Gold also expressed uncertainty regarding how working groups are created and how their membership is determined.

- Ken Barone suggested that the supervising committee under which a working group operates could be responsible for appointing a chair and establishing its membership. He further proposed setting limits on the number of members, as well as guidelines for how many members must come from the committee versus from outside it.
- Members agreed that working groups could be established by the Steering Committee or by an advisory committee, subject to the Steering Committee's authority to terminate such groups.

b. Other

- Judge Gold adjourned the meeting at 3:02 PM.
- The next Steering Committee meeting will be held on May 20.