



Timothy Montoya Task Force | Meeting 15

March 6, 2024, Meeting Recap

Overview

The Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Children from Running Away from Out-of-Home Placement is legislatively charged with analyzing the root causes of why children and youth run from out-of-home care to help develop a consistent, prompt and effective response for when children and youth do run. It is also charged with assessing how to address the safety and well-being of children and youth upon their return to care.

Roadmap and Review

Trace Faust began the task force meeting by proposing that the task force find a date for an in-person meeting to be hosted by Keystone. They then reviewed the roadmap and progress made by the task force regarding the legislative directives.

The task force reviewed the summary of the subcommittee discussions from the last meeting. Each subcommittee presented its recommendations, which were discussed and voted upon by the task force as a whole.

A two-page document was shared with the task force with four recommendations, summarizing the work of the subcommittees.

1. Pre-Admission and Recovery Screening Tools
2. Specialized Investigation Staff
3. Standardized Statewide Policies
 - a. Create Multi-Tiered Categories of Risk of Running From Care
 - b. Create Varying Response Protocols for Each Category of Risk
4. Physical Infrastructure

Intervention Subcommittee Review and Presentation

Recommendation 1 involves contracting with a third-party organization to create pre-admission and recovery screening tools. The recommendation proposes a one-year pilot program to implement these tools in several counties. At the end of the pilot, an assessment will determine whether to expand the program further.

Recommendation 3A suggests creating a multi-tiered category system for assessing the risk levels of children running from care, ranging from low to extreme risk. It was suggested that a

third-party entity would create the categories, design the correlating responses and review the language used to describe the varying levels of risk. The level of risk can fluctuate over time, so regular assessment is essential.

Recommendations 1 and 3 are interconnected in terms of assessing and mitigating the risk of runaway incidents. The need for more specificity was raised, as well as suggestions that the risk assessment tool should include provisions for preemptive planning and post-recovery assessment to prevent future runaway incidents effectively.

Brian Cotter emphasized the need for a structured pre-plan to respond effectively when a child runs from care. Drawing parallels with how fire departments and SWAT teams pre-plan for emergencies, he proposed a summarized intervention plan for each child at risk based on collected history and assessments. This plan should be readily available to intervention teams, avoiding delays in response. It would prioritize high-risk cases and those in danger if they run, rather than solely focusing on the likelihood of running. The importance of tailored responses for different risk levels, such as less intensive interventions for lower-risk cases, was also raised. Task force members raised the following points for consideration:

- Conducting a risk assessment upon intake is crucial to identify high-risk children before they run from care.
- It is important to have the assessment completed and evaluated at a therapeutic level beforehand to avoid leaving the decision to report the risk level to staff during an incident.
- Ongoing data collection and preparation are necessary to ensure that information is readily available.
- Pre-planning is essential, and parts of the intervention plan should be ready in advance to respond appropriately if a youth runs away.
- The group does not want to duplicate existing practices. Some regulations already exist, and having a standardized assessment universally implemented across residential facilities would be beneficial.
- Information continuity between placements is crucial for youth in care, but obtaining and transferring information effectively poses a challenge – there is no standardized system for sharing information as children move between residential facilities.
- Variations exist in how well information follows the youth, depending on the referral source.
- Learning from experiences with medical passports could improve information sharing for youth in care.

Prevention Subcommittee's Review and Presentation

Recommendation 4 was presented to the task force regarding hardware-related matters. The task force reviewed the recommendations and discussed goals and obstacles.

The subcommittee focused on identifying hardware solutions to secure children in out-of-home placements. They aim to approach this in a supportive and trauma-informed manner while considering the least restrictive level of care. The recommendation involves utilizing physical infrastructure both inside and outside facilities, including features like delayed locks, secured perimeters, and pedestrian safety mechanisms. Additionally, they suggest incorporating advanced technology such as motion detectors and light sensors. Emphasis is placed on assessing youth before placement and regularly reviewing their level of care to ensure appropriateness. It is stressed that the physical infrastructure should complement, not replace, adequate staffing levels on site.

Dennis Desparrois highlighted that providers can already implement these things, but that it could hurt the placement continuum if all providers were required to install these ideas. Task force members raised the following discussion points:

- Members expressed an interest in exploring a standardization of the use of discussed solutions across all facilities.
- Some saw an area for potentially useful overlap if the implementation of hardware solutions were linked to the results of the run risk assessment.
- High-risk runners could be directed to facilities equipped to handle such measures.
- Some voiced a desire to emphasize the need for policy clarity regarding placement decisions for high-risk youth.
- The task force expressed interest in seeking clarification on existing policy guiding placement decisions based on risk assessments.
- There was an interest in ensuring consistency in placing high-risk youth in appropriate facilities.

Kevin Lash questioned what actions facilities can take in response to a runaway event and at what level such incidents are considered emergencies. Kevin's concern was acknowledged and the need to clarify the hardware-related recommendations while continuing discussions on prevention measures was highlighted. Bryan Kelley will consider how these concerns can be addressed in future prevention subcommittee meetings, potentially focusing on physical restraint measures.

Norma Aguilar-Dave expressed caution regarding simply identifying specific residential programs as equipped to handle high-risk children, noting the potential chaos if multiple high-risk children are concentrated in one facility. She emphasized the need for individualized care for high-risk children, involving genuine engagement and intervention to address the root causes of their behaviors. She urged careful consideration to avoid inadvertently funneling all high-risk children into a few facilities, which could have negative consequences.

Jenna Coleman pointed out that the reality is that many high-risk children are currently placed together due to capacity constraints, especially with facilities closing. She emphasized the need

to focus on providing trauma-informed care and continually assessing children's needs to facilitate stepping down to lower levels of care when appropriate.

Dennis highlighted the complexity of the situation if the committee wants to move in a direction where all facilities are equipped to handle high-risk individuals. Local zoning issues and financial constraints are problematic, and he emphasized the need for a distinction between high-risk individuals and the financial challenges associated with accommodating them in all facilities.

The task force was reminded of its goal to be bold in its recommendations, and the balance of the task force's discussion revolved around balancing innovative ideas with the importance of proposing realistic recommendations that have a chance of being implemented. The task force was encouraged to generate ideas without being overly concerned about feasibility initially. What may seem unachievable at first could be possible with collaborative effort and creative solutions, such as securing grants or providing one-time funding for specific initiatives.

Stephanie Villafuerte suggested separating two distinct questions: first, whether the task force agrees on the general recommendation for hardware, and second, how to operationalize this recommendation. Clarifying these points would facilitate more focused discussion and decision-making.

Sergeant Cotter cited the example of body cameras for police officers, which were implemented statewide despite financial challenges. He believes that if the need is adequately demonstrated, the funding will eventually materialize.

Dennis highlighted the importance of remembering Timothy Montoya's case, where despite having security measures in place like perimeter fences and time delay locks, Timothy was still able to escape. While time locks may be beneficial, they are not foolproof. The goal is not to prevent all incidents of youth running from care but to reduce and mitigate them, along with implementing other recommendations. The task force agreed to view recommendations as part of a comprehensive package rather than in isolation.

Landscape Analysis - Facility Survey

Becky Miller Updike suggested conducting a survey or assessment of all facilities in the state to determine what security measures they currently have in place. She suspects that many facilities may already have some of the recommended security features but are not operating at full capacity due to staffing issues. This approach would provide insight into which facilities already meet the proposed standards and identify gaps that need to be addressed. Additionally, Trace suggested using this landscape analysis to identify facilities in need of upgrades and prioritize them for funding.

Dennis expressed concerns about implementing requirements that could inadvertently harm the placement continuum, and emphasized the need for caution in setting mandates that could limit placement options. His suggestions included:

- Avoid imposing changes that would alter a facility's programming or mission.
- Consider how security measures might conflict with a facility's goals (with Third Way as an example).
- Establish guidelines or requirements based on the types of children a facility serves.
- Allow flexibility for facilities that may not benefit from certain security measures.
- Adopt a tailored approach that respects each facility's unique circumstances and objectives.

Stephanie proposed conducting a comprehensive assessment of facilities through a third-party evaluator, prioritizing safety concerns and prevention measures while supplementing with a targeted assessment. Norma expressed an urgency in addressing immediate needs and suggests conducting informal interviews with facilities to gather data more quickly. Becky suggested conducting a survey to gather information from facilities, with the possibility of follow-up discussions to delve deeper into specific needs. Brandon Miller emphasized the importance of security hardware in deterring running behaviors and promoting safety, suggesting a funding model similar to that used by the Colorado Department of Education.

Trace summarized the prior discussion as follows:

- 1. Immediate Funding Opportunity:* Offer a one-time funding opportunity for facilities to upgrade or implement security measures. This funding would address the immediate need for increased security.
- 2. Release Best Practices:* Provide a list of best practices for security measures based on the research and conversations conducted by the task force. This list would offer options ranging from low to high cost and cater to the diverse needs of different facilities.
- 3. Conduct a Survey:* While not immediately necessary for the first step, conducting a survey could gather additional data to further justify recommendations. The survey would help identify any additional needs or concerns that could inform future recommendations.

This approach ensures that immediate funding is available to address urgent security needs while also providing guidance and resources for facilities to make informed decisions about security measures. Additionally, the survey would serve as a tool to gather more comprehensive data for future planning.

Ongoing Assessment

The task force discussed the possibility of implementing an ongoing assessment or accountability mechanism to ensure that best practices are being implemented in facilities to address youth who run. They are considering involving Laurie Burney's Colorado Department of Human Services team for a presentation on what currently exists and exploring potential ways to enhance this process.

Laurie explained that her unit, the Performance Management Outcomes (PMO) team, focuses on the quality of care provided by facilities, separate from licensing and monitoring. Their role is to ensure that trauma-informed care plans submitted by providers are implemented effectively, using assessment tools and rubrics. They partner with facilities to set improvement goals and specialize in meeting the needs of specific populations, as well as providing training through a staff academy.

Trauma-informed care aims to create environments where youth feel safe and supported, reducing the likelihood of attempts to run from care. By addressing underlying issues and implementing proactive strategies, such as intervening when a child shows signs of distress or developing individualized plans for at-risk youth, facilities can effectively prevent youth running from care. This approach emphasizes early intervention and tailored support to meet the unique needs of each youth, ultimately reducing the occurrence of youth running from care.

Brandon emphasized the importance of focusing on the clinical aspect and treatment of at-risk youth, highlighting it as the key to addressing the underlying issues. However, he expressed concern that progress in this area may take years or decades due to the current state of mental health science and the need for extensive human infrastructure development. In the meantime, investing in short-term solutions, such as hardware infrastructure, may be necessary to protect at-risk youth and prevent immediate harm while long-term improvements are pursued.

Jordan Steffen and Bryan Kelley will coordinate with Becky and Norma to assist with the surveys and ensure a robust public-facing report. They plan to use the survey results as a foundation for finalizing recommendations regarding hardware. They acknowledge the possibility of needing additional meetings to revisit these topics once the survey results are available.