



Timothy Montoya Task Force | Meeting 13

January 3, 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.

Review of Subcommittee Meetings

Today's meeting was an opportunity for the task force as a whole to review the subcommittee meetings from December. For this meeting, the intervention subcommittee summarized its discussion on a statewide specialized investigation unit and the prevention subcommittee reviewed its discussion about a screening tool.

Trace Faust clarified that there will not be a formal vote to determine recommendations for the report, but emphasized the importance of capturing dialogue and feedback. Participants had an opportunity at the end of each topic to express support or opposition to the recommendations. Dissenting opinions were documented, and individuals were encouraged to provide reasons for non-support for proper documentation. Jordan Steffen stressed that the intention for these recommendations is to be backed by legislation, emphasizing ongoing collaboration and discussions beyond the development of recommendations for the report.

Intervention Subcommittee – Specialized Investigation Unit

Doris Tolliver introduced the intervention subcommittee's draft recommendations. She highlighted the use of the term "specialized investigation staff" instead of "absconder unit" to avoid language barriers. Additionally, she urged members not to get caught up in cost concerns but rather concentrate on the concept of a Colorado program.

Jordan discussed insights gathered from examples the task force has considered from other states (DC, Tennessee, and Texas) regarding units dealing with youth leaving care. The different approaches were highlighted: DC's differentiated responses based on the length of absence, Tennessee's correlation with law enforcement, and Texas's emphasis on an investigatory model involving former law enforcement. The benefits of a dedicated unit for youth runaways in Colorado were highlighted, focusing on trauma-informed training, standardized protocols, quick responses, and a non-law enforcement perception. The discussion considered funding challenges and noted the multi-disciplinary nature of the unit.

Brandon Miller asked about the reasoning behind ensuring that the unit does not feel like a law enforcement entity. Doris noted two key points from the subcommittee discussion: the need for a trauma-informed approach sensitive to the unique needs of runaway youth and avoiding making them feel like they are in trouble. Jordan added that building trust and rapport with the youth was highlighted, emphasizing Texas's success in establishing relationships with runaways to offer support. Brandon expressed concerns about losing the security and presence that law enforcement-trained individuals provide in potentially dangerous situations involving runaway children and reminded the task force of the advantages of law enforcement's reputation, respect, and safety in the community context.

Jenelle Goodrich raised a concern in the chat regarding reinforcing the idea that law enforcement is inherently negative or frightening. Stephanie Villafuerte highlighted the challenges of implementing uniform protocols and training across all law enforcement agencies statewide. She emphasized the advantages of a regionalized unit, suggesting that scalability then becomes easier. Stephanie interprets the recommendation as advocating for an interdisciplinary approach, suggesting that the unit's composition should not solely comprise law enforcement but should also involve professionals from human services or facilities-related backgrounds. Doris echoed this, stating that there was broad agreement on a multi-disciplinary approach, but there was no consensus on who should be the initial response team to find missing youth. She mentioned the need for further discussion on the composition of the team, suggesting different options based on resources and jurisdiction sizes rather than a uniform statewide standard.

Brian Cotter emphasized the need for a 24-hour response capability in the unit and expressed apprehension about the explicit statement regarding the non-use of force, highlighting that the unit should be prepared for situations where some level of custody might be necessary. He stressed the need for clarity on the unit's authority. He advocates for law enforcement to be an integral part of the response team, citing the pragmatic advantages of utilizing law enforcement's existing infrastructure, tools, and jurisdictional expertise. He referenced successful crisis response models involving law enforcement and expressed interest in understanding how other states like Tennessee and DC have approached the issue concerning the involvement of law enforcement. He also requested that the task force understand whether these models are effective.

Brian also emphasized the importance of relationships in obtaining timely responses when handling situations involving law enforcement and human services. He stressed that creating a separate unit might overlook the advantages of existing partnerships, which could affect effective and timely responses in critical situations.

David Lee expressed his appreciation for the recommendations but raised concerns about the potential cost implications, particularly in rural communities. David suggested directing funding towards training law enforcement groups in various municipalities and collaborating with local entities to establish multidisciplinary teams to ensure comprehensive coverage statewide.

The conversation then focused on identifying the lead agency for housing the unit. Brian suggested organizing the multidisciplinary team under CDHS but emphasized the participation and support expected from mental health professionals, Human Services staff, and law enforcement agencies within each region. Brandon proposed an alternative practical approach similar to School Resource Officers where the team is funded through out-of-home placements, suggesting local management

with state oversight by CDHS. He highlighted the need for local implementation while having CDHS provide guidance and expectations.

Dennis Desparrois suggested that the access and training required might align better with housing the unit within CDHS rather than in law enforcement. Successful investigation would likely necessitate significant integration with the Trails system, which might not be feasible within a law enforcement entity. Stephanie added that the children in question fall under the purview of CDHS, so it would make sense to house the unit within CDHS.

Doris discussed developing and implementing protocols for the unit, emphasizing the importance of incorporating prevention efforts to decrease the possibility of subsequent runaway attempts. This aspect overlaps with the prevention subcommittee's discussions and aims to create intervention strategies that address the underlying reasons for the youths' runaway behavior while also reducing the chances of repeated occurrences.

Stephanie offered that this is already in state and federal law - what this recommendation would do is requiring doing this in a way that is consistent both in terms of a statewide approach as well as with each individual youth.

Doris suggested the inclusion of "trauma-informed" before the term "prevention" based on conversation within the subcommittee about trauma-informed. There was general agreement from the task force.

Doris then transitioned to the next point, focusing on the clear delineation of the unit's scope and authority. She highlighted Brian's previous concerns about restrictions on restraining or using physical force on youth. She invited comments from the task force. Elizabeth Montoya emphasized the importance of the unit having the authority to bring the youth back, stating that without this authority, the purpose of the unit could be defeated. Ashley Chase shared her concerns about granting the unit the power to arrest, as it could expose the youth to potential charges and hinder the trust-building process. Brian acknowledged Ashley's concerns and suggested working with prosecutors to manage such situations while also ensuring that provisions are made for managing physical situations despite the aim to avoid physical force. Doris raised concerns about disparate treatment of youth of color within various systems, noting that these youths are more likely to experience harm. The potential for increased use of physical force might disproportionately affect youth of color.

Beth McNalley highlighted her experience in managing a unit that deals with missing youth, emphasizing their policy of maintaining confidentiality to build trust with the youth. She expressed concerns about using physical force, mentioning that immediate physical intervention might occur due to understaffing or the urgency of situations. She stressed the importance of de-escalation, emphasizing the need to avoid causing further trauma to the already vulnerable youth.

Stephanie proposed adding a caveat or specific consideration regarding the use of force by the unit, including the type of force used under specific circumstances. This would serve as a placeholder for the task force to revisit or discuss further while modifying the recommendations.

The next point regarding adopting similar tactics utilized in crisis response units was discussed previously within the context of a multidisciplinary approach, potentially modeling it after the STAR

approach. There was general agreement on this term. The need for all employees within the unit to be trained in trauma-informed practices and receive standardized mandatory training was also discussed, with general agreement.

Task force members discussed ensuring that the specialized investigation unit works collaboratively with all licensed out-of-home placements through standardized response protocols. Brandon suggested an addition to the recommendation, emphasizing the involvement of local county human services agencies and their collaboration with licensed out-of-home placements to ensure that the necessary plans are in place. Brian highlighted the existing extensive involvement of county agencies in various aspects of working with placement facilities, emphasizing the effectiveness of their current collaborations. He questioned the need for a separate state-level unit to engage in this specific response piece, suggesting that it should fall within the scope of the county's responsibilities and partnerships. Dennis emphasized that while counties play a role, the oversight of licensed facilities falls under CDHS. He mentioned the need for rule writing and plan approval in case of implementation. Brandon echoed these sentiments, highlighting the importance of consistency and a central approach in setting expectations, rules, and oversight for licensed organizations, suggesting that state-level entities should drive much of these processes.

The next point highlighted was about the development of protocols for the unit to access and share essential data for aiding in youth recovery and preventing future runs. This could include accessing health records, past run history, family contacts, child welfare history, law enforcement databases, and social media accounts of the youth. Dennis previously referenced Trails and related data but highlighted the need for additional data not currently included in that system. Brian finds the recommendation quite broad, and expressed concern about granting access to social media accounts - the unit can only search publicly available information. He suggested refining this access to be more specific and cautious. Beth emphasized the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach and advocates for information sharing without necessarily granting full access to databases. She highlighted the need for key information sharing to facilitate a trauma-informed approach when engaging with youth.

The next few points were all agreed to: creating standardized information-sharing requirements among various partners to enable the unit's comprehensive access to data; ensuring consistent accessibility of records related to the specialized investigation unit throughout the state via the Trails system; the incorporation of multi-disciplinary teams into unit responses and practices; the development of an information system for the specialized investigation staff which is conducive to information-sharing across multi-disciplinary teams. Doris asked about the distinction between the development of standardized information-sharing requirements and the creation of a database specific to the unit. The latter would be designed as a dedicated database for the unit to input its information. The next point about standardized protocols - the creation of a standard response and standard response times and mandated memoranda of understanding with facilities - was agreed to with the idea that the details would be sorted out later.

The discussion then moved on to the importance of prioritizing requests for the specialized investigative unit's involvement and establishing clear requirements for communication. This includes a mechanism to notify the unit when a youth goes missing and maintaining

communication updates when the unit responds to locate or engage with a missing youth. Stephanie inquired about the meaning of "proper prioritization of requests." She suggested examples like different response times based on categories, such as assigning a 6-hour response for children with intellectual disabilities or a 12-hour response for children under 12. Jordan clarified that this is an anticipation of the next topic that the intervention subcommittee will address—establishing a statewide standard protocol for response times based on various categories or situations.

The next point involved consideration of a regionalized model for the unit to adequately address the unique needs and circumstances of urban and rural areas. The task force also discussed whether to adopt and require the use of standardized trauma-informed information-gathering forms and protocols similar to those used in Tennessee.

The discussion then revolved around the possibility of integrating other related entities or programs recommended by the task force within the proposed unit. Jordan and Bryan Kelley highlighted that this unit, if established in CDHS, could act as a central hub for various programs or recommendations emerging from the task force's directives. They suggested that rather than segregating interventions and prevention, it might be more beneficial to formulate a unified recommendation encompassing all aspects under CDHS for more comprehensive management and implementation.

The conversation then centered on the need to establish clear procedures to handle situations where a recovered youth has been victimized while in a runaway status. The proposed protocols should ensure that the youth understands subsequent steps, their rights, and how their preferences will be accommodated. There were no evident concerns raised, and it was acknowledged that this recommendation is essentially an enhancement of existing state laws and regulations.

Brandon emphasized the importance of considering the use of force in certain circumstances involving runaway youth. He acknowledged that while the preference is to avoid physical intervention, situations may arise where it becomes essential to protect the children, especially in dangerous or urgent scenarios. Brandon stressed that overlooking the means of using force could perpetuate issues such as human trafficking that runaway youth might face.

Stephanie inquired about the potential for further discussion on the use of force. Jordan and Bryan indicated that the current plan is to revise the language, ensuring additional details and considerations are incorporated, but the task force won't revisit this recommendation until July. They highlighted the upcoming survey as the last chance for members to provide further input for inclusion in the report.

The task force will ensure that all member opinions, including those supporting and opposing the use of force, will be represented in the final report. They are moving towards subsequent committees for operational details and clarifying that dissenting opinions will be attributed to individual members in the final report. Regarding the specialized investigator unit, the facilitator asks if anyone in whole disagrees with this recommendation. Dennis expressed concern (not disagreement) with considering the recommendation separately, as it might be very expensive.

Jordan assured the task force that they will look at all recommendations together in July to assess necessary resources, funding, and prioritize their implementation.

In general, the task force favors a multidisciplinary team model over a unit model - the distinction being that a unit implies employees belonging to an organization, while a team implies independent professionals from various organizations such as mental health, County Department of Human Services, law enforcement, etc., working together.

Elizabeth highlighted the importance of providing alternative options such as shelters or access to medical facilities, which could potentially reduce the necessity for employing force. These alternatives could serve to de-escalate situations and offer youths choices, diminishing the likelihood of resistance and, consequently, the use of force.

Jordan requested clarification in the survey regarding the preference between two distinct models: the proposed unit with designated individuals responding and the Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) collaborative model. This distinction is crucial to gauge preferences accurately regarding the functionality of the unit in line with the drafted recommendation.

Prevention Subcommittee – Assessment Tool

Bryan provided a brief overview of the state policies examined, mentioning Georgia, Nevada, Wisconsin, and Illinois as highlighted in the summary document. The focus was on post-run interventions with screening tools for delivering preventive methods after youth run, and Illinois had a runaway risk assessment user guide for use at the time of admission. The subcommittee discussed using both approaches.

Bryan summarized the prevention subcommittee's discussion in December. The subcommittee discussed various recommendations for the prevention assessment tool. These included contracting with a third party or university to develop the tools, using a pilot program for initial implementation, employing evaluation components for assessing effectiveness, considering data storage and sharing through systems like Trails, emphasizing standardized training, integrating trauma-informed practices, utilizing gathered information to adjust care for the youth, and exploring collaboration with the Joint Technology Committee for implementation. This overview was presented to set the stage for the 45-minute discussion on these points.

The task force discussed 12 recommendations concerning pre-admission and recovery screening tools.

The recommendation suggests securing a third-party consultant or engaging with an institution of higher education to develop a runaway risk assessment screening tool and a post-run assessment tool. Stephanie sought clarification from the facilities' perspective regarding whether this tool would complement or duplicate existing pre-admission processes at facilities. Brandon indicated that the tool would likely enhance the process by focusing on contextual details surrounding the runaways rather than simply identifying them as runners, potentially aiding in interventions and treatments. Dennis agreed that the proposed screening tool would enhance the provider's capabilities, offering valuable information for treatment planning. Additionally, in conjunction with the proposed unit responsible for locating missing youth, the screening tool would serve as a crucial asset for the unit's operations.

The next idea put forth by the subcommittee was conducting a one-year pilot program that would involve implementing the running risk assessment screening tool and post-run assessment tool in a specific number of urban and rural counties. The purpose of this pilot would be to iron out any issues and refine the tools before scaling them up on a larger scale.

Dennis asked about the necessity of conducting a pilot instead of implementing the tool outright. Ashley highlighted the importance of ensuring the tool's high quality and reliability, indicating that the pilot would serve as a step in refining it before widespread implementation. Additionally, the feedback loop involving impacted individuals, especially providers and youth, was emphasized for refining the tool based on their experiences. Stephanie added points about the need for partnership between facilities and the state to establish clear expectations and rules around the tool's use, preventing miscommunication in its application. David suggested the consolidation of the two recommendations into one by viewing the pilot as an integral part of developing the risk assessment tool. He proposed combining the aspects of developing and piloting the tool into a single recommendation for greater efficiency.

Recommendation three revolves around integrating evaluation methods during and after the pilot program, allowing for adjustments to the tool based on feedback. There was a suggestion to potentially combine this point with the previous recommendations concerning the pilot program, making it a supplemental component.

The task force then discussed recommendation four, integrating provider access into Trails and ensuring that information exchange and connectivity with other databases occur seamlessly. There were considerations around grouping recommendations based on access, training, implementation, and other related aspects to provide a clear and cohesive structure.

Recommendation five focused on creating a data file system that ensures electronic storage of youth responses to the tools for future placements. There were concerns raised about the specificity of the language regarding access to this information. Participants proposed including language that encompasses a broader range of entities and stakeholders, beyond just future placements, potentially involving all impacted parties and multi-disciplinary teams. The emphasis was on ensuring inclusive access to the stored data, acknowledging that the implementation side would further define the specific entities requiring access.

Ashley inquired about whether the creation of a separate data file system is necessary if Trails can accommodate data sharing envisioned in this recommendation. Doris highlighted that the intent is to ensure a system exists for storing and sharing this data. The system might potentially reside in Trails, but this recommendation allows flexibility for the implementation planning to decide the system's location.

Dennis emphasized the need for stronger language in this recommendation, suggesting that it should potentially be mandated within legislation to ensure its implementation. Drawing on an example from child placement agencies accessing information, he highlighted that legislative backing would solidify the permanence of this access, preventing changes or retractions in the future.

The task force discussed the need for more specific details within the recommendation about sharing data for better program development and responses. Ashley suggested including the analysis of patterns related to reasons for youth running or not running away. This data analysis could inform future policies or changes within facilities.

Stephanie suggested including an annual reporting requirement to ensure transparency and accountability in sharing the data gathered. This reporting would serve as a means to communicate findings to the public and state legislature.

A question was raised about specifying trauma-informed training in the utilization of the screening tool. There was a consensus that trauma-informed principles should be incorporated not only in the development of the tool itself but also in its implementation and usage. There were suggestions to clarify that it's not just a single designated person who has received training but that everyone using the tool should be trained in a trauma-informed approach to ensure consistency and proper usage.

David expressed the opinion that it might not be necessary to delve deeply into specifying every aspect of training needed at this stage. He emphasized the importance of ensuring fidelity in implementing the tool and understanding how to handle the information gathered from it effectively. David highlighted the need for extensive training, not just in conducting the tool but also in utilizing the information derived from it to create effective prevention plans. He suggested that the focus should be on what to do with the information obtained from the tool after its application.

Dennis echoed sentiments similar to David's points, emphasizing the need to focus on the training aspect associated with the tool. He emphasized the importance of engaging the same institution or entity involved in creating the tool to develop the training, ensuring a seamless connection between the tool's development and the subsequent training required for its effective utilization. This approach would avoid any disconnect or misinterpretation when implementing the tool.

The discussion around recommendation nine revolved around ensuring compliance practices regarding the use of the tool and related data entry. Dennis highlighted the necessity of training all staff members working directly with youths, emphasizing the importance of the entire staff being proficient in utilizing the tool.

Jenna Coleman suggested incorporating ongoing or limited consultation from an outside party that develops the tool and provides training. This consultation would offer expertise and support to those implementing the tool, enabling them to discuss specific cases or scenarios, ensuring effective utilization. She clarified that the consultation would be aimed to assist in the practical implementation rather than conducting an evaluation of the tool.

There was a consensus that trauma-informed practices shouldn't be relegated to just one specific recommendation but rather should be a pervasive theme across all recommendations. The suggestion was to highlight trauma-informed approaches as a significant element within each recommendation, emphasizing its importance in understanding and effectively addressing the needs of high-risk youths who might have experienced trauma.

The conversation highlighted the need for a more defined understanding and consistent application of trauma-informed practices. Brandon emphasized the prevalent use of "trauma-informed" as a

buzzword and suggested establishing a clearer definition and standard for what trauma-informed practices actually entail. He stressed the importance of consensus and education around the principles and foundations of trauma-informed care, especially in crisis situations, to ensure a more uniform understanding and implementation of these practices across various recommendations. There was a suggestion to explicitly delineate and define trauma-informed practices within the language of the recommendations to provide a more precise understanding.

The discussion emphasized the need for clarity regarding interventions and agency capabilities to prevent youth from running away, which Brandon highlighted as a crucial aspect to address within the recommendations. There was a query about whether the proposed language effectively accounts for the agency's authority and options to intervene when all measures to prevent youth from running away have been exhausted. The consensus was that the current language didn't explicitly cover this important aspect and should potentially be revisited to ensure it adequately addresses agency abilities and intervention protocols when dealing with such situations.

The conversation focused on the critical need to discuss the intervention measures to prevent children and youth from leaving facilities. Brandon emphasized the urgency of addressing this issue and highlighted the importance of preventing incidents that led to the establishment of the task force. The discussion is scheduled for the Prevention Subcommittee in April, allowing for additional resources and external contacts to be gathered to better inform the conversation. The aim is to integrate these insights into the recommendations for discussion in July, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of intervention methods and prevention strategies.

The task force then discussed whether to include the Joint Technology Committee in the task force's efforts. Bryan and Jordan provided context, highlighting that this entity could be an essential partner in addressing challenges related to data systems and interdisciplinary access to information. Ashley pointed out that during the Child Welfare Interim Study Committee this summer, that group issued a request to the Joint Technology Committee to work with it so it seems like an opportunity this task force could capitalize on. The goal is to explore the potential benefits of collaborating with the Joint Technology Committee for the task force's aims concerning data systems and access to information.

Trace provided a wrap-up, emphasizing the opportunity for task force members to offer individual feedback on the discussed recommendations through a survey. They sought confirmation if anyone disagreed with the concept of including statewide assessment tools in the task force report, receiving no dissenting opinions. The discussion on these topics is scheduled to resume in July for the finalization of the report. Trace also highlighted the upcoming subcommittee meetings in February, urging task force members to review provided resources ahead of time for preparedness.

Stephanie expressed gratitude to the task force members for their dedication, thorough preparation, and thoughtful contributions. She highlighted the evident progress in the recommendations and reminded the task force of Timothy's story which led to this task force being formed. She expressed gratitude to Elizabeth for her participation and advocacy. Stephanie conveyed the task force's commitment to effecting changes and expressed excitement about the outcomes of this important collaborative work.