

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 22ND DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2024

The Caddo Parish Juvenile Justice Committee met in legal session on the above date at 11:30 a.m., in the Government Plaza Chambers Conference Room, with Mrs. Gage-Watts, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Cothran, Gage-Watts, Thomas, and J. Young (4). ABSENT: Commissioner Blake.

Mr. Cothran gave the invocation, and Mr. Thomas led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance. There were no Agenda Additions or Public Comments, so the Committee moved onto New Business.

NEW BUSINESS

- Discuss and receive presentation regarding gun violence prevention from Mary Ellen Hoffan

Ms. Hoffan introduced herself to the Committee. She would like the Commission to work with the School Board to look at the risk factors for juveniles and the correlation between those risk factors and violence.

She said that several Caddo families do not own property, so they are transient and moved to where they can afford to live. This is a risk factor, she said. Another risk factor is the lack of commitment to schools. If the parents do not have a commitment to education, then the children do not.

Ms. Hoffan then talked about the Harbor. She said that they have little resources for middle school aged and older. Mr. Clay Walker, Assistant Parish Administrator, explained that VYJ (Volunteers for Youth Justice) treats 0-5th grade. The Harbor will treat any child that is referred, but their primary focus in truancy is between kindergarten through 5th grade. Mr. J. Young then wanted to know if there was an umbrella organization that treats 6th grade and up at the Harbor. Mr. Walker said that the school system would deal with the truancy issues 6th grade and above.

Ms. Hoffan said that the truant teens are at an increased risk for teenage pregnancy, drop-out, substance abuse, and violence. She would like to see a map of resources to help these teens. Ms. Hoffan would like to be a part of the conversation that helps the juveniles.

Mrs. Gage-Watts thanked Ms. Hoffan for all of her concerns. She also mentioned that they are in the process of filling the Caddo Youth & Planning Board in the hopes that the politics will be left aside. She agreed that an educational component is needed to inform the public about the plethora of available resources.

Mr. Cothran said that he's dealt with at-risk teens when he was a principal in Ohio. He said that if someone saw a group of kids, they would call the police who would then bring them to the school. Mr. Cothran wanted to know about the truancy program in Caddo Parish. Mr. Andrew Randall, Juvenile Services Director, explained that VYJ has hired new truancy officers who work diligently with the probation officers. He mentioned that the truancy numbers are coming back down after the increase following COVID.

The rest of the meeting was not recorded due to technical issues with the DVD recorder.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 12:07 p.m.

M. Nations

Michelle Nations
Assistant to the Commission Clerk