

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S  
JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMITTEE  
HELD ON THE 19<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF MARCH, 2026

The Caddo Parish Juvenile Justice Committee met in legal session on the above date at 2:00, p.m., in the Government Plaza Chambers, with the following members present constituting a quorum: Commissioners Cothran, Gage-Watts, G. Young, and J. Young (4). ABSENT: Commissioners Jones (1).

Commissioner Ron Cothran gave the invocation and Commissioner Gregory Young 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**

- *Update on The Harbor from Volunteers for Youth Justice Executive Director Kelli Todd*

Commissioner John-Paul Young introduced Mrs. Kelli Todd as the Executive Director of the Volunteers for Youth Justice, which is a nonprofit organization that operates Caddo Parish's and the City of Shreveport's juvenile delinquency and juvenile crime prevention center, which is known as the Harbor.

Mrs. Todd explained that this is the fourth year of operation for the Harbor. She said that traditionally they only dealt with youth and their families, but they now can help anyone with many issues, from simply needing to know where the Medicaid office is or needing access to food. She mentioned that they have a food bank. She explained that since the Harbor opened, they generally served 6,000 to 7,000 children each year, but now that they include parents, they served 12,000 individuals this year.

Mrs. Todd said that this year they had 744 of what she calls walk-in cases. These cases were not sent by probation, DCFS, or schools. Out of those cases, they were able to refer 221 of them to outside agencies. She explained that they used to have to refer cases to agencies across town or in other parishes, or agencies which had waiting lists. Now that they have community nonprofits housed alongside them, people do not have to leave once they have come to the Harbor. She listed the services they connected people with, which were anger management, domestic violence, tutoring, housing, legal assistance, and mental health counseling. She added that they were able to connect youth with mentors and supply them with school supplies.

Mrs. Todd highlighted their new anti-vaping class. She said that many students were being expelled for vaping nicotine and THC. She said they serviced 205 middle and high school students. Out of those 205 students, 120 of them had illegal drugs in their vapes. She explained that they partnered with the Louisiana Education of Addiction Network to place students with illegal drugs in their system in a six-week class, after which they can return to school. The class is on Saturdays from 9 o'clock to noon, and parents must attend the last 30 minutes of the class. Mr. J. Young asked if there are any resources they are lacking for them to have an elementary school anti-vaping class. Mrs. Todd explained that Willis Knighton usually runs their elementary classes, but they are limited in the resources they can provide. She said they also reached out to the public health institute, but they have not been committed to helping with prevention activities. Mr. J. Young asked what resources are missing for the Harbor to run the classes. Mrs. Todd answered that they are lacking personnel to conduct the class. She said that for prevention classes, they would be conducted on-site at the elementary schools, and they do not have the personnel to cover 50 schools. Mr. J. Young asked about a program at the Harbor that would be for children who had been caught vaping. Mrs. Todd said they could do that, but they would have to add a trainer and security. Mr. J. Young said that if she could provide the amounts needed, the Commission would likely be able to help. Mr. Cothran asked if these classes could be run by volunteers. Mrs. Todd said that they could, the volunteers would just have to learn the certified curriculum.

Mr. G. Young thanked the Committee for shining light on the Harbor, and thanked Mrs. Todd for coming to speak. He asked her to give some background on the Harbor. Mrs. Todd explained that Volunteers for Youth Justice is a local nonprofit organization that was established in 1981 which runs many different programs, such as programs for foster children, juvenile justice intervention programs, trauma-based programs, and school-based programs. She explained that the organization does not provide mental health or domestic violence services. She said they would send families to other services which could help them, but those families would never make it there. The Harbor was a collaboration between the Caddo Parish Commission, the City of Shreveport, and Caddo Parish Schools to form a one-stop resource center for the community, where people in need of various services could come. She explained that every organization based in the Harbor pays rent, which covers overhead and pays for case managers. She explained how, even if they cannot directly help someone, they can still direct them to help. She added that they advertise in multiple ways. Mr. G. Young asked her to give some examples of the circumstances that people may find themselves in when they come to the Harbor for help. She explained a time when a female student rode the city bus to the Harbor and came in with signs of physical abuse from a family member. They called DCFS and the student's mother, who was also fleeing abuse from the student's father. Mrs. Todd said they took them down the hall to Project Celebration, who were able to put the two in a safe house. She also said they were able to provide them with school uniforms and food for the week. She said that family is currently doing well because of the collaborative effort at the Harbor. She added that they get a lot of food issues. She explained that they achieved a partnership with the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana with the help of Mr. J. Young, and they provided the Harbor a walk-in cooler. She said they were able to serve 703 clients quality food last year. She highlighted that one does not have to live in specific zip codes to access their food bank. She said anyone in Caddo Parish who qualifies can come Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:30. Mr. Cothran asked what the requirements are to qualify for their food bank. Mrs. Todd said that there is income paperwork and the requirements are the same as the Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana. Mr. Cothran asked for the address of the Harbor. Mrs. Todd answered the address is 3004 Knight Street. Mr. J. Young said it is directly across from the Wal-Mart.

Mrs. Todd continued to highlight their services. She said they are starting Brentwood outpatient services for the youth, which will be through Caddo Parish Schools for students with mental health issues preventing them from going to school. She also mentioned the Calming Studio which was opened at the Harbor about a year ago, which is a space for parents and children to have visits. Here they pair families with a Trust-Based Relational Intervention facilitator. She also highlighted a Trust-Based Relational Intervention training program for incarcerated men. She said Lucinda Miles, the TBRI trainer, has been allowed now to work with incarcerated minors. Mrs. Todd said she thinks it is important that those minors have a support system when they are able to be released from their sentences. Mr. J. Young asked what kind of follow-up those minors have once they get out of incarceration, and if they get out at all. Mrs. Todd answered that this service is new to them. Director of Juvenile Services Andrew Randall said that those incarcerated minors tend to have lengthy sentences, as their crimes are more serious. Mr. G. Young said that it is important for juveniles to know that there are consequences for their actions.

Mrs. Todd explained that the Harbor is now holding hearings for truant juveniles. Mr. J. Young asked if this is like a student court. Mrs. Todd answered that it is not a court, but it is a cooperation with Caddo Parish Schools to try to address the issue before it gets to court. Mrs. Todd said that this is helping to bring down probation numbers. Mr. G. Young asked if these hearing were in addition to or in lieu of juvenile court. Mrs. Todd answered that they are in lieu of juvenile court. Mr. Randall added that this has been very helpful to Juvenile Services because it makes it so that only the most serious cases of truancy make it to juvenile court. Mr. Cothran asked Mrs. Todd to explain the different levels of truancy. Mrs. Todd explained that level one means they have intervened and are providing basic services, such as reminding the family of attendance rules. Level two mean that the child has reached a much higher level of truancy, probably fifteen to twenty days, and they are not complying with the services. If that continues, they go to level three, which is the Harbor hearing. Mr. Cothran asked how parents are affected by these hearings. Mrs. Todd said the parents are affected a lot by having to miss work to come to the hearings. She explained that these are parental issues, as they are dealing with elementary and middle school students. Mr. Cothran asked Mrs. Todd to expound on the Court Appointed Special Advocates program. Mrs. Todd explained that they are trained volunteers who have to go through 30 hours of training. When a child is placed in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services they go before a judge and the judge very often

appoints a CASA volunteer. This volunteer is responsible for meeting with the child, their teachers, their family members, and any other people who are integral to the child's life, in order to determine the best placement and long-term security for the child. The main goal is to find a family member or someone familiar so the child is not having to stay in a system with strangers. Mrs. Todd said CASA served 617 children in Caddo, Bossier, Desoto, and Webster Parishes. She explained that it is a very difficult job that requires a lot of investment from the volunteer in the child's life. Mr. Cothran cited his own experience as a CASA and said that it is a truly rewarding experience. He said that Mrs. Todd should let CASA know that they should come before the Commission to speak and hopefully get more people to volunteer.

Mr. J. Young thanked Mrs. Todd for giving him credit for their food bank. He asked if the STD test kits the Commission had appropriated funds for had ever been used. Mrs. Todd said that program never came to fruition. Mr. J. Young asked why. Mrs. Todd said they never received the funding. Mr. J. Young asked Assistant Administrator Clay Walker to look into why that was the case.

Mr. J. Young mentioned an audio-visual recording studio was donated to the Harbor and asked if it had been put to use. Mrs. Todd explained that Booker T. Washington is going to start afterschool activities there with their digital marketing and advertising program. She said it is hard to man the studio, so it has not been promoted much. Mr. J. Young mentioned that they have been approached by some people asking for money to set up a relevant program. He asked if administration could connect them with the Harbor. Mrs. Todd said that they could have students who wish to use the studio train others as a tradeoff for studio time. Mr. J. Young asked Mr. Walker to have the Communications department advertise the Harbor's studio in conjunction with advertisements for the upcoming Rising Stars talent competition. Mrs. Todd said they have been sharing information about the competition with their school-based programs.

Mr. J. Young mentioned that Commissioner Grace Anne Blake was interested in flight simulator programs. He asked Mr. Randall about the flight simulator program that Juvenile Services started. Mr. Randall said that the program is at Southern University in Shreveport, and that Juvenile Services has not purchased one. Mr. J. Young said Mrs. Blake is interested in getting a similar program on-site where it is accessible to youth. He asked that Mrs. Todd get in touch with Mrs. Blake about that. He said that he would like to continue enhancing the services at the Harbor and make it more attractive for people to come and get the things they need while being educated and having fun.

Mr. J. Young asked Mrs. Todd if she senses that there is a need for the STD test kits. She said she was unsure, but Dr. Martha White feels as though there is. Mrs. Todd said there is going to be a need as they served 12,000 families last year. Mr. Walker said he will look at the relevant committee minutes to see what complications arose with the funding. He said he recalls there being similar services at the health center. Mr. J. Young said that does not seem like an obstacle to him.

Mr. J. Young asked Mr. Cothran if he had any further questions or ideas for Mrs. Todd. Mr. Cothran said VYJ are doing an outstanding job, and he thinks there needs to be more visibility in the community, particularly for parents of children who are not in the system, but are on the bubble. He cited his experience as a school principal where he had parents come to him not knowing what to do for their children, as they had not done anything to get them incarcerated, but they were a danger to do so. He said the Harbor could possibly get with the Communications department to get on the Parish's web pages. Mr. G. Young mentioned peer pressures affecting children and said he was curious about the stigma associated with being involved in programs like those offered by the Harbor. Mrs. Todd said they do a lot of prevention on school campuses. She said that they can keep their interactions from going on the children's records. She said incarcerated children are the ones affected by a stigma, and they do not usually deal with those children.

Mr. J. Young asked if they have an anti-bullying program at the Harbor. Mrs. Todd said they do not have a program at the Harbor, but VYJ does classes at schools for third, fourth, and fifth graders. Mr. J. Young asked if it would be a benefit to have these classes at the Harbor. Mrs. Todd answered it would if people would come, but that is an issue. She said if they go to the schools, they can ensure the children are exposed to the education. Mr. J. Young asked if they have any sort of course which helps children with issues caused by social media. Mrs. Todd answered that they would have to be referred to

the power of choice class by the court or district attorney's office. Mr. J Young asked how big that program is. Mrs. Todd said it is a six-week class which sees around 250 children a year. Mr. J. Young suggested that Mrs. Todd consider some sort of program for this issue. She said there may be another organization doing it, but she does not know if the Harbor has the resources to do it.

Mr. J. Young asked if they have anti-littering education for children. Mrs. Todd said that only happens at their school-based resource sites, and it is not an extensive program. Mr. J. Young said he does not think it needs to be a lengthy program, but children should be told that littering is wrong.

Mr. J. Young asked if VYJ has any domestic violence prevention education for children. She said do not, but they utilize Project Celebration to hold those classes, which is also based at the Harbor. Mr. J. Young said it would be good to talk about Project Celebration at a future Juvenile Justice or Public Safety committee meeting, and suggested Mr. Cothran could put that on a future agenda for the Public Safety Committee.

Mr. J. Young asked Commissioner Stormy Gage-Watts if she had any questions for Mrs. Todd. Mrs. Gage-Watts said she had no questions but expressed her support and gratitude.

Mr. Cothran asked Mrs. Todd how someone could get in contact with them about volunteering. Mrs. Todd answered that the best way is to go to the website VYJLA.org for information. She said they are currently looking for teen court volunteers. She said teen court is held one Monday a month at the Caddo Parish Juvenile Court. Mr. J. Young asked Mrs. Todd to explain teen court. Mrs. Todd explained that it is a program where teens who have gotten in legal trouble can have their case heard by their peers, with an attorney as the judge. Their sentence are usually power of choice classes, as well as community service such as working at the food bank. As part of their punishment, they are required to serve on the next teen court jury.

Mr. J. Young thanked Mrs. Todd for coming and sharing information about Volunteers for Youth Justice and the Harbor.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 2:58, p.m.



Clayton McGee  
Administrative Specialist