



## Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs

KATHY HOCHUL  
Governor

MARIA LISI-MURRAY  
Acting Executive Director

### NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs Advisory Council Meeting Summary January 23, 2025

Advisory Council Members Present: William Gettman (Chair), Michael Agovino, Ijaz Ahmad, M.D., Veronica Crawford, Geno DeCondo, Norwig Debye-Saxinger, Kathleen Gaffney-Babb, Jason Hershberger, M.D., Walt Joseph, Ron Lehrer, Glenn Liebman, Joe Macbeth, Tom McAlvanah, Judith O'Rourke, Jeff Savoy, Wini Schiff, Euphemia Strauchn

Advisory Council Members Not Present: Harvey Rosenthal, Mary St. Mark

Justice Center Staff Present: Maria Lisi-Murray, Acting Executive Director; Emily Steinbach, Chief of Staff; Erin Hogan, Director of Public Information; Lisa Barone, Assistant Director of Public Information; Davin Robinson, Deputy Director of the Outreach, Prevention and Support Unit; Charlie Pensabene, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs; Christa Book, General Counsel, Robert Miller, Executive Deputy Director.

#### I. Justice Center Updates

##### NYS Budget

The budget proposed by the Governor for 2025-26 contains no significant changes to the Justice Center's budget.

##### New Justice Center Staff

Emily Steinbach was hired in October to be the Justice Center's Chief of Staff. Ms. Steinbach brings over a decade of experience in healthcare and human services including the Office of Mental Health and, most recently serving as Chief of Staff at the Office of Children and Family Services and as a member of the Governor's taskforce to assist the Office of Cannabis Management.

In her role with the Justice Center, Ms. Steinbach works with executive leadership to help the agency achieve its strategic goals. She serves as a liaison with the broader agency staff to facilitate the day-to-day operations in pursuit of the Justice Center's mission. This can include overseeing policy initiatives, maintaining relationships with key stakeholders, representing the agency Executive Director at events, and helping to shape public perception of the agency.

##### Code of Conduct Awards

The Justice Center awarded five Code of Conduct awards in 2024. Events to honor the award winners are being scheduled with the winner's provider agency so that the event is held in a local venue where colleagues, family members and people receiving services can attend.



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In October and November, the Justice Center presented awards in Jamestown and Cortland and received positive local press. A ceremony was held January 16 in Staten Island and Joe Macbeth was able to attend. The last two ceremonies are on March 4 in the Bronx and March 18 in Chappaqua. Anyone interested in attending the upcoming ceremony should contact Emily Steinbach.

### Prevention and Quality Improvement Site Visit

The Justice Center completed a site visit in October to an OPWDD-licensed residence based on a referral from an investigation that found inadequate living conditions in the residence which was thought to have contributed to two residents getting diagnosed with pneumonia.

During the site visit, Justice Center staff found significant environmental issues that jeopardized the health and safety of people receiving services, including the presence of rodent droppings, moldy food, bed bugs, and overall unsanitary living conditions.

The Justice Center issued an Immediate Action letter, calling for the immediate remediation of these issues; OPWDD visited the program the next day and removed the residents from the home and declared immediate jeopardy. Due to the agency's inability to remediate the issues and develop a plan for compliance to address the living conditions, the agency was placed on OPWDD's Early Alert list and fined \$15,000. This site visit demonstrated the impact of the Justice Center's oversight role and the importance of collaboration with OPWDD.

### Schuyler County Collaboration

In November staff from the Justice Center's Special Prosecutor and Individual and Family Support Units met with the Schuyler County's District Attorney's office and the Justice Center of the Southern Tier -- a multidisciplinary advocacy organization that provides support for crime victims in the Southern Tier of New York. The goal of the meeting was to help to facilitate collaboration with our agency, the DA's office, and law enforcement. Thanks to their efforts, we can now use the Justice Center of the Southern Tier's space to conduct forensic interviews as needed.

### TRAIID Partnership

A partnership between the New York State (NYS) Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD), the Westchester Institute for Human Development (WIHD), the NYS TRAIID Assistive Technology Program, and local partners across New York explored how the community living options for people with developmental disabilities could be expanded through increased access to Assistive Technology (AT). With funding from the NYS CDD, WIHD piloted a three-year project that has connected people with developmental disabilities with needed AT to support independent living. WIHD assessed individual needs, provided AT devices and technical assistance. In November, the partnership offered a webinar on the wide range of AT currently available and how it can be used to make a home accessible. Presenters shared best practices and lessons learned from their pilot program as well as information on what funding and resources might be available to support increased access to AT.



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### Justice Center 2025 Summit

Registration is now open for the 2025 Justice Center Summit to be held on March 25, 27 and April 1 and 3. During the first day of registration 500 people registered and as of January 22, 2025, 1,159 people had registered.

### Cameras

Members of the advisory council enquired about discussions with OPWDD concerning the use of cameras in common areas of programs. Some members were hopeful that the recent press articles about the abuse that was videotaped secretly at the Anderson Center would help advance the call for cameras. The Justice Center reported that OPWDD remains concerned that the use of cameras could negatively impact federal Medicaid reimbursement.

While some members of the advisory council strongly support the use of cameras to help prevent, detect, and investigate abuse and mistreatment, others cautioned that cameras are not a panacea for preventing abuse and shouldn't take away from focusing on provider agency management and training. In addition, the use of cameras costs money and requires guidance from state oversight agencies about who and when outside entities can have access to videotape. Members also urged that future discussion include input from people with disabilities.

## **II. 2025 Messaging and Media Opportunities**

The new assistant director of communications, Lisa Barone, was introduced to the advisory council. Ms. Barone comes to the Justice Center from the private sector and has worked with many of the providers under the Justice Center's jurisdiction.

The Justice Center developed priority messages that advisory council members who speak with the media on a regular basis, are encouraged to use if appropriate. These messages are attached to the email containing this meeting summary. They are in draft form and if any council member has suggestions, please let Emily Steinbach know.

## **III. Justice Center Prevention Committee Update**

The Justice Center's internal abuse prevention committee is charged with identifying preventative actions that address conditions that cause or contribute to incidents of abuse and neglect. The committee met in December 2024. During these meetings, committee members working in different business units across the Justice Center received updates on prevention and quality improvement activities and investigative trends. During this meeting, committee members were split into four different groups to review Spotlight on Prevention Toolkits that are in the development process. These toolkits are on:

- Supervision
- Training
- Pica
- Peer Mentoring



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The peer mentoring toolkit is designed to give provider agencies resources to support peer staff that may be working at the agency. The Justice Center sent a survey out to solicit suggestions and sample policies, etc. and received over 300 responses. Advisory council members cautioned that there are real differences in how peer staff are used in OMH and OASAS programs and urged that the toolkit address those differences.

#### **IV. Committee Reports**

##### Legislation and Regulations Committee

The committee met earlier in the month. The Justice Center is preparing for the Mental Hygiene budget hearing in February. On the regulatory side, the Justice Center submitted a Notice of Adoption to use gender neutral terms in Justice Center Regulations to be published on January 29. The comment period for Surrogate Decision-Making Committee regulations which support the use of virtual hearings closes at the end of January. No comments were received and it is expected that these regulations will be implemented in February.

The Governor's State of the State message did not include any proposals that impacted the Justice center directly and there were no Article VII bills that reference the Justice Center. A high-level overview of Article VII bills impacting a range of topics, including a proposal for a 2.1% COLA was provided. The overview summarizing these issues are attached to the email containing this meeting summary.

##### Workforce Issues Committee

In addition to receiving an update on the Code of Conduct award ceremonies, the committee discussed the E-Badge Credentialing program. One member reported that about 30 staff at his provider agency are enrolled in the college program that allows SUNY students to take a micro-credentialing course and earn up to \$750 for completion. There is a lot of interest from staff in this program. The program is being evaluated and it is hoped that a permanent source of funding can be found for this credentialing. More information can be found on the NADSP website at: <https://ebadge.nadsp.org/>.

This year a broad range of human service providers are seeking a 7.8% investment in the workforce. The amount has been calculated based on the difference between the CPI in past years and the amount of money New York has budgeted for the workforce. It is hoped that this investment will allow service providers to recruit and retain quality staff.

##### Abuse Prevention Committee

The committee received a briefing on the Justice Center's abuse prevention committee meeting.

##### Investigator and Law Enforcement Training

Justice Center in-person training for all Justice Center staff in October was successful and the panel of people who have received services and their family members was very well received. Special thanks to Veronica Crawford, Bill Gettman and Jeff Savoy who participated on the panel. The 2025 in-service training will be held on October 7 and 8 at the Desmond Hotel in Albany. As always, members of this committee are welcome to attend any sessions offered. The committee will be informed as the agenda is finalized.



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*Disability Awareness Training for Law Enforcement and First Responders*

The Justice Center offers a portfolio of free courses designed to train first responders and law enforcement on respectful communications and investigative best practices. The agency has also begun to offer trainings to non-Justice Center employees that had previously only been offered to Justice Center staff. Recently the Justice Center offered its Forensic Interviewing for Vulnerable Populations training to OPWDD investigators. Additional trainings will be offered in the future. If there is space, the training will be offered to investigators in the other state oversight agencies (e.g. OMH, OCFS).

On January 7, the Justice Center provided disability awareness training to the Bronx DA's office. The Bronx DA's office is interested in more of these trainings and asked for training on what to expect when working with people in OPWDD settings.

All of the trainings offered can be found on the Justice Center website. The Justice Center engages in regular outreach to a variety of law enforcement groups to advertise the services, including the Sheriff's Association, Fireman's Association) to promote the trainings.

On January 16, YAI did a presentation for first responders and Justice Center staff on best practices for communicating with non-verbal individuals.

**Next Meeting  
April 24, 2025  
161 Delaware Avenue, Delmar NY  
Or Via Webex**