

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
JUVENILE JUSTICE COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 17TH DAY OF MARCH, 2022

The Caddo Parish Juvenile Justice Committee met in legal session on the above date at 1:00 p.m., in the Government Plaza Chambers Conference Room, with Mr. Chavez, Chairman, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Gage-Watts, Johnson, Taliaferro, and Young (6). ABSENT: Commissioner Jones (1).

Mr. Johnson gave the invocation, and Mr. Young led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

NEW BUSINESS

- *Discuss increased gang violence in Caddo Parish and possible responses. Discuss establishing a taskforce to address gang violence.*

Mr. Johnson asked that this be on the agenda because of all the recent shootings. He said that the majority of them have been in retaliation. Mr. Johnson reached out to the City Marshal who suggested creating a taskforce comprised of representatives from the City Marshal's Office, Shreveport Police Department, and Caddo Sheriff's Office.

Mr. Burrell wanted to know if these individuals were pre-identified based on certain criteria. Mr. Johnson explained that SPD and the Sheriff's Office is short on manpower, which is the reason for the combined effort of the three law enforcement agencies.

Mr. Young wanted to know how many outstanding warrants have been issued for juveniles for violent crimes. Mr. Walker said that there are about fifty juveniles who have those types of warrants. Mr. Young then wanted to know where would they go.

Mr. Walker explained that the VCAT (Violent Crimes Abatement Taskforce) is currently being implemented. VCAT is comprised of members from the Sheriff's Department, Shreveport Police Department, ATF, OJJ, and Caddo Juvenile Services. This taskforce does meet and targets violent crimes. There is also an effort to put together a group to discuss a truce between the gangs. If the truce doesn't hold, then the VCAT will be executing warrants.

Mrs. Gage-Watts said that the violence in the community is being approached in many efforts to deter it, such as the Ring Doorbell Program. She wanted to know if there are any investments the Caddo Parish Commission needs to make towards the intelligence for the program. Mr. Walker said that Keith Hanson with the City and the Real Time Crime Center is building camera systems to be placed throughout the City. He also explained that they are working with the Real Time Crime Center with regards to tracking things social media because the kids are posting everything to social media. Mr. Walker believes once social media is tracked, they'll be able to get ahead of the curve.

Mr. Walker also said that the children who are coming to the detention center are being charged with new crimes. The violent ones are being held at CCC. He said that the children who are being released are being tracked and not reoffending.

Mr. Walker gave an example of the "binary feeder system" as he describes it. The kid joins the Peach Street Youngins, which is a younger group that has a certain territory in town. When that kid gets older or makes a name for themselves, the graduate to SOD or BBG. He further explained in order to become a part of the SOD or BBG, "you have to be called up".

Mr. Walker also talked about a rolling shootout that happened a few weeks ago on Youree Drive. He said that the kid was being held at CC on a murder charge with a \$500,000 bond. The bond was then reduced to \$250,000. The kid then made the bond and was released. He is alleged to kill one of the main leaders of SOD a few years ago.

He also said that the truce effort is working out better than he originally thought. The youth effort does not seem to be that organized. Mr. Walker is concerned with the OGs calling the truce and the younger kids not listening. He said that the previous generation was more hierarchical and listened to their OG, but now, if the kids do not want to listen, they just splinter off and create a new gang. He further explained that the effort right now is to get four or five members in the leadership positions off the streets by way of warrants to see if it "cools things off for a bit".

Mr. Walker also mentioned that he does not want to release any information regarding a truce until approximately two months after its been in effect. Mr. Young wanted to know if there are any incentives being offered for the truce. Mr. Walker said that there will be food involved and potential jobs and vocational training. Mr. Young said that the City and the Parish both have job openings. Mr. Walker said that it would be City Public Works positions dealing with blighted properties. If the individual comes to work, then vocational training opportunities will be offered.

Mrs. Gage-Watts wanted to know if the Parish would be able to provide some type of gifts cards. Dr. Wilson said that Goodwill Industries or United Way can train people to have skills. The Parish

could then fund them and “not call it gift cards”, he said.

Mr. Walker pointed out that the children want studio time. Mr. Young wanted to know if there was anyone who could provide that. Mr. Walker explained that if the children show up to work for two weeks, then they will have studio time. He also mentioned that rappers are coming to talk to the kids and inspire them to do right.

Mr. Young wanted to know if they could talk to the judges to eliminate bail for gun crimes. Dr. Wilson said that is up to the District Attorney. Mr. Taliaferro explained that the bail was not cut from \$500,000 to \$250,000. He said that it was a glitch that raised the bail from \$250,000 to \$500,000, and it was never sent to CCC. Attorney Bernstein also explained that a bail bondsman is who the individuals post bail to. For example, if the bond is \$150,000, the bondsman will bail the person out for \$25,000. Mr. Young wanted to know if the Parish has any influence over those individuals. Attorney Bernstein stated that they do not.

Mr. Young also talked about the people at CCC. He said that it is almost at max capacity. He wanted to know if there was a way to get the non-violent offenders out of jail. Dr. Wilson said that they met with Judge Emmanuel and Judge Mosely to expedite the adjudicated process to get the numbers back down. Mr. Walker also clarified that they are not “sitting on warrants”, and the police have any violent warrants that Juvenile Services has.

Mr. Atkins wanted to know if there will still be a taskforce if the truce is agreed upon. Mr. Walker said that there will still be a taskforce. He does not believe there will be a stop on any investigations involving violent crimes.

Mr. Johnson said that some of the rappers are stimulating some of the crimes. He suggested that the children who earn studio time cannot rap about crimes or retaliation that will be done in the future.

Mr. Johnson also said that the Parish owns both the detention center and CCC. He said that space can be made if a child needs to be picked up. Mr. Johnson said that this is about saving lives, public health, and public safety. He explained that Caddo Parish is losing the next generation. One group is graduating high school and leaving to go to college and never coming back home. The other group is being killed. He said that everything needs to be done to help the children.

Mrs. Gage-Watts agreed and believes this is a bold approach. She said that this conversation needs to be a constant conversation. Mrs. Gage-Watts also said that the children who do decide to change their lives will need some type of safety net. Mr. Walker said that there is a group of leaders within the community who will serve as their mentors. He also said that the truce will call for each side to “lay down their weapons” and not follow up with retaliation because both sides have lost soldiers.

The Clerk of the Commission wanted to know where a person would turn if they are phasing out of a life of crime, but are being pressured to go back into it. Mr. Walker said that the mentors in the community will be providing that safe place for those children. He also explained that these are OGs from the 90s.

Mrs. Gage-Watts suggested having serious conversations with the gang members and showing them the Coroner’s Office, Sheriff’s Office, and the District Attorney’s Office to show them that is where they will end up if they do not stop what they are doing. She asked that the Committee consider having everyone in one place, such as a summit, to have these hard conversations.

Mr. Burrell said that everything that is being talked about today were the same conversations that were had in the 90s. He also mentioned that the OGs never trusted law enforcement to be a part of those conversations because they could not be open to discuss certain things for fear of being incarcerated. Mr. Burrell suggested getting non-law enforcement agencies involves, such as churches, psychologists, and other community leaders.

Mr. Johnson agreed and said that the meetings should be with people that the leaders trust because if they feel uncomfortable, they will pull out of the meeting. He also mentioned that there are jobs available all over town with starting wages at \$10-\$15 per hour because companies cannot find people to work. Mr. Johnson said that these jobs will allow the children to make some money because right now they are living off of their parents or stealing to make a way. He further explained that United Way or Goodwill can then come in and provide financial guidance on how to save money, manage their budget, etc. He said that this will be a domino effect on providing a path for this generation to follow.

Mrs. Gage-Watts said that she spoke with Ms. Lynn Stevens at Goodwill about being a part of the Expungement Summit.

Mr. Atkins said that he is concerned about up front incentives. He said that he is ok with jobs, but is concerned that people may just come get the cash and not continue to stay engaged.

Mr. Burrell agreed with Mr. Atkins. He said that sometimes these symposiums or summits become more glamorized not yield the results that they are wanting. He also said that in the 90s, there were several non-profits that helped out.

It was **moved by Mr. Johnson**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *to recommend to the full body putting on a symposium or Expungement Summit in the hopes of decreasing the violence in the community by bringing together the juveniles and gang leaders and providing for a job fair.*

Mr. Johnson said that when he was a kid, he was able to walk all over Queensborough and Mooretown without any problems, but times have changed. People cannot walk in those neighborhoods without fear of being shot. Mr. Atkins wanted to know what changed. Mr. Johnson said that people have no investment in their neighborhoods because they are renting properties rather than owning them. Mr. Johnson said that this generation has no values. In order to get back to the children having values, there needs to be symposiums and incentives. Mr. Johnson said that he does not believe in cash incentives, but rather job incentives. He suggested that the OGs need to sit down with these children and let them know where they are going to be if they continue on the path that they're going on.

Mr. Atkins wanted to know how to prevent violence if there are several gangs meeting at the same time. Mr. Johnson said that there will still be law enforcement there. He also suggested providing the members a blank application that can be filled out prior to coming to the symposium that can be transferred to the jobs that the members are interested in.

Mr. Burrell said that there is a direct correlation between the rise in gang activity and the poverty rate. He also pointed out that the violence is not just with boys; it is with girls too.

Mr. Walker agreed and said that the gangs are going to social media. He explained that it is all over the State, from Jefferson to New Orleans to Lake Charles to Monroe.

Mr. Taliaferro said that he was involved with the Bottom Boys in the 90s, but not in the social aspect of it because he was in law enforcement. He said that they started on one end of the street and worked their way to end of the street, and they moved throughout the neighborhood. He said that everyone on went to jail. He said that those were different times, and he understood the components because it was narcotics, turf, and control. Mr. Taliaferro said that the children nowadays do not understand those components. Now it is more emotional and psychological.

Mr. Taliaferro wanted to know if the program needs to be drafted prior to sending to the full body. Mr. Johnson said that it will go hand in hand with each other. He explained that this program will be recommended to the full body, and a dollar amount will need to be set to stay within budget. Mrs. Gage-Watts mentioned that the Commission has put on Expungement Summits and Resource Fairs in the past that has been well-attended. She said that an additional component will be added to the event.

Mr. Taliaferro said that it is incumbent upon the Parish to have a thorough follow-through component as well.

At this time, Mr. Johnson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Gage-Watts, Johnson, Taliaferro, and Young (6). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioner Jones (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

- *Discussion on issues related to Juvenile Services*

Mr. Walker agreed with Mr. Johnson about the children not having values being one of the core problems. He said that government cannot raise children, and it is hard for a probation officer or judge to try and teach those children values. He said that this will take a bigger effort.

Mr. Johnson said that the judges need to start moving the juveniles through the system, especially if the crimes are being ramped up.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know if they could petition the Legislators to have a weekend judge who handles weekend cases. Mr. Walker said that they did have a meeting with Justice Creighton, and they have the opportunity to bring in ad-hoc judges. He said that there are ways to reduce the population, i.e. by doing a risk-assessment and survey everyone who is incarcerated. Attorney Bernstein pointed out that the judges do not have a supervisor.

Mr. Young asked each of the judicial candidates for the Court of Appeal if Caddo Parish needs more judges. Their answers were that in Bossier Parish, the judges do every type of case; whereas, in Caddo Parish, the judges choose their types of case. Mr. Young suggested bringing to the public's attention.

Dr. Wilson pointed out that the juveniles have a code of ethics where they will not say anything if they get hurt, shot, stabbed, etc. Mr. Walker said that they receive several calls about parents trying to get their children out of this lifestyle. He also explained that when a child goes to Juvenile Detention, it isn't a form of punishment, but more so "getting their stripes".

The Clerk of the Commission suggested locking the children out of the internet. Mrs. Gage-Watts said that they will figure a way to gain access to their social media apps. Mr. Walker mentioned that they will even get phones while they're in prison.

Mrs. Gage-Watts would like to continue the discussion on gang violence and prevention at the next committee meeting.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned
at 2:17 p.m.



Michelle Nations
Assistant Commission Clerk