



## **Criminal Justice Advisory Committee Minutes Tuesday, September 30, 2025**

**Members Present:** Dawn Baxton, Mike Sistrom, Tonia Rogers-Dixon, Dorothy Hairston Mitchell, Jesse Battle, Lao Rubert, Dr. Angeloe Burch, Nida Allam, Ben Haas, Dr. Rodney Jenkins, Michael O’Foghludha, Dave Crispell, Duane Brinson

**Guests:** Irene Lawrence - Community Development Specialist with NC’s Department of Adult Corrections, Ontario Joyner, Program Manager – City of Durham Office of Survivor Care, Derrick Fitts, Safe Babies Coordinator, Kristin Stout - Safe Babies Court, State Coordinator, Catherine Constantinou, Assistant Public Defender, RCND/RJ Durham

**Staff:** Roshanna Humphrey, Marc Strange, Robin Heath, Jenni Amis, Janice Williams

**Excused Absences:** Eric Johnson

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Baxton called the meeting to order at 4:05pm, welcomed all attendees and asked all in attendance to introduce themselves.

### **2. Approval of July 2025 Minutes**

Chair Baxton called for a motion to approve the July 29, 2025, minutes. Hearing no corrections, Dr. Angeloe Burch moved to approve the minutes as presented; the motion was seconded by Dr. Rodney Jenkins. The motion to approve the July 29, 2025, CJAC minutes was unanimously carried.

Chair Baxton introduced Mr. Derrick Fitts as the first presenter.

### **3. Safe Babies Court Presentation:** Derrick Fitts, Safe Babies Coordinator

➤ **Overview:**

➤ **State Team:**

- State Director – Polly Handrahan
- State Coordinator – Kristin Stout

➤ **What is Safe Babies?**

- Safe Babies Court (SBC) was established in 2005 and there are currently over 32 sites across the United States.
- In 2021, the Chief Justice’s Task Force on ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences/Adverse Community Environments) recommended implementing Safe Babies Courts in North Carolina, envisioning a 3-year, five-site pilot program.

- ▶ In 2023, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Social Services (DSS), SBCs were implemented in two (2) NC pilot sites; currently there are five (5) sites in NC.
- ▶ SBCs:
  - operate in conjunction with the Abuse, Neglect and Dependency (A/N/D) Court.
  - is a voluntary program that parents and care givers can sign up for and withdraw from at any time.
  - operate under the judicial leadership of two (2) judges – Judge Montgomery-Blinn and Judge Walker.

➤ How does Safe Babies Court work in Durham?

- ▶ The science of early childhood development is an evidence-based practice utilized by SBCs. Based on Durham statistics, SBCs provide services for infants and children from 0 – 5 years of age. Petitions filed with SBCs must include at least one child within this age range in order to be processed for services.
- ▶ The goal is to reduce generational trauma and eliminate maltreatment.
- ▶ Focus is on counteracting the adversities that exist in the Family Court System by improving how SBCs, the child welfare programs, and service providers work together to expedite referrals for needed services to families and care takers.

➤ What is the Safe Babies Approach?

- ▶ To implement:
  - Enhanced Oversight and Problem-Solving Procedures: guiding parents and families through the process
  - Expedited Appropriate and Effective Services (based on the evidenced-based approach)
  - Trauma- Responsive Support: providing a safe space for communication
  - Continuous Quality Improvement: data collection
  - Interdisciplinary Collaborative and Proactive Teamwork

? What does the typical intervention consist of?

Answer: During a typical intervention the strengths and weaknesses of the family are identified to help determine what services are needed.

? If a parent is diagnosed with a substance use disorder, is treatment mandated?

Answer: Since the SBC Judicial Status Conferences aren't hearings, attorneys will file motions for services needed. SBC will then facilitate the process of connecting the parent(s) with accessing the mandated resources.

? Is further guidance provided for parents after completing the process?

Answer: Safe Babies does not provide aftercare services, however, through SBC's referral sources, individuals may receive further assistance.

❖ Dr. Jenkins stated there is an ACE Coordinator and Resilience Task Force (made possible through the generosity of the County Commissioners' office) located in the DHHS building and offered Mr. Fitts access to these resources.

Chair Baxton introduced Mr. Ontario Joyner as the next presenter.

4. **Office of Survivor Care:** presented by Ontario Joyner, Office of Survivor Care, Program Manager (*PPT presentation attached*)

Mr. Joyner began by stating the following:

➤ **The Office of Survivor Care's (OSC) Mission Statement:**

- To compassionately support, uplift, and empower survivors by fostering a healing-centered, community-rooted approach and being dedicated to building trust, restoring dignity, and advancing justice.

Mr. Joyner went on to state that:

➤ OSC is:

- a new department within the City of Durham's Community Safety Department.
- derived from recommendations from the Task Force to help address the residual effects of gun violence. This office was created in response to the rising concerns regarding unmet needs of survivors of gun violence in the City of Durham.
- a small team which consists of Mr. Joyner and a clinician.
- is now in operation and has started receiving referrals as of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.
- helps grieving families navigate the complexity of getting and receiving services of support by utilizing a Trauma- Informed Care approach.
- completely free of charge; services are limited to individuals who reside in the City of Durham.

➤ **Core Values:**

- Providing Compassion-Centered Care to survivors
- Community Collaboration: working in conjunction with non-profit and other existing organizations that are currently providing the same services
- Equity and Justice: working with **all** survivors and their families including perpetrators
- Empowerment through Voice and Choice: making sure the survivors' voices are heard

➤ **Services Offered:**

- Bridge Therapy: consists of 16 sessions with the clinician who will connect survivors with an actual therapist
- Case Management/Care Coordination: connecting survivors to all resources available to them i.e. food and laundry services, employment and assistance in accessing NC Victim Compensation Funds
- Advocacy
- Support for Family & Loved Ones
- Empowerment and Community Outreach

➤ **Referrals:**

- Referral forms are obtainable via a secure link:  
<https://forms.office.com/g/KC73cWzDT7>
- Upon receipt of a referral, the team will establish contact within 48 business hours

➤ **Partnerships:**

- There is a plethora of non-profit, religious and county organizations that OSC partners with.

? Since this is a city funded organization, what is the sustainability of this office?

Answer: The OSC is set-up as a 3-year pilot program. Several listening sessions and community events were held in advocacy for the OSC operations to establish continued support and relevancy in the community.

- ▶ Mr. Sistrom also responded “there is an advisory committee that Mr. Joyner is overseeing which (through outreach efforts) allows the public to know about OSC’s existence. Community efforts are needed to make sure OSC continues to exist beyond the 3-year pilot period. It is not presumed that the city has to or will continue to fund this office if other philanthropic sources can keep it going”.

? What are 3 – 5 main services requested and are most needed?

Answer: Connection to therapy, access to The Victim Compensation Fund and Housing assistance are the main services requested. Mr. Battle volunteered his services as a counselor to assist with OSC efforts.

Chair Baxton introduced Catherine Constantinou, Assistant Public Defender, as the next presenter.

**5. Family Treatment Court Update** – Catherine Constantinou, Assistant Public Defender

As the Team Lead to the group designed to develop a proposal for a Family Treatment Court in Durham, Ms. Constantinou began reporting the following updates:

- The group is in the midst of completing a global proposal to present to The Opioid Settlement Committee that has just been created in Durham County.
- The group is also researching other funding sources and preparing applications for submission.
- Since March, data research has been completed and drafts of grants and requests for proposals (RFPs) are now being edited.
- Research is ongoing for other funding sources in light of discontinued federal funding.

Chair Baxton introduced Robin Heath as the next presenter.

**6. Local Reentry Council Update** – Robin Heath, Justice Service Department Assistant Director

Mrs. Heath reported that this quarter there were:

- ✓ 114 referrals
- ✓ 61 intakes were completed
- ✓ 23 clients have found employment
- ✓ 21 clients were assisted with housing (10 different providers were used to find housing for 10 clients)

- ❖ The LRC Coordinator interviews are in its final stages, and the LRC Case Manager position will be posted soon.

Chair Baxton introduced Mike Sistrom as the next presenter.

7. **Areas of Interest for FY '25-'26** – Mike Siström, Vice Chair

Mr. Siström explained that this will be an ongoing agenda item moving forward to give each CJAC member an opportunity to present ideas for discussion and develop action items. This can be by way of giving useful, informative presentations, assist in developing promising pilot programs and collaborating with and giving support to these endeavors as they develop. Ideas and information can be forwarded to Chair Baxton, Roshanna Humphrey or Mike Siström via email at any time outside of CJAC meetings.

- ▶ Lao brought to the Council's attention:
  - There are a number of people who are spending more time in jail than necessary and perhaps this issue can be further explored.
  - The ARPA funds that were allocated for housing will be discontinued. January 2026 will be the time that consideration will be given as to whether or not there are some other opportunities for continued support. Perhaps CJAC creating a presentation on this topic would be helpful.
- ▶ Chair Baxton alerted CJAC to a new bill – House Bill 307 - that is now on the governor's desk and is going to increase the length of time served for incarcerated individuals. Thoughts on how CJAC as a group can address this is encouraged.

8. **Brief Member Updates:**

- ▶ Dr. Burch announced that the Durham Branch of the NAACP will be having their Criminal Justice Freedom Fund Banquet on November 30<sup>th</sup>. The honorees will be Joseph Burwell, former Bail Bondsman in Durham, Sheriff Clarence Birkhead, and our very own, Chief Public Defender Dawn Baxton.
- ▶ Mr. Siström announced The coalition is having their annual vigil for homicide victims October 11<sup>th</sup> at the United Methodist Church at 10pm.

 **Next Meeting date: December 2, 2025**

Chair Baxton adjourned the meeting at 5:26pm