

2021

# State Roundtable Report Congregate Care



## Workgroup Co-Chairpersons

Honorable Walter Olszewski  
Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County

Honorable Michael Sholley  
Court of Common Pleas of Snyder & Union Counties

William Browning, Director  
Lackawanna County Department of Human Services



# Congregate Care Workgroup Members

## Chairpersons:

**Honorable Walter Olszewski, Supervising Judge**  
Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County

**Honorable Michael Sholley**  
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## **Background:**

In May 2018, the Pennsylvania State Roundtable (SRT) commissioned the Congregate Care Workgroup to examine the use of congregate care for dependent youth. The Workgroup was tasked with the following:

- 1. Examine congregate care for the purpose of significant reduction/elimination of congregate care.**
- 2. Identify effective alternatives to the use of congregate care for dependent youth.**
- 3. Assist Pennsylvania in the implementation of the Family First Prevention Act.**

Chairing the Workgroup is the Honorable Walter Olszewski, Supervising Judge, Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia; the Honorable Michael Sholley, Judge, Court of Common Pleas of Snyder and Union Counties; and Bill Browning, Director, Lackawanna County Youth and Family Services, Department of Human Services, with the Workgroup membership reflecting the diversity of Pennsylvania.

In its initial year of work, members heard from various state, county, and provider entities. In addition, the Workgroup analyzed national and state data, reviewed national studies regarding teen psychosocial development, and analyzed earlier efforts of the SRT's Transitional Youth Workgroup.

During its second year, the Workgroup turned its attention to reducing congregate care and identifying alternatives to congregate care. The Workgroup developed several tools, including:

- The "Array of Local Service Alternatives" - a list of potential resources, services, and practices that were proven to reduce the use of congregate care,
- The Congregate Care Oversight Process and Report to the Court to provide greater oversight for any initial or ongoing congregate care placement requests, and
- The "Congregate Care Contract Provision Tool" – a guide to the many considerations needed for youth residing in congregate care settings.

The Workgroup also made considerable attempts to identify an evidence-based level-of-care assessment tool for dependent youth. However, both statewide and national searches were unsuccessful. In addition, Workgroup members concluded that most level of care assessments, actually encouraged the used of congregate care. Therefore, the members recommended that assessments focus on individual child and family functional needs rather than "levels of care."

(For additional details, the 2019 and 2020 Congregate Care Reports to the State Roundtable are available at [WWW.OCFPCOURTS.US/State Roundtable Workgroup/Reports/Congregate Care](http://WWW.OCFPCOURTS.US/State Roundtable Workgroup/Reports/Congregate Care))

**Progress and Updates:**

In October 2020, the SRT approved all of the following recommendations and strongly encouraged dissemination and utilization of the tools.

1. Approve "Array of Local Service Alternatives" tool and disseminate to all counties/courts strongly encouraging Local Children's Roundtables to utilize.
2. Encourage the consistent use of comprehensive child and family assessments that clearly identify needs and match or create services to meet the individualized needs of children and families.
3. Approve Congregate Care Oversight Process and disseminate such to county child welfare agencies and courts with strong encouragement to utilize.
4. Approve the model Congregate Care Report to the Court document, disseminate to all counties/courts with strong encouragement to utilize the tool in combination with the Congregate Care Oversight Process noted above.
5. Approve "Congregate Care Contract Provision Tool" and disseminate to counties with strong encouragement to utilize in any new or ongoing contract development.
6. Examine the concept of Specialized Congregate Care settings being created as a result of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act and include in 2021 State Roundtable Report.

Recommendations 1 through 5 are complete. Immediately following the SRT, Workgroup chairpersons issued letters to each county's lead dependency judge and child welfare administrator. Attached to the letters was the 2020 Congregate Care Report to the SRT. The report included the recommendations, tools, and detailed directions for effectively utilizing each tool.

Additionally, during each of the Fall 2020 Leadership Roundtables, Workgroup members provided training on the purpose and use of these tools and strongly encouraged implementation.

Workgroup members also felt it was essential to share the substantial congregate care knowledge gathered. This information included research, data, presentations from stakeholders, and presentations from both parents and youth with congregate care experience.

Therefore, the Workgroup created a PowerPoint presentation addressing:

- Workgroup details and responsibilities,
- Summaries of stakeholder presentations,
- County, state, and national data,
- Myths and misconceptions about congregate care,
- Judicial and agency leadership in reducing congregate care, and
- Strategies to assist in using the "Array of Local Service Alternatives," Oversight Process and Report to the Court, the "Congregate Care Contract Provision Tool" and,
- Utilizing an individualized needs-based assessment.

The initial presentation was designed for use with local Children's Roundtables. However, it can be customized to benefit any group including:

- The County Commissioners Association (CCAP)
- Foster parent organizations
- Provider networks
- Other stakeholders (i.e. mental health, education)

Thus far, presentations have been well received by the York County Family First Workgroup, Children's Roundtables in Allegheny, Bradford and Montgomery Counties, the Pennsylvania Statewide Family Group Decision Making Conference, and the Utah Division of Child and Family Services.

The Workgroup will continue to offer these presentations moving forward.

In order to address the final task of the Workgroup, **"to assist Pennsylvania in the implementation of the Family First Prevention Act,"** Roseann Perry, Region Special Projects Manager with the Department of Human Services, Office of Children, Youth & Families, provided a presentation and update on the implementation of the Family First Prevention Act with a focus on Specialized Settings.

The discussion included the licensing and certification process, monitoring, staffing qualifications, staffing ratios, trauma services, and Title IV-E funding related to Specialized Settings.

As of October 2020, Title IV-E funding for congregate care placements will be limited to 14 days unless the service is provided in a certified specialized setting. Specialized settings serve youth at risk for sex trafficking, pregnant and parenting youth, and transitional youth ages 18-21. Pennsylvania has designated any youth in "out-of-home placement" as a youth at risk for sex trafficking.

After extensive discussion, Workgroup members expressed concern regarding the definition that identifies all youth in out-of-home placement as being at-risk for sex trafficking. The Workgroup voiced its concern with this definition being a catchall that will potentially increase congregate care placements. In addition, several workgroup members expressed concern as to what services or activities would be provided to every youth to prevent sex trafficking, if all youth are considered at risk.

Unfortunately answers to the Workgroup's questions were not readily available. As such, the Workgroup would like to continue its work and provide an update to the 2022 SRT.

**Recommendations:**

The Workgroup respectfully submits to the Pennsylvania State Roundtable the following recommendations:

1. Continue providing assistance in the implementation of the Family First Prevention Act
2. Continue to offer presentations on the topic of congregate care
3. Continue to encourage the use of Workgroup tools and assess results
4. Analyze and share congregate care placement data
5. Collect and share county successes in reducing congregate