

The Connecticut General Assembly



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REPRESENTATIVES LEEPER AND MCCARTHY VAHEY HOST JUVENILE CRIME FORUM WITH POLICE AND ADVOCATES

(FAIRFIELD, CT) – **State Representatives Jennifer Leeper (D-Fairfield, Southport)** and **Cristin McCarthy Vahey (D-Fairfield)** hosted an informational forum on juvenile crime last night with data analysts, advocates, and detectives. The discussion offered diverse perspectives with a goal of exploring solutions ahead of the upcoming session.

"The reforms CT has made to our criminal justice system have been a model of bipartisanship and made our state a national leader on both lowering crime and our prison population," said **Rep. Leeper**. "We cannot go backward. There is still a tremendous amount of work ahead of us to ensure we are reaching children sooner, so they have more productive and viable choices in their lives. In the context of COVID, this work is even more critical as we have witnessed the pandemic's impact on the mental health of our children and know that our most vulnerable have been impacted most dramatically. Juveniles' needs have become more complex making the realities for our law enforcement much more challenging and we are working to better support them as they encounter these very acute cases. Our panelists' perspectives and knowledge were invaluable and will help guide our future work as legislators."

"Tackling an issue as multifaceted as juvenile crime has been an ongoing challenge for communities across the country, and our state is no exception," said **Rep. McCarthy Vahey**. "Sharing differing perspectives is critical to achieving comprehensive policies that both mitigate crime and address the mental health and primary supports needed by vulnerable youth. Hearing from our detectives, policy makers, and those involved in the juvenile justice system allows us to create solutions that are child focused, economically sound, and proven effective."

"Although we did see an increase in motor vehicle thefts in 2020 compared to 2019, the data strongly suggests that this increase is directly related to the pandemic. The increase in thefts has been seen across the country and Europe. It is important that we use data to ground our public policy solutions. At this point, the best thing we can do is to work to restore programs and services to our most vulnerable populations. We saw the fewest number of motor vehicle thefts ever recorded in Connecticut in 2019. By using data as our guide, we can work our way back to pre-pandemic levels," **Ken Barone, Associate Director of the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy**, said.

"Great strides have been made in public safety and criminal justice reform in Connecticut in the immediate past decades. However, the task is not yet completed. There are many opportunities for

growth and change in these areas if we were to employ more effective, efficient, and compassionate methodologies. The General Assembly could do great service to our citizenry by focusing their attention on these opportunities for change," **John Santa, Chair of Connecticut's Sentencing Commission**, said.

"As we work to address youth crime, we must partner with communities to identify gaps and implement change for long-term solutions," said **Iliana Pujols, Policy Director at the Connecticut Justice Alliance**. "The best way to support effective long-term change is to focus on rehabilitation through education, not punishment. We have seen solutions, such as StreetSafe, Credible Messenger programs and other solutions identified within communities' work. It's time to invest in solutions that address the root causes of issues."

"When schools and families are coming to the Police for help with a Juvenile repeatedly committing crimes and out of their control, we need to be able to offer them some help through the Juvenile Justice System," said **Fairfield Police Department Detective, Beth Leetch**.

The Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee (JJPOC) is a taskforce made up of a diverse group of stakeholders and experts established in 2014. The committee has been and will continue to hear feedback from local agencies on what improvements need to be addressed and what issues currently have solutions that aren't being utilized. Thanks to the committee's work, on September 1, 2021, the Judicial Branch updated a policy that now provides police departments with 24/7 access to juvenile arrest records to help curb car thefts and break-ins by juveniles. The JJPOC also held a meeting as recent as this week, sparking even more updates in policies. On Monday, the Judicial Branch confirmed they would be updating their policies regarding juveniles charged with a gun offense or a car theft in hopes of moving cases and mitigating recidivism.

It is apparent that the work being done by the JJPOC is vital to how we improve our response to juvenile crime. **Reps. Leeper and McCarthy Vahey** are committed to continuing similar discussions and dialogue in both the community and in Hartford, as the General Assembly seeks to craft careful and effective policies and find solutions.

If you were unable to attend the forum, it is set to air on CT-N today, December 17, 2021. An on-demand version of the discussion is also planned to be posted on FairTV's Government YouTube page on Monday, December 20, 2021.

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