

Responses to the Substance Abuse Community Conversation

1. (A) Is it possible to streamline the initial process of engaging with the CSB?
(B) Is there a way to register/apply over the phone instead of online?
(C) Is there a way to register/apply with a paper form without delaying the submission of the form?

Many residents do not have desktop or laptop access, so they are registering/applying on their phones. It is challenging for residents to submit an electronic signature, etc.... on a mobile phone.

The CSB provides three options for the initial engagement and required entry paperwork. All three options are being used on a regular basis.

- a. **Electronic:** Complete documentation over the phone with Client Assess Services staff and receive the completed documents via DocuSign to obtain the necessary signatures.
 - b. **US Mail:** Complete documentation over the phone with Client Access Services and receive the completed documents in mail with a stamped return envelope; or
 - c. **In-Person:** Complete documentation over the phone with Client Access Services staff and come in person to the Sharon Bulova or another mental health center to sign the documents in the electronic health record.
2. **Why does the CSB process take so long? When a child overdoses it is urgent that they receive support immediately. Parents have been told they need to wait two, three and sometimes over three weeks before they can get an appointment with a therapist and/or receive other support services. Parents feel that there is a sense of urgency for drug issues and that they cannot get support quickly. How can parents receive support from the CSB within days instead of weeks?**

Opioid using youth are being fast tracked as quickly as possible into treatment. The CSB is trying to get intakes completed when Youth Outpatient (OP) gets a direct public safety referral (notification of a non-fatal OD) within days. We quickly do outreach and have intake slots to offer within 1-2 days. We have added intake slots for these referrals.

When a youth comes through the walk in Engagement, Assessment and Referral (EAR) unit, the CSB reviews the chart and works as quickly as possible to get

them into treatment. Individuals and families can continue to walk into the Sharon Bulova Center Monday through Friday for an assessment. In addition, they can call to get a scheduled assessment.

The CSB continues to hire additional therapists and case managers to expand its capacity to serve youth and families with behavioral health issues. The goal is to be able to assign everyone a therapist and/or case manager in 10 business days or less.

- 3. It seems like drug use and overdose situations are treated the same way as other mental health issues. Is the process the same for both? When a child is on the waiting list for a drug rehabilitation facility how often are families updated on the waiting period? Parents say they are waiting for long periods of time without any updates on when a facility will be available.**

To provide quality care, the CSB completes a comprehensive assessment that will provide information on both substance use and mental health issues. It is important to perform an assessment of both issues as 50% of individuals with either a mental health or substance abuse issue also have the other one. Based on what is shared in the intake, recommendations are made. Youth OP is working hard to get Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Opioid using clients into services as soon as possible. The same is true for high-risk MH youth as well. If a medical emergency is suspected the CSB will contact 911 and have any onsite medical staff respond immediately.

On August 15th the CSB opened a new adolescent Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) clinic. This will allow us to provide MAT to youth who are 16-18 years old.

- 4. In some cases when a drug rehabilitation facility is not available, youth are sent to a mental health facility. Is this the best solution? Parents feel that this can be detrimental to youth with an overdose history because of the instability of the patients they are with at the mental health facility.**

Often substance use disorders has an underlying or co-occurring MH issue. CSB clinicians are trained on assessing and providing care to individuals with both issues. If a youth or family member is seeing a CSB clinician on an outpatient basis, they can be addressing both issues at the same time. If a higher level of care is needed, it is a best practice to provide the most services available at that time while the individual is waiting for more intense services. In addition, there may be

other supportive services in the community to adjunct treatment – peer support specialists, support groups, 12 step groups, other higher level of care services. Unfortunately, there are additional treatment needs in our community that need to be addressed. There is a significant shortage of affordable residential treatment programming for youth with substance abuse issues.

5. Is the CSB short staffed? Parents feel that delays in receiving services are due to a shortage of staff. Is this accurate?

The CSB is experiencing unprecedented clinical staff vacancies due to the national health care workforce shortages. During the past year, the CSB has implemented multiple retention and recruitment strategies to retain existing staff and hire new staff. It has also increased the caseload size for clinicians and clinical supervisors and managers are assisting with service delivery to reduce wait time for services. However, notwithstanding these initiatives, and the CSBs commitment to providing timely access to care, there are delays in service delivery for some individuals. At the point of intake, everyone is assessed and triaged based upon their level of need. Any individual with an urgent need is prioritized and seen immediately.

6. The female drug dealer who sold drugs to Reynaldo was known to the police. Reported by several parents of students at West Potomac High School months before the overdose of Reynaldo Lemus. Why wasn't she arrested?

As a result of the series of cases at West Potomac High School, a comprehensive criminal investigation was initiated by the Fairfax County Police Department along with a thorough prevention and intervention strategy by the police, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), and human services agencies. The criminal investigation identified several individuals who used, sold, or were addicted to fentanyl pills. Detectives coordinated prevention and intervention services for these juveniles, including referrals to the Community Services Board (CSB) and ensured direct points of contacts were generated for at risk youth.

Criminal investigations involving juvenile offenders are difficult for many reasons and detectives are limited how they can conduct operations and use informants. Laws protect juveniles from being interviewed (need consent from parents), the timing of juvenile court proceedings (cases must be heard within 21 days of charges), and information identifying a juvenile cannot be sent to the community. Once a juvenile is served with a petition, they are less likely to be detained pending

adjudication, which can give the perception that no enforcement action has been taken.

In this investigation, several juveniles were taken into custody. One juvenile was taken into custody on an unrelated matter and provided residential treatment. There was no information directly linking this juvenile to a specific overdose. However, the juvenile was associated with a drug enterprise where multiple adults were arrested on narcotic charges.

Another juvenile was identified as a dealer in two non-fatal overdoses. One of the overdoses occurred in October and was not reported to the police. The second overdose was reported in December and began a long-term investigation. Detectives collaborated with the school and wrap-around services were coordinated through CSB and the school. In addition, the police attempted to utilize a Child in Need of Services (CHINS) process with the juvenile court, however juvenile intake indicated the case did not meet the criteria for CHINS. The investigation later led to a criminal charge against the juvenile. The juvenile was not detained and is being monitored pending the court hearing/trial.

7. Parents were told that there is only one Spanish speaking police officer at Mt. Vernon PD available for families who speak Spanish and needing assistance with the drug issues. Is this accurate?

The actual number of Spanish speaking officers at the Mount Vernon District Station is 13 officers. In addition, every police officer and civilian employee has access to the Language Line, which enables the community member and police to communicate no matter the language spoken. In addition, the police department has a strong Language Skills Support Unit (LSSU) comprised of officers and detectives with advanced skill and fluency in foreign languages that assists in investigations.

The LSSU team operates as a decentralized non-standing unit responsible for providing enforcement and investigative support, assistance, and mediation to all entities of the department dealing with persons of limited English proficiency which requires translation, interpretation, and communication assistance. The LSSU augments the department's community policing efforts by delivering efficient service and understanding of community cultural barriers and enhances criminal case closure and prosecution.

8. Is it possible to have more police presence around the school and surrounding buildings where the drug deals take place?

The Commanders of the Mount Vernon District Station have assigned an additional School Resource Officer (SRO) to positively engage and interact with students and conduct additional patrols at West Potomac High School, several days a week. These patrols include patrolling inside the facility and outside on the campus grounds. In addition, area patrol officers are also increasing their presence around the high school campus and the surrounding areas during their patrol duties.

9. Parents gave multiple names and car license plate numbers to police of known drug dealers coming into Audubon Estates and they were never arrested. Why?

The police department always welcomes, and values information and tips received from the community. The police department works closely with the community to ensure everyone's safety. The police department valued the names and car descriptions of drug dealers provided in Audubon Estates. As a result of parents providing this critical information, the police department was able to conduct extensive investigative work directly related to the West Potomac cases. This information enabled enforcement actions to be taken by the Mount Vernon District Station's Neighborhood Patrol Unit as well as by investigative teams.

The extensive criminal investigation included serving over 20 search warrants and led to the arrest of 15 subjects, resulting in 19 criminal charges and the seizure of 30 firearms.

10. Can the police give more information to community members without damaging investigations?

The police department enjoys a great relationship with the community and strongly believes in transparency and collaborative efforts to foster trust and build strong communities. At times it is difficult for the police department to share details of an active criminal investigation. The department does not want to jeopardize the prosecution of a criminal investigation and at times the law prevents the police department from disseminating certain information, especially when the investigation involves a juvenile. In addition, the police department makes every effort to protect the identity of complainants, witnesses, and community members who provide the department with information. Collectively, these factors sometimes inhibit how and when information can be shared with the community.

11. What support are the police able to provide at the school and to families that call the police during and after witnessing a drug deal.

Parents are encouraged to call the police and provide information regarding any suspected drug usage or deals. When suspected drug activity involves the school, the SRO takes immediate steps to notify the school administration, follow up with parents to provide information on prevention and intervention, and obtain information for investigative efforts and speaks with the students (with parent permission).

In addition, the school may conduct administrative searches of students suspected of being involved in drug transactions. Intervention efforts are made with suspected dealers by the school administration and the SRO to provide needed services as sometimes an individual's involvement with drugs is a result of other issues outside of the school. If no petition or charges are placed, the school may handle discipline. The school may hold a conference with a student involved with drugs and their parent to address the student's behavior. In cases that impacts the entire school community, the school will send a letter / email to parents notifying them of the school's action. If an incident rises to the level of arrest or a violation of school rules and responsibilities, a referral to the hearing office for alternative schooling / expulsion may also be made by the school.

12. Has anything changed as far as police assistance since Reynold/s overdose? The parents feel that the drug/crime issue at West Potomac is "out of control". What new measures are being taken to help reduce crime and drug use?

The Fairfax County Police Department and Fairfax County Public Schools take all concerns of drug and crime issues at West Potomac High School very seriously. Efforts and action plans are collaboratively undertaken in prevention, intervention, and enforcement efforts to address reports of possession, usage, addiction, and distribution of drugs.

As it relates to West Potomac High School, the police department along with FCPS have been working together to ensure students and teachers feel safe. To ensure full coverage of the building (West Potomac HS is a large building with more than 2700 students on any given day not including the Academy students from other schools), the police department has deployed another SRO to support staff and engage with students at the school several days per week. Once construction is completed, the school will have camera coverage of all areas of the building.

The school substance abuse counselor also works with the SRO to provide services to students (caveat, parents must opt in for their child) as all drug related cases are automatically forwarded to the substance abuse counselor for follow up.

Once construction is completed, all three buildings and a new cafeteria will be connected, and students will no longer be permitted outside to change classes. Students will only be allowed to eat lunch at either the lunch patios and/or lunchroom. All doors will be locked during the school day with one access point at Door 1 by the main office. School staff will continue to clear hallways and bathrooms and escort students to class. If a student refuses to go to class, they are sent to in-school suspension resulting in parent notification. The SRO will continue to be visible in and around the school campus to deter any crime. The SRO's police cruiser will continue to be strategically parked directly in front of the school.

13. During a drug investigation, officers will often take the cell phones of the children involved to retrieve texts and information related to the case. The phones are never returned. This puts a burden on the families to purchase a new cell phone. Is it possible to return the phone to eliminate the inconvenience and cost burden for families?

The process to obtain information from a phone takes time. Detectives may need to write a search warrant, have the search warrant signed by a judge/magistrate (unless consent is received to search it), deliver the phone to the Cyber and Forensics Division for processing, wait for the results, and then analysis the information. This process can take several weeks. If detectives don't have the passcode to get in the phone, this can add additional time.

Detectives do not keep the phone as punishment and will try to return the phone back to the family as soon as possible but if a criminal case is going to court, the phone may be held until the case is adjudicated.

14. Reynaldo's mother has never been given any follow up information on what happened to the drug dealers that sold her son the drugs leading to his overdose. Will she be briefed on the case? If so, when will this follow up occur?

Victim's parents are always briefed throughout the entire criminal investigation by detectives of the police department. In this case, in addition to being briefed, like

other investigations, a Spanish speaking Victim Services Advocate, attends each court occasion with a parent(s) along with the detective.

In this criminal case the local charges were nolle prossed so the case could be filed and heard in Federal Court. This process was explained to the parent at the conclusion of the town hall meeting and the next day a follow up conversation occurred to ensure there was no confusion and to answer any additional concerns or questions.