

Advocating for Youth Checklist: Staffing and Classification in the Department of Youth Services

This checklist describes the steps a legal guardian, parent, or advocate can take after the court commits a youth with mental health issues to the Massachusetts <http://www.mass.gov/mhlac/dys.html>.

The **staffing meeting** is a meeting of DYS staff (and, potentially, the youth, the youth's lawyer, a parent or legal guardian and the parent or legal guardian's personal representative) to recommend a range of time which a committed youth should spend in secure and residential treatment facilities and identify potential placement locations.

The **classification meeting** is a meeting of the DYS Regional Review Team (and, potentially, the youth's lawyer, a parent or legal guardian and the parent or legal guardian's personal representative) to review the recommendation made by those who attended the staffing meeting and to determine both the range of time which a committed youth will spend in secure and residential treatment facilities and the placement location.

Before the staffing meeting

What you should do

- Once a youth is sent to an assessment unit and a DYS caseworker is assigned to the youth, send a letter to the caseworker indicating that you plan to attend the staffing meeting and would like to receive notice of the date and place of the meeting.
- Be in touch with the youth's lawyer as the lawyer also should attend the staffing meeting. You and the lawyer should agree to tell each other immediately upon receiving any notice of the meeting.
- Think about possible documents to bring with you to the staffing (for example, documentation describing mental health problems and treatment recommendations).
- Think about possible participants and supporters to bring with you to the staffing.
- Talk to, or ask the youth's lawyer to talk to, the youth's DYS clinician prior to the staffing meeting and ask what the clinician intends to recommend regarding time and placement. At this point, share appropriate information with the caseworker and clinician.

The information in this checklist has been adapted from the book Just for Youth: Advocating for Youths in the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (2010) by the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee, <http://www.mass.gov/mhlac/Justforyouthfinal.pdf>.

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- Talk with the youth's lawyer about whether it is appropriate to ask for DYS to give credit for time served. This is particularly appropriate if the youth has already served 30 days or more.
- Prepare the youth to attend the staffing. Tell the youth that it is important to have a serious demeanor and respect the process.

After the staffing meeting and before the classification meeting

What you should do

- After the staffing meeting, the recommendations developed at that meeting will be forwarded to a group of DYS staff, known as the Regional Review Team (RRT), who will hold a classification meeting. Immediately after the staffing meeting, send a letter to the youth's caseworker restating your main points regarding placement, duration and the service plan. Ask that the letter be submitted to the Regional Review Team for consideration at the classification meeting.
- At the staffing meeting, DYS staff completes staffing notes and an initial Service Delivery Plan. Send DYS a written request for these documents.
- If you or your child is dissatisfied with the way the staffing meeting was conducted, complain in writing to the DYS Regional Director for the DYS region responsible for your child.
- Request in writing the date and place of the classification meeting. If possible, attend the classification meeting.

After the classification meeting

What you should do

- The Regional Review Team should issue a written decision within five business days of the classification meeting. Request a copy of this decision.
- A youth may appeal the decision in writing to the DYS Deputy Commissioner in DYS's Central Office in Boston within 7 business days of receiving the decision. The Deputy Commissioner must respond in writing within 14 business days of receiving the appeal. If your child wants to appeal, he or she should ask his or her lawyer for help in writing the appeal request. The DYS caseworker also is required to assist the youth. The decision on appeal is final.

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