

## Summary of Joint Citizen Review Panels' Meeting on October 8, 2015

### Attendees (at each location, connected by video)

**NYC Panel:** Wayne Ho (Panel Co-Chair), Marion White, David Lansner, Esq., Mathea Rubin (by phone), Jorge Saenz De Viteri

**Western Panel:** Ellen Kennedy (Panel Chair), Melissa Cavagnaro, Sarlyn Tate, Karl Wiggins, Paula Mazur

**Eastern Panel:** Hector Ramirez (Panel Chair), Mary McCarthy, Lance Jackson, Carrie Jefferson-Smith, Ed Blatt and Maureen McLaughlin

**WRI:** Lee Lounsbury, Executive Director, Shawntell Mills-Sánchez-Project Associate

**OCFS:** Laura Velez, Deputy Commissioner

### Handouts

Meeting Agenda

Summaries of Panels' Impact Assessment, including:

- Rating Categories
- Access to Information
- Children of Incarcerated Parents
- Disproportionate Minority Representation
- Educational Neglect
- Family Assessment Response
- Foster Care
- Home Visiting
- Kinship Guardianship
- Preventive Services Funding
- Public Health Approach to Child Welfare
- Reinvestments
- Child Welfare Workforce

Copy of 2014 Citizen Review Panels' Annual Report

OCFS' Response to the Panels 2014 Annual Report

Summary of NYS Citizen Review Panel 2015 Meeting Highlights

### Agenda Item: Welcome & Introductions

Hector Ramirez, Chair of the Eastern Panel, called the meeting to order. Introductions were made by attendees at the three meeting sites, which were connected by videoconferencing and by phone.

The agenda for the meeting was reviewed, including the primary purpose of the meeting, which was to finalize the recommendations to be included in the Panels' joint 2015 Annual Report. Each Panel Chair will provide a brief overview of their Panel's work this year. Then there will be a detailed discussion of each topic area the Impact Assessment workgroup has reviewed this year. As per Panel Guidelines,

there will be vote on which recommendations to include in the Annual Report, with decisions made by a simple majority of Panel members in attendance.

**Agenda Item: Brief Overview of each Panel's work in 2015**

New York City Panel: Wayne Ho, NYC Panel Co-Chair, provided a brief overview of the NYC Panel's work in 2015.

- At the Panel's March meeting, OCFS provided an update of the Executive Budget, the federal CFSR outcome data for NYS, OCFS' new Children and Youth Bill of Rights, and the "Raise the Age" proposal for juvenile justice. This meeting also included discussions about the desire to get data from ACS on how poverty affects families in child welfare, as well as a decision by the Panel to sign on to the amicus brief in a case to determine whether a fetus is considered a child.
- The NYC Panel's May meeting was spent primarily with ACS Commissioner Gladys Carrión, First Deputy Eric Brettschneider, and several other senior ACS administrators. A range of topics were discussed, including the Commissioner's plans relating to child protective services, fair hearing policies, workforce development, training, Family Assessment Response (FAR), teaming model and the Racial Equity Task Force.
- The NYC Panel's meeting in September was primarily about the lawsuit filed by the NYC Public Advocate and Marcia Lowry against ACS and OCFS regarding foster care in NYC, with a presentation by the Public Advocate's Office.

Western Panel: Ellen Kennedy, Western Panel Chair, provided a brief overview of the Western Panel's work in 2015.

- At the Panel's March meeting, OCFS Assistant Commissioner Lisa Gharty-Ogundimu, discussed the Executive Budget for OCFS programs, the newly issued Children's Bill of Rights, and CFSR data. The meeting also included a discussion with outgoing Erie County DSS Commissioner Carol Dankert-Mauer, who provided a status report of accomplishments and remaining challenges in Erie County's child protective/child welfare system. Separately, the Panel again discussed the needs of children with incarcerated parents.
- At the Panel's May meeting, Al Dirschberger, the new Erie Co. DSS Commissioner, shared his vision for child protective services and child welfare in Erie Co. Additionally, Michelle Heyward from OCFS discussed FAR data and the status of FAR in the western region counties.
- At the September meeting, the Panel held a roundtable discussion with 11 Commissioners of Social Services from western NY on a wide range of issues, including workforce, training, caseload/workload, participation in and suspension of FAR, child fatality trends, and disproportionality. The Panel discussed with the group how they might assist local districts, including recommendations the Panel might make in the Annual Report(s).

Eastern Panel: Hector Ramirez, Eastern Panel Chair, provided a brief overview of the Eastern Panel's work in 2015.

- At the Panel’s February meeting, Lisa Gordon from OCFS provided an update on the Executive Budget, the CFSR outcome data, The Children’s Bill of Rights, and the “Raise the Age” proposal. In addition, the Panel discussed the Impact Assessment workgroup’s work.
- In April, Panel members JoAnne Merriman and Sharon Chesna presented to the Panel on Fatality Review Teams. Anne Johnson from OCFS discussed OCFS’ data tracking of child fatalities. In addition, the Panel discussed developing performance benchmarks in related to the mandates of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).
- In September, the Panel discussed the Impact Assessment Workgroup’s work, the Panels’ recommendations in the 2014 Annual Report, and OCFS’ written response to the report, in preparation for the Joint Panels’ meeting and finalizing recommendations. Lisa Gordon from OCFS provided an OCFS update. In addition, the Panel heard by phone from four DSS Commissioners in the Eastern region about their experiences with FAR, including the reasons some of them discontinued FAR after a period of implementation.

**Agenda Item: Impact Assessment Review & 2015 Recommendations Discussion**

There was an overview of the work the Impact Assessment Workgroup did during 2015. This Workgroup had members from all three Panels, and reached consensus about the approach, which was approved at the Joint Panel meeting in June. This approach was to chart the recommendations made by the Panels for the past five years, by topic, with the written response by OCFS and actions OCFS has taken to implement the recommendation. The workgroup then assessed each recommendation according to the following scale:

1. OCFS fully implemented the recommendation.
2. OCFS partially implemented the recommendation.
3. OCFS agreed with the recommendation but did not implement it.
4. OCFS was initially supportive of the recommendation but is no longer supporting/taking action.
5. OCFS didn’t respond to the recommendation.
6. OCFS disagreed with the recommendation.

A handout on each topic area was provided (see handout list) as a way to organize the discussion and voting on recommendations. The discussion for each topic area, and potential recommendations for the 2015 Annual Report, was facilitated by one of the Panel Chairs. These topics included:

- Preventive Services, including reinvestment
- Public Health Approach to Child Welfare, including Access to Information
- Home Visiting
- Child Welfare Workforce
- Family Assessment Response
- Child Welfare and Children of Incarcerated Parents
- Racial Equity and Disproportionality
- Educational Neglect
- Kinship Guardianship
- Foster Care, including the Public Advocate’s lawsuit against ACS and OCFS
- Other topics, to be raised by Panel members

During the discussion on each topic, significant agreement was reached about the recommendation(s) to be included in the 2015 Annual Report. There was either consensus, or near consensus, among Panel members to include the following recommendations in the 2015 Annual Report.

- Highlight the poor CFSR child welfare outcomes in NY as compared with other states, and the urgent need for improvement.
- Frame the report around the need for a public health approach with leadership from not only OCFS, but other state agencies, the Governor's Office, the Legislature and other key stakeholders.
- Significant investment of additional funding in New York's child welfare system to improve outcomes, including:
  - Increase the state share of preventive services funding to 75%
  - Increase funding for community based primary prevention services (formerly COPS) and allow counties to start new primary prevention programs
  - Provide home visiting services to all eligible families
  - Remove kinship guardianship subsidies from the foster care block grant and create a separate funding structure, much like adoption subsidies
- The need for a data-driven child welfare change agenda with transparent data sharing about progress toward measurable goals.
- Action on disproportionality that can be measured, and this data shared.
- Attention to the front line workforce, ensuring that they have the needed competencies to implement OCFS' Practice Model and receive training within required time frames. Allow districts and agencies to use a train-the-trainer model for core training.
- Reducing caseload sizes to conform with the recommendations in OCFS' Child Welfare Workload Study (2006).
- Improve outcomes for children in foster care with attention to youth who age out, re-entry into foster care after discharge, abuse/maltreatment of children while in foster care, and racial equity.
- Modify the FAR Model and/or implementation requirements to allow more flexibility to encourage counties that have discontinued it to re-start it, and for additional counties to implement it. Incorporate the FAR principles into all child protective trainings.
- Collect data about the number of children in the child welfare system with an incarcerated parent and increase the focus on this special population.

#### **Agenda Item: Vote on Recommendations for 2015 Report**

A vote was taken on each recommendation and there was either consensus, or a strong majority of members in agreement that the recommendations listed above be included in the 2015 Annual Report.

#### **Agenda Item: Timeline for Report Completion**

WRI will draft the report, based on the discussion in this meeting and the written summaries produced by the Impact Assessment workgroup and will circulate the draft to all Panel members for review in late November/early December. The report is due to OCFS by January 31, 2016 and a couple of weeks are needed for printing.