

**Meeting Summary**  
**Joint Citizen Review Panel Meeting**

**October 18, 2016**

**Attendees:**

*Panel Members:* Eastern: Edward Blatt, Mary McCarthy, Maureen McLoughlin, Sharon Chesna (by phone)  
Western: Ellen Kennedy, Karl L. Wiggins  
NYC: Stanley Capela (in Albany), Marion White (by phone), Mathea C. Rubin (by phone)

*Guests:* Laura Velez, OCFS, Deputy Commissioner  
Lisa Gordon, OCFS, Senior Director of Performance Improvement  
Nadia Allen, Executive Director, Mental Health Association in Orange County, Inc. and prospective Eastern Panel Member

*WRI Staff:* Lee Lounsbury, Executive Director  
Judy Stanger, Program Specialist and CRP Coordinator  
Cindy Alois, Administrative Support Specialist

**Handouts:**

- Agenda
- Citizen Review Panel 2015 Annual Report
- OCFS Response to New York State Citizen Review Panels for Children and Family Services
- Worksheet to Evaluate Current and Prospective Recommendations

The joint meeting of the three Citizen Review Panels was called to order by Ed Blatt, Eastern Panel Chair. The meeting was held in two locations (Albany, Buffalo) connected by video conferencing. Panel members from the New York City Panel attended the Albany location or joined by telephone. Panel members and other attendees introduced themselves.

**Agenda item: Updates on key OCFS child welfare initiatives**

*Laura Velez, OCFS Deputy Commissioner*

**Outcome of CFSR review and PIP development**

Deputy Commissioner Velez from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) was introduced and provided updates on key child welfare initiatives. She reported that OCFS has not yet received the final report from the federal Children’s Bureau with results of the on-site portion of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) held in June 2016. Once the report is received, OCFS has 90 days to submit a Program Improvement Plan. OCFS has already started working on this, and is continuing their analysis of data to help with this process. Working with a consulting firm, Public Catalyst, OCFS and several large counties are looking deeply into their data to identify “bright spots” where good outcomes are being achieved and

opportunities for replication. In addition, several counties have participated in a process analysis using a model called “Lean,” in which opportunities to improve outcomes with fewer resources are identified.

*Upcoming Permanency Summit:* Ms. Velez reported that a second Permanency Summit is being held on November 18 – 19 for the 10 largest counties in New York. During the Summit held last year, these counties developed action plans to improve permanency outcomes. The purpose of the Summit this year is for counties to report about progress on their action plans. The focus this year is on organizational culture, leadership, and services to promote kinship care. Partners in the Summit are the Court Improvement Project, Casey Family Services, and the Redlich Horwitz Foundation.

*Partnership with the Court Improvement Project, Office of Court Administration:* This fall, OCFS and the Court Improvement Project are also co-sponsoring an event attended by teams of staff across disciplines to focus on ways to reduce the use of the permanency planning goal of APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement). Strategies to prevent youth from “aging out” of foster care without permanency and resources needed for a successful transition to adulthood will be explored.

*Revision of the child welfare training system and practice model implementation update:* OCFS continues to revise their child welfare training system to focus on core competencies and better align the delivery with adult learning principles. The content will be divided into modules over time rather than frontloading so much training for new hires. Last year, OCFS formed a training committee to identify the core competencies and foundational training to be used in revising the core curriculum. The goal is to provide core training to all child welfare caseworkers statewide as a foundation and then offer specialized topical trainings to supplement the core training. The first offerings of the revised training will begin in July, 2017. A Panel member asked about delivering the training to supervisors. Ms. Velez responded that supervisors will be trained first so they are prepared to support staff who receive the training.

*Update on OCFS’ partnership with OASAS:* OCFS and the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) are holding joint meetings to identify strategies to address the impact of opiate addiction on children and families in the child welfare system. At the first meeting there was a screening and facilitated discussion of “The Hungry Heart”, a film about prescription drug addiction through the eyes of a pediatrician in Vermont. There are upcoming regional meetings in Buffalo and New York City. A Panel guest announced a presentation that will be conducted by a national expert on the opiate epidemic in Orange County. Information about that presentation will be emailed to Panel members.

*Communication with stakeholders:* Ms. Velez invited Panel members to participate in a webinar OCFS is delivering on November 22<sup>nd</sup> to describe OCFS’ child welfare initiatives. Information about the webinar will be provided to WRI for distribution to Panel members. In addition, OCFS has begun periodically distributing an e-newsletter with updates about child welfare initiatives.

*Panels’ 2016 Annual Report and Recommendations:* For consideration by the Panels when deciding on recommendations for the 2016 Annual Report, Ms. Velez reported that state agencies, including OCFS, received instructions to submit a flat budget for 2017-18. She

discussed the budgetary considerations statewide under the two percent property tax cap provision. She pointed out that OCFS has become more involved in the work of children with incarcerated parents, in response to the Panels' recommendation in this area last year.

A Panel member asked that OCFS consider system wide, comprehensive workforce development, and seek federal funds to invest in workforce development. The Panel Chairs reported that during the August meeting with the NYS Division of the Budget (DOB), DOB staff expressed openness to some "smart experiments" in child welfare, including but not limited to strengthening the workforce. There was a discussion about increasing rates of turnover in the child welfare workforce and the fiscal cost of worker turnover, estimated to be approximately \$27,000 per staff member.

Upon completion of her presentation and the related discussion, the Panel Chairs thanked Ms. Velez for joining the meeting.

**Agenda item: Are there new recommendations to consider for the Annual Report?**

*Edward Blatt and Group*

The following topics were reviewed for consideration:

- CPS "Blind Removal Practices" where decisions about removals of children from their homes are made without any information about the family's race or ethnicity.
- Practices to reduce racial disproportionality in child welfare agencies and Family Court.
- Trauma Informed Care Models and system wide implementation.

**Agenda item: What past recommendations should be continued, enhanced or discontinued?**

*Ellen Kennedy and Group*

The following topics were reviewed for consideration:

- Reauthorize child welfare financing, due to sunset in June, 2017, and maintain preventive services funding as uncapped. Restore the state reimbursement level for preventive services to 65%.
- Allow counties to start or restart Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) with an enhanced focus on expansion of home visiting programs.
- Attention to the issue of children of incarcerated parents.
- FAR/CPS differential response with a focus on incorporating the principles of FAR into all CPS work.
- Move funding for Kinship Guardianship outside the foster care block grant.
- Improvement of services and outcomes for children in foster care and their families.

**Agenda item: Strategically targeting recommendations to decision-makers**

*Mary McCarthy and Group*

The Panel Members discussed strategies for addressing recommendations in the Annual Report to the relevant decision-making body/bodies, depending on the recommendation. For example, recommendations related to funding should be addressed not only to OCFS but also to the Division of the Budget, the Governor's Office and the Legislature.

## **Agenda item: Voting on Recommendation for the Annual Report**

*Ed Blatt and Group*

After discussing many options, Panel members voted unanimously to include the following recommendations in the 2016 Annual Report:

### **1. Reauthorize the child welfare financing structure scheduled to sunset in June, 2017.**

- Keep preventive services funding uncapped.
- Restore the level of state reimbursement for uncapped preventive services to 65%.
- Move Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGap) outside of the Foster Care Block Grant to be funded like adoption subsidies.
- Lift the prohibition against counties using preventive services funds for primary prevention programs (Community Optional Preventive Services, or COPS) to allow local districts to provide evidence based programs including but not limited to home visiting.

### **2. Continue to push for a 5-year strategic plan to improve child welfare outcomes through systemic improvement including:**

- Take a public health approach to addressing child abuse and neglect, with an emphasis on early intervention.
- Be data-driven with aggressive, measurable goals and cross-agency collaboration.
- Child Protective Services: Incorporate the family engagement principles of FAR across all CPS and child welfare work. Revisit whether having a separate system of CPS work (FAR) is the best approach, given the implementation challenges in New York to date.
- Improve outcomes for children in foster care (include Panels' recommendations from 2015 Annual Report):
  - Ensure that every youth discharged from foster care is discharged to a permanent family or significant, reliable permanency resource;
  - Safely reduce the rate at which children discharged from foster care return to foster care; and
  - Identify the root causes of abuse/maltreatment of children while in foster care and implement effective strategies to reduce this rate.
- Include plans for implementing Trauma Informed Care statewide as part of the OCFS Practice Model.

### **3. Child welfare public and private Workforce Crisis**

- Address the high turnover rates of child welfare caseworkers reported by counties and private agencies.
- Develop a data collection system for statewide public and private workforce data, including turnover/retention rates, vacancy rates, and lengths of vacancies.
- Develop a data collection system for statewide caseload and workload data. Establish maximum caseload standards statewide.

### **4. Home Visiting**

- Leverage local, state and federal funds to invest an additional \$107 million to provide home visiting to additional 24,000 low-income families.
- Approximately 60,000 babies are born to low income families in NYS each year, but only 12,560 can receive home visiting because of limited funding.

**5. Reduce disproportionality and promote Race Equity in the child welfare system by identifying strategies that ‘move the needle’, what it takes to replicate them, and then support implementation.**

- Work collaboratively with the Court system to promote practices in the Family Court that reduce disproportionate minority representation throughout NYS.
- Identify DMR practices that are working and disseminate the information statewide

**6. Children of Incarcerated Parents**

- While OCFS has become more involved in this issue, continue the specific recommendations from the 2015 report in this area:
  - Update the Connections system to collect case specific and aggregate data about children who are receiving child welfare services and who have incarcerated parents.
  - Support legislation that would establish a pilot program to move a number of incarcerated parents, including those with children in foster care and/or being cared for by relatives, to facilities closer to their children to sustain family connections and promote permanency, where possible and appropriate.
  - Incorporate information about the needs, the laws and statues related to this special population of children into the core training curriculum for caseworkers and supervisors, as well as foster parents.
  - Support changes in visiting policies at correctional facilities to allow more frequent contact in child-centered settings between parents and children via in-person visits and video technology.

**Agenda item: Next Steps for Annual Report Development**

*Lee Lounsbury, WRI*

The Annual Report must be submitted to OCFS by January 31, 2017. WRI will begin drafting the report following this meeting and get it to Panel members toward the end of November, allowing approximately ten days for review and comment. Panel members will see the report for a second time with changes incorporated and the layout in place, however the review time for the second review will be shorter to allow time for WRI to have the report printed and disseminated.

In addition to OCFS, the report is distributed to each legislator via courier, the Governor’s Office, the Division of the Budget and the Department of Social Services, or its equivalent, in every county.

**The meeting was adjourned by Ed Blatt.**