

**NYC Citizens Review Panel
Meeting Summary
February 5, 2016
10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

Attendees:

Panel Members

Wayne Ho, Panel Chair and Chief Program and Policy Officer, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
Jocelyn Brown, MD., Director, Child Advocacy Center of New York
Mathea Rubin, Parent
Marion White, Senior Program Director, New York Foundling Child Abuse and Prevention Program, Inc.
Lisa Gordon, OCFS (by phone)

Guests

Michael Certo, Medical Student with Dr. Brown
Kylie Brock, Program Staff with Marion White

WRI Staff

Lee Lounsbury, Executive Director
Judy Stanger, Program Specialist and Citizen Review Panel Coordinator

Handouts

Agenda

New York State Citizen Review Panel 2015 Annual Report
Class Action Complaint for Injunctive and Declaratory Relief
Case 1:15-cv-05273 Document 1 Filed 07/08/15; NYC Public Advocate's Foster Care Lawsuit
9-15-15 NYC CRP Minutes

WELCOME (Wayne Ho, Panel Chair)

Introductions took place. Mr. Ho asked for a general discussion of CRP's focus for 2016:

- What will be the arc for the next three meetings?
- Recommendations for new panel members
- Internal: How can CRP have more of an impact and collaborate with OCFS?

AGENDA ITEM: Updates from ACS

Presenters: Commissioner Gladys Carrión and First Deputy Commissioner Eric Brettschneider

Commissioner Carrión and Mr. Brettschneider provided an overview and updates regarding key child welfare initiatives in NYC. They provided an update on the status of the class action lawsuit pending against ACS, including the settlement negotiated between the State and the Plaintiff. This settlement, although not yet approved by the court, would require that OCFS identify a Monitor to provide additional oversight of NYC's foster care system. ACS is not part of the settlement process at this time.

The Commissioner and Mr. Brettschneider then provided an overview of the 10 work groups ACS has established, in partnership with stakeholders, to examine specific areas of child welfare in detail, and

develop recommendations for improvement. Workgroups include participants from ACS and external stakeholders, including legal aid, service providers, and advocates. Each workgroup is chaired by an ACS staff and someone from outside ACS. The work of the groups is coordinated through a committee made up of workgroup chairs, and co-chaired by the Commissioner and Tami Steckler from Legal Aid. This process is staffed by Casey Family Services. The Public Advocate's office was invited to participate in the workgroups but declined. However, they declined. The committees recently finalized recommendations and are now working on prioritizing them. The judiciary is not yet represented on the work groups, however ACS is looking at the strategic plan recently issued by the Family Court to identify areas of alignment.

Ms. Carrión discussed the need for reducing the length of time for the adoption process in NYC. Each private agency has been given targets for adoption and kinship guardianship. ACS has brought in consultants to support improvement efforts. In addition, it was also noted that a great deal of work has already been done, and continues to be done, to strengthen the use of kinship care.

An open discussion then took place focusing on the development of ACS' new Training Institute, similar to New Jersey's training institute. All ACS staff will be trained by the Training Institute over time.

- Professional Development: New staff for ACS's Training Institute has been hired and curriculum development is in process. ACS is partnering with CUNY and Bank St. College of Education on curriculum development. Space has been identified in each borough for training.
- Staff Development: ACS is in the process of developing Masters and Bachelors-level scholarships.

Additional topics of discussion included ACS' work to increase its internal use of technology, including developing a dashboard for line supervisors.

Ms. Carrión also discussed the Mayor's priority of addressing homelessness, which ACS is supporting through work such as Safe Sleep initiatives in homeless shelters. ACS may assist in the training of social workers in the shelter system.

Older Youth in Foster Care: There was a brief discussion about ACS' work to achieve better outcomes for older youth in foster care. ACS established a committee on this topic and is currently promoting collaboration with all voluntary child welfare agencies, as well as key state and city agencies. Additional work in this area includes:

- NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) established a central point of access for youth aging out of foster care to apply for temporary assistance, food stamps, housing, etc.
- Plans for ACS to replicate the First Star Program based at UCLA, which is a model for a college preparedness program that allows high school students to attend college during the summer to earn college credits, recover high school credits and participate in life skills training. ACS already has a pilot program at the College of Staten Island, funded by the Hilton Foundation. In this program, high school students who are in foster care can spend a month at the college in the summer, and then one day a month during the school year, to help with college readiness. At UCLA's program, 90% of students participating in the program to on to attend college after high school.

Child Fatalities: ACS recently hired a monitor, whose role is to look at all external and internal offices that make recommendations for corrective action to ACS (Department of Investigations, Comptroller's Office, etc.) to coordinate the process of reviewing and implementing recommendations. These include recommendations about preventing child fatalities, among many others. Ms. Carrión noted that, overall,

fatalities have decreased, although the number of fatalities associated with safe sleep has risen slightly. ACS will launch an infant mortality initiative and implement a grassroots, community organizing approach modeling Baltimore's work. In addition, a public awareness campaign will target seven high risk neighborhoods.

Preventive Initiatives: ACS is developing an intervention program for young parents, in partnership with the Columbia School of Health. ACS is also looking at options for locating "free standing" preventive services offices in high-needs neighborhoods, and not associating them with ACS so there is less stigma for families. N.J. does this in their "Family Success Centers."

Family Assessment Response (FAR): Ms. Carrión noted that ACS is expanding FAR more broadly in Queens, and starting FAR in two additional boroughs: Brooklyn (2 units) and then in the Bronx. Fifteen hundred (1500) families have been served by FAR in Queens to date. The principles of FAR are also being integrated into the Training Institute curricula.

Strategic Planning: ACS has engaged in a strategic blueprint for the next 2 years within a framework of Well Being. Measures are being developed and the work will include obtaining educational data.

Trauma informed care: NYC's first lady has made the creation of a trauma informed system her priority.

Additional areas in which ACS has new/expanded initiatives that were briefly mentioned include: expanding more evidence-based preventive services slots for young children; converting more general preventive slots to evidence-based slots; developing and implementing measures of well-being across the system; early childhood initiatives, interest in implementing the state's Quality STARS program with early childhood programs; and expanding the teaming model in Staten Island.

At the conclusion of Ms. Carrión and Mr. Brettschneider's presentation there was a brief discussion about Child Abuse Prevention Month. Mr. Brettschneider noted that ACS is currently in discussions with media about developing a positive story to be broadcast during Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Ms. Carrión also mentioned the launch of the Validated Health Screening program – the first health screening for girls. There is a "Girls Matter" conference on May 29 as part of ACS' work to refine gender-specific programming. Ms. Carrión also noted that this year is the 20th anniversary of the creation of ACS and there will be a large convening to note the occasion, as well as the establishment of "Reunification Month", much like there is Foster Care Month.

Updates on Foster Care Lawsuit

Presenter: Molly Thomas-Jensen, Deputy Counsel, NYC Public Advocate's Office

Ms. Thomas-Jensen began her presentation with a summary of the class action settlement against ACS and OCFS. A motion was filed on 1/20/16 for Preliminary Approval of a settlement with the state, however that settlement is not yet approved by the court. The terms of the Preliminary Approval Agreement include: 1) the Commissioner of OCFS will retain a monitor who will have access to records and prepare a quarterly report. 2) OCFS reviews the monitor's quarterly reports; 3) plaintiffs and defendants will meet after three years and every two years thereafter for up to seven years, as long as there are no outstanding complaints at the seven-year point; and 4) there is a covenant that the plaintiffs will not sue again during the term of the decree.

Next steps in the settlement process is the posting of a Notice in courts, agencies, and newspapers. The Notice will include a date for a fairness hearing when a Judge will determine if Preliminary Approval is fair to class members. During the discussion, it was noted that on 12/28/15 an Amended Complaint was filed: now there are 19 children listed (original complaint included 10 children). Since all of the children are minors, they are each assigned a Next Friend (guardian, attorney for the child, parent, or teacher) who appears for them in court.

Panel members raised the question about whether the appointment of a Monitor by OCFS, as the settlement would require, would be effective or add another layer of administrative review. Ms. Thomas-Jensen responded that the Monitor's role would be to look at systemic issues in the foster care system, with clearly defined goals.

At the conclusion of her presentation, Ms. Thomas-Jensen noted that she would email a copy of the class action settlement to the Panel. In addition, she will let members know when a date has been assigned for the upcoming Fairness Hearing.

AGENDA ITEM: Panel Business for 2016 (Group)

Future Agenda Items: There was a discussion among Panel members about agenda items for upcoming Panel meetings. The following items were identified for the next Panel meeting:

1. Implementation timeline for initiatives at ACS
2. Presentation by a manager in the Queens Field Office regarding their experience "on the ground" with implementation of FAR
3. FAR data review/presentation
4. Invite an upstate county to discuss (by phone) why they discontinued FAR

New Panel Members: There was discussion about the need for additional Panel members, including prospects from academia, a former participant of the system, and possibly someone from the Columbia School of Social Welfare. Panel members were asked to forward names of prospective Panel members to WRI.

Updates from WRI: WRI provided the following brief updates to Panel members:

- National CRP conference is in Phoenix June 6th through the 9th. Judy Stanger will attend on behalf of the Panels and report back on her learnings. Panel members are invited to attend the conference as well and while there isn't funding in WRI's budget for Panel members' travel, there may be scholarships available through the national organization. If there is any interest among Panel members, please let Judy Stanger at WRI know.
- Panel chairs will be meeting with OCFS Deputy Commissioner Laura Velez on February 24th to discuss the Annual Report and ways in which the Panels and OCFS might work together more effectively.
- The Panels were invited by the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) and the NYS Citizens Coalition for Children (NYS CCC) to participate in a child welfare Advocacy Day in Albany on March 3rd: An email was sent to Panel members about this event and those interested in attending should contact Judy Stanger at WRI. This is not an advocacy day where hundreds of people are needed, but rather a few people to meet with individual legislators.

The meeting was adjourned by the Panel Chair.