

New York State Citizen Review Panels

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New York State Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services Releases 2009 Annual Report and Recommendations

The Time for Change is Now

Albany – The report, *The Time for Change is Now*, builds on the Panels’ previous reports calling for fundamental reform in child welfare. The report highlights the underlying causes of maltreatment, why there is urgency for change, and provides recommendations for a shift in funding from investigations and foster care placement to primary prevention and intervention services that keep children from being harmed. The report also highlights five innovative practices with promising results.

New York spends over \$3 billion annually for child welfare, mostly for Child Protective investigations and foster care. At a time when the state can least afford to invest in programs and services that fail, the Panels call for a shift in child welfare funding to achieve better outcomes for children and families and save money over the long-term. Mary McCarthy, Eastern Panel Chair, emphasized, “Community-based, family-centered interventions and supports that build strong, stable, nurturing families and prevent child abuse and maltreatment are needed instead.”

The Panels’ recommendations call for a reduction in foster care placements, a shift to preventive services, increased cultural competency, and increased parental access to information, especially for immigrant and vulnerable families. In addition, panel members call for the elimination of educational neglect as a basis for child protective reports for children 13 and older and increased responsibility on the part of school districts for reducing absenteeism. The CPS system is not equipped to help families with teens who are refusing to attend school. New York State must develop other options to reach out to these youth. “Importantly, responding to education neglect reports, which have increased 34% since 2004, takes valuable time away from reports where there is a serious concern for a child’s safety,” stated Ellen Kennedy, Western Citizen Review Panel Chair.

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Children cannot wait for a time when reform is convenient. During this deep recession, more and more families with children have fallen into poverty, leaving them unable to provide basic necessities. While poverty by itself does not lead to child maltreatment, it can exacerbate stresses and strains in any household. Most families need help accessing public benefits, job programs, and safe housing instead of a report to the SCR. This is a time when the state can least afford to spend scarce resources on programs, services, or approaches that don't work. "What is needed is the political will to make the changes necessary to better respond to our most vulnerable families," stressed Elba Montalvo, New York City Panel Co-Chair.

Citizen Review Panels are mandated by federal law to assess the extent to which agencies are effectively carrying out their child protection responsibilities. There are three independent panels in New York State, each with 13 members. Each panel has up to 13 citizen volunteers as members, seven of which are appointed by the Executive Chamber, three appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly, and three appointed by the President Pro Tem of the Senate. Each year, the Panels are required to submit a report with their activities and recommendations to the state.

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