

New York State Citizen Review Panels

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MEMORANDUM

April 17, 2007

TO: Assembly Children and Families Committee

FROM: Stacy Alvord, Chair, Eastern Citizen Review Panel
James A. Vazzana, Chair, Western Citizen Review Panel

SUBJ: A6610/S4009

We are writing on behalf of the Eastern and Western Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services in support of A6610/S4009 which would amend the social services law to permit local districts to offer a differential response for child protection assessments.

This bill differs from the dual track legislation proposed in past years in four significant areas:

- 1) The bill permits those districts interested in offering a differential response to do so. Previous legislation proposed targeting seven demonstration projects.
- 2) This bill exempts New York City from consideration, an important exemption due to the reform plan already begun by the Administration for Children's Services.
- 3) This bill allows track switching with only a notice of change provided to the State Central Register, correcting a major concern raised by local districts with past legislation.
- 4) The bill requires OCFS to complete a report evaluating the implementation, impact and costs of a differential response by January 1, 2011.

The bill is designed to minimize the adversarial relationship that results from a child protective investigation for those cases that are not indicated or where a child is not in immediate danger. This allows CPS workers to address more fully the most serious cases of child abuse and neglect and offer important preventive services to those families in need whose situation does not rise to the level of seriousness where a child's safety is of concern. Evaluations of this approach conducted in other states indicate improved outcomes for children and families.

Reports made to the State Central Register are not all alike and do not require the same response. Differential Response offers local districts a flexible option in their work with families and supports their efforts to engage families in order to prevent future abuse and neglect. We urge your support of this important legislation.

Citizen Review Panels are mandated by federal law. In 1999 the New York Legislature passed S371-b of the Social Services Law establishing panels in New York State to evaluate the extent to which agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities in accordance with the State's Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Plan, child protection standards set forth in the federal law, and any other criteria that the panel considers important to ensure the protection of children.