

Eastern Citizen Review Panel
Minutes of the meeting, February 3, 2006

Attendees:

Stacy Alvord
JoAnn Merriman

Lance Jackson
Mary McCarthy

Adam Shaw
Julia Bielawski

OCFS Staff: Lee Lounsbury, Richard Nells, Tom Hess

SCAA Staff: Karen Schimke, Diane Mastin

Handouts:

OCFS Testimony on Child Fatality Review Teams

Assembly Hearing Notice on Oversight and accountability of the child welfare system

Instructions to access members only web page

Draft plan for OCFS/Eastern Western panels roundtable discussion

Draft survey to commissioners

Data Analysis for the NYS CRPs by Hornby Zeller

Executive Summary: *Retention Planning to Reduce Workforce Turnover in New York State's Child Welfare Systems*

Don't Turn Back Reform Has Made New York's Children Safer

Articles: *A shattering death*, 1/23/06, The Journal News

New York Acts to Coordinate Child Welfare, 1/25/06, The New York Times

Minutes from the Nov. 4, 2005 meeting

Meeting began at 10:20 with updates. A report was given on the December 7th Assembly Hearing on Child Fatality Teams. There are now four approved fatality teams in New York State. Discussion covered the lack of consistency in standards and practices across the state. Panel members suggested that some of the problems should be addressed at the state level and that they were interested in further discussion and that could lead to specific recommendations. FBI check legislation will be introduced again this legislative session. Panel members were given information as to how to log onto the panel members only page of the website. An overview of the Governor's proposed budget was provided. Panel members asked that a letter be written and forwarded to the governor asking for funding for the Trust Fund and home visiting programs in his 30 day amendment. They suggested that the letter come from all three panels since the recommendations in the report were approved by all panels. Panel members re-elected Stacy Alvord as panel chair and Lance Jackson as Vice Chair.

The panels' annual report was submitted to the Commissioner and is in the mail to legislators, local DSS commissioners and others. Panel members agreed to hold a joint meeting with the Western panel to discuss their recommendations with OCFS and invited others. Date and location will be confirmed. Members were asked to submit their suggestions as to who should be invited.

Lee Lounsbury, Assistant to the Executive Deputy Commissioner, Office of Children and Family Services, talked with panel members about OCFS response to the recent tragedies in New York City. Their work with Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has been two-pronged: 1) to support ACS and provide services and resources needed as they evaluate their operations and 2) to independently monitor their work. Immediately after Nixzmary Brown's, OCFS brought two child

protective specialists from the National Resource Center to New York City. These experts are examining the child protective framework in the city and state to see if the right policies, procedures, and practices are in place. Their work will continue. The Resource Center has reported to OCFS that the framework in place in New York State for assessing child risk and safety is one of the best in the nation.

ACS staff began a review on their own of 8,000 to 10,000 cases the weekend after Nixzmary Brown's death. OCFS did a review of about 800 cases which they have just finished. That review included two cases from every supervisor at ACS. She could not report on the results of that review until the data has been tabulated. 19 staff from OCFS from around the state participated in that review. When they have been able to identify problems that need correction, corrections are being made. For example, in Brooklyn they have increased the bandwidth available to allow Connections software to work more quickly. ACS has plans for hiring additional staff, including former law enforcement personnel; it is not clear yet how all the additional staff will be used.

OCFS, in their role as an independent monitor, is considering systemic improvements, legislative reforms, and regulatory changes that would lead to improvements. She asked for ideas for improvements from panel members. Discussion covered concerns as to how to support good staff through this difficult time, that any reform under consideration has to take a look at unintended consequences and that no reform can substitute for good practice and judgment on the front lines.

Ms. Lounsbury also reported on the state's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). The state's plan ended April, 2005. She informed the panel that the state is in substantial compliance with all aspects of the PIP. Various workgroups continue their work on improvements and the OCFS role now is to support local districts in reaching outcomes. She agreed to share data and analysis related to the outcomes with panels. She highlighted key points and stated that much of the data has to be analyzed in terms of all the changes that have been made. For example, improvements have been made on the number of kids exiting from foster care and the state is just shy of reaching their goal. However, the children now entering foster care, although fewer in number, are staying longer. Recurrence data can be influenced positively by the state's move to consolidate investigations and influenced negatively by the clean up of records during the implementation of Connections. She reported that New York State recently received the largest award for their work moving kids to adoption. She mentioned the importance of post-adoption services to avoid recidivism.

Ms. Lounsbury passed out information to panel members regarding implementation of the permanency bill stating that the new legislation provides a great deal of potential to improve practice.

Panel members reviewed the data report provided by Hornby Zeller, highlighting key points and places where they need further clarification. Their next meeting will be devoted to understanding the information more clearly.

SCAA staff agreed to provide panel members with a list of legislators for potential visits by panel members.

Next Panel meeting: April 7, 10-2 Wolferts Roost