

Eastern Citizen Review Panel  
Minutes of the meeting, March 16, 2007

*Attendees:*

Lance Jackson            JoAnn Merriman            Julia Bielawski

Adam Shaw

*OCFS Staff:* Tom Hess, Renee Hallock

*SCAA Staff:* Diane Mastin, Karen Schimke

Guest: Sheila Poole

*Handouts:*

Meeting Agenda

Chart: Panel Recommendations and 2007-8 Executive Budget

Executive Summary: NYS Child Welfare Workload Study

2007 Joint Panel Meeting Survey

Differential Response Legislation and sponsors memo

2007 Draft Plan for Eastern Panel Meetings

Draft NYS CRP Operating Guidelines

Testimony of Gladys Carrion to the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee

Report: Families Connections to Services in an Alternative Response System

Note: 6<sup>th</sup> Annual CRP National Conference

Articles: *Mother gets 15 years in starving case*, The Post-Standard, Feb. 21, 2007

*Rescuing Children*, The Post-Standard, Jan. 28, 2007

Minutes from the 11/3/06 meeting

Meeting began with introductions and a welcome to the panel's guests, Renee Hallock and Sheila Poole. Philip Goldstein from Westchester County Department of Social Services was unable to join the panel as a guest speaker due to the inclement weather. Sheila Poole, Commissioner, Department for Children, Youth & Families in Albany County graciously filled in at the last minute.

Commissioner Poole presented an overview of Albany County's practice and experience co-locating and organizing all services for children, youth and families under one umbrella. This allows Albany County to fully integrate their services. Child Welfare (CPS, Foster Care, Adoption), PINS, JD, Early Intervention, Home Visiting, Health and Special Needs, Youth Bureau, Substance Abuse services all fall under this one umbrella with one commissioner. Albany County's services have become more community-based with their redesign into north and south teams, non-adversarial with additions such as family team conferencing throughout points of contact with families and service provision, and more outcome focused. They placed more focus on adoption/permanency planning. They have been able to bring all out-of-state placements back into the district for services. They now offer a better continuum of care to kids who cross systems. For instance, they have hired an education professional whose job is to support foster care children with their school work.

In Child Welfare, she has seen the number of open reports go from over 4,000 in the year 2000, to 1,100 to 1,200 currently. Their delinquency rates are down to 50%. She has focused on recurrence rates which have typically been 10% higher than the rates in other districts. She noted that Albany County also has a 10% higher rate of mandated reporters. She found documentation issues with Connections. She also found that Albany County was not consolidating reports as it should. Reports on the same incident were being counted twice in many instances. The County just added a youth cabinet with ten youth who have had experience in these systems who will serve as an advisory group to the executive.

She highlighted some of the changes and innovations made to improve access and outcomes with mental health issues for both parents and children. In Albany County, she links with the social services department to help families secure housing and other benefits to which they are entitled to prevent homelessness. She stated her belief that child welfare should be a relatively short term intervention with families. Families in need of longer term support should find such support in their communities, but there is a lack of such services and safe places to go.

She has been able to reduce caseworker caseloads by using paraprofessional community services workers who help free up caseworkers time by providing transportation support, obtaining needed documents, etc. Last year, Albany County experienced their highest turnover rate in ten years. She asked for support from the panels to promote innovate practice in NYS.

Renee Hallock gave an overview of the 2006 workload study conducted by MacDonald and Associates. Over 2,200 staff were part of the study, recording their time over the two week period from September 11<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Their response rate was 85%. Recommendations from the study point out issues having to do with training, management, documentation, and court waiting time. OCFS has begun to identify and implement solutions on each of these issues. The greatest concern highlighted by the study is that child welfare caseworkers spend only 17% of their time in face to face contact with families. Currently, OCFS does not have the authority to mandate caseloads. To start, OCFS staff are concentrating their work with local districts that have caseload sizes at 20 or over that also have cases which are 90 days past due. They estimate that 39 districts need a total of 320 additional caseworkers to bring caseload levels down. This would also require an additional 60 plus supervisors.

OCFS has just launched a pilot with five counties on the Teaming Model such as the model used in Massachusetts. Kick off for this pilot is the end of March.

Panel members received an update on the Citizen Review Panels' Annual Reports. They joined the Western Panel in agreeing to have their Eastern/Western Panel Report distributed to the same list as used by the NYC Panel with one change – use of a different colored cover to differentiate the two reports. Panel members were given an overview of the new legislation for differential response that will be introduced this year in the Assembly by Amy Paulin and in the Senate by Mary Lou Rath. It differs in four ways from the legislation that has been introduced in previous years: instead of dual track it uses differential response, permits any interested district to apply rather than having seven demonstration projects, excludes NYC, and allows for reports to move from the assessment track to the investigation track with only a notice given to SCR and no need to file a new report. Panel members reiterated their support for this legislation and asked that a letter of support be drafted on behalf of the panel for the legislation. Panel members received an update on the 2007-8 Executive Budget. Panel members discussed an email forwarded to them about practice in Suffolk County and agreed to communicate with OCFS Yonkers Regional Office regarding practice in Suffolk County.

Panel members agreed to request Child Fatality Reports for a one year time period. They offered their support for a joint panel meeting in October. SCAA staff will poll members for their responses and input into the agenda for a joint meeting. They approved the operating guidelines presented and received information about the 2007 CRP budget. They agreed to the workplan presented for panel meetings. Larry Brown, Executive Deputy Commissioner, OCFS, has again offered to meet with panel members to review the panel's 2007 recommendations. They expressed their interest in holding such a meeting.