

Eastern Citizen Review Panel  
April 7, 2006  
Minutes

Attendees:

Lance Jackson  
Julia Bielawski

Steve Weber  
JoAnn Merriman

Mary McCarthy

*OCFS Staff:* Tom Hess

*SCAA Staff:* Karen Schimke, Diane Mastin

*Handouts:*

Draft report on Panel Recommendations and Assembly/Senate budget

ACS March 23, 2006 Press Release on Reforms

Safeguarding Our Children, 2006 Action Plan

Commissioner's Survey and Report

Hornby Zeller Data Analysis

Draft Agenda: May 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting

Directions to SUNY IT

2004 Upstate MAPS Data 2000-2004

Draft Agenda for June 15<sup>th</sup> Joint Panel meeting

Article: Back to Child Welfare, The Journal News, March 5, 2006

March 2<sup>nd</sup> Child Welfare Hearing Testimony:

David Sutkowy, Onondaga County Commissioner of Social Services

Stacy Alvord, Ex. Dir. Community Action Program for Madison County

Meeting began with a welcome and introductions. Updates were given by SCAA staff on the New York State Budget and ACS reforms. Panel members indicated their interest in meeting with the consultant who would be hired to do a review of workload standards and in following the progress of Child Advocacy Centers, given the increase in dollars in the budget for the centers. Discussion included mention of New York City Councilwoman's speech and press release in which she mentioned child welfare issues. Panel members asked that they be sent these materials. It was also suggested that panel members think about becoming an informational resource on child abuse issues for gubernatorial candidates for the 2006 elections. SCAA staff gave an update on candidates for panel appointments.

SCAA staff gave an overview of a report prepared for the panel from the surveys sent out to Commissioners of Social Services in the 40 county region of the Eastern panel. To date, 26 surveys had been returned. The report was compiled based on 25 of those surveys. Survey answers and comments indicated that staffing and funding issues were of primary concern to the Commissioners. Concerns were also raised about the amount of time it takes to bring new caseworkers up to speed with a full caseload and the time Connections Build 18 takes away from important field work. They indicated overwhelmingly that the Flexible Fund for Family Services lacked flexibility. They indicated a great deal of agreement and support for the panels' 2005 recommendations. Comments indicated some confusion about the Children and Family Trust

Fund and what it supports. There was mixed support for changes in the law regarding Child Fatality Reviews and with moving towards a system of Community Child Protection. Suggestion was made that the panel could offer a proposal to the legislature regarding regional teams for child fatality reviews. SCAA staff will send panel members a copy of a proposal that was written regarding rapid response teams.

Panel members then reviewed the Hornby Zeller report, relating differences in philosophy at the local level, different kinds of cases that exist in CPS and the variance in time required for those cases with the data reported. The question was asked about how local counties are reviewing and using this data. Panel members suggested that they could help our elected officials understand the complexity of these issues. Of particular interest were recurrence information and other indicators in the report where the state and local districts fall lower than the national average.

Panel members discussed proposed legislation and the Meier/Spano 12 Point Plan for child welfare services. Panel members agreed that the proposed changes reflected in Child Fatality legislation (S6703A) are substantial and they agreed to submit a letter of support. They also asked that SCAA staff meet with Assembly members to encourage adoption of a “same as” bill in the Assembly. They also asked that SCAA staff encourage support for evaluation dollars to be included in the Meier/Spano plan. Currently over \$70 million dollars support CPS training in New York State without any understanding as to whether or not the training translates to the work conducted in the field. Panel members expressed concern over items 6 and 8 in the plan regarding interviewing children and the intersection with school districts during a CPS investigation. Panel members asked for information about the number of child fatalities in smaller counties and recommend that OCFS release a fatality report for 2004. They agreed to send such a request to Commissioner Johnson. Panel members also agreed there would be value in meeting with legislative leaders, especially Spano, Meier, and Scarborough, on child welfare issues and want to talk about such a role for the panels and formulate recommendations to bring to them at the joint panel meeting.

The agenda for the May 15<sup>th</sup> meeting in Utica was reviewed. Panel members were offered an opportunity to visit the Child Advocacy Center in Utica while in the community.

Next meeting: May 15<sup>th</sup> 10:00 to 2:00 at SUNY IT in Utica with Western Panel members and OCFS staff.