

Eastern New York Citizen Review Panel

Meeting Notes
September 16, 2005

Attendance

Stacy Alvord	Mary Felasco	Lance Jackson
JoAnn Merriman	Dianne Meckler	Steve Weber
Mary McCarthy	Lori Currier Woods	
Julia Bielawski – joined group at CAC visit in Troy		

Guest speaker: Fran Lanigan and Judy Reitz, Oswego County

OCFS Staff: Richard Nells, Tom Hess, Larry Brown, Bill Travis

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) Staff: Diane Mastin, Panel Coordinator

Location: Wolfert's Roost Country Club, 10:00 – 1:00, Start Children's Center, Troy NY 1:00 – 2:00

Handouts: Commissioner Johnson's letter and response to panel's Annual Report

2003, 2004 Recurrence data

Draft agenda for Joint Panel Meeting

Governor's Veto message on Dual Track

Draft letter of invite to Commissioner's meeting

Draft agenda for Commissioner's meeting

Legislative Bills: S5834 and S5534A

CWLA Information sheet on proposed Federal Legislation

Children's Bureau Express email listserv

Strengthening California Families Through Differential Response

Minutes from June 3rd meeting

Articles: State: County to blame for allowing convicted rapist to become foster parent

Wright Legislation to Require National Background Checks on Prospective

Adoptive and Foster Parents Passes Senate

The meeting began with updates. The Governor did not sign the Dual Track Legislation. His veto message is included in panel members' packets. Of note, the NYC panel voted to send a letter to the Governor asking that he veto the bill. Fran Lanigan stated that other commissioners, besides ACS Commissioner Mattingly had questions about the proposed legislation.

Bills S5534A and S5834 (companion bills in the Assembly) allowing FBI checks on applicants for foster care and adoption will cost the state roughly \$290,000 for an estimated 18,000 finger print checks. It is not clear if the legislation covers existing foster parents. Funds will come out of Title IV-E funding. The bills were quickly passed in the Senate and several Assembly committees but stopped in the Assembly Codes committee. Some concerns have been raised regarding capacity, communications and funding although there seems to be full support for doing such checks. The Assembly may decide to hold a hearing and panel members will be informed if such a hearing is scheduled.

The Permanency bill passed and was signed by the Governor although there were some last minute concerns raised by Domestic Violence advocates. A meeting between those advocates and the governor's office has been scheduled for next week. Provisions in the bill go into effect on December 21st. This bill calls for some significant changes and will have a huge impact on local Departments of Social Services. Panel members were urged to go to the OCFS website and look at the PowerPoint presentation on the changes to familiarize themselves.

Panel member Mary McCarthy reported that at the federal level Title IV-E and TANF will be reauthorized for one year without change. The focus in Congress will be put on changes proposed in Medicaid. Of significance, local services will be asked to draw on other sources of funding where they exist and turn to Medicaid funding as a last resort. Much of the funding that will be used first for Medicaid eligible services has been used locally for many other services. Also, services will be disaggregated.

A draft agenda was distributed for the joint panel meeting scheduled for October 14th. Panel members were asked to indicate their interest in attending the meeting. Larry Brown, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Development and Preventive Services, OCFS, informed panel members that New York State will have its second Child and Family Service Review in 2007, but OCFS will be working on the review in 2006. He stated that the panels would have an important role in providing community input called for in the review process.

Panel members commented on the Commissioner's response to the panels' annual report. They have been comfortable with the relationship developed with OCFS and the ongoing dialogue over the years and had no specific comments about any of the details in the response.

Judy Reitz and Fran Lanigan, Oswego County Department of Social Services, gave a presentation on Connections Build 18 and their experience as the first site to implement this major revision to Connections. Build 18 allows for a structured decision making process which is consistent, objective and supports a strengths-based approach to practice. It expands access to CPS case records to foster care workers and service organizations providing family support. Built into it is a way of pulling up information using any field of inquiry by which data has been entered. With it, a caseworker is able to prioritize families by highest need or highest risk. It offers an ongoing assessment of safety that is more consistent. Use of Build 18 has also standardized intake procedures. It is an extremely useful tool for supervisors allowing for easier case management oversight.

For providers, there is one online case record. Multiple providers can enter their information, with access available to only those with a role in the case. Although it takes some time to enter records at the beginning, county personnel are now seeing efficiencies because of the ease in pulling up records.

Oswego County started with a pilot where each supervisor and caseworker had a couple of cases using the new software. They had weekly video conferences with OCFS staff and a lot of support preparing for and implementing Build 18. OCFS starts 8 weeks out from implementation to work with local district staff. It is now implemented in all but New York City's five boroughs.

Some challenges they experienced included technological issues especially linking caseworkers who are located outside the office; cases that crossed county borders and access to their records; software melds the role of the examiner with the caseworker when they are two separate functions in their department; and the reality that there are uneven practices across counties with the entry of case records. The discussion that followed reiterated that Build 18 is a tool and not a substitute for good practice.

The panel adjourned at 1:00 to travel to the Start Children's Center, Troy, New York for a site visit.

The next meeting is the joint panel meeting scheduled for Friday, October 14 at 11:00 in Albany. The next panel meeting is scheduled for Friday, November 4th in Utica. The agenda includes a meeting with local Commissioners of Social Services and development of the annual report.