

New York State Western Citizen Review Panel  
February 25, 2005  
Minutes

*Attending:*

James A. Vazzana  
Ellen Kennedy  
Kathryn Friedman

Mark Lazzara  
Dennis Wittman

Augusta Welch  
Stefan Perkowski

*OCFS staff:* Thomas Hess

*SCAA staff:* Karen Schimke, Diane Mastin

*Meeting handouts:* Minnesota Alternative Response Evaluation, A Review of Pilot Project Findings from 2001-2004 summary

The meeting began with an overview of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, the new organization contracting with OCSF to support panel activities. SCAA is a 133 year-old organization that provides analysis and advocacy in areas such as public health, child welfare, and mental health in New York State. SCAA staff expressed their enthusiasm in having the opportunity to work with and learn from each of the panels and asked for the panel members understanding in this transition period. Although SCAA has been awarded the contract from OCFS, it takes some time before a contract is signed. The contract will have a February 1<sup>st</sup> start date and be renewable yearly for up to five years.

Panel members then reviewed their recommendations from the 2004 annual report:

- The panel should expect a response to their recommendations by June. SCAA will help facilitate a reply to that response once it is received.
- Educational requirements: The recommendation in the annual report should be forwarded to civil service. Note: Individual counties can go above and beyond civil service standards. However, they may not go below those standards for a position.
- Core Trainings: All new caseworkers must go through this training. OCFS can provide an update on how many supervisors have received this training to date. The suggestion was made to invite Mary McCarthy to a panel meeting to provide an overview of her research in this area.
- Dual Track: Panel chairs signed a joint letter to Governor Pataki in support of Dual Track legislation. Last year's bill did not pass due to concerns by domestic violence advocates that victims would be automatically put into the investigative track and then could not be switched to the services track. Both the Assembly and Senate have new chairs in the key committees for this legislation. In the Assembly, William Scarborough is the new chair of the Committee on Children and Families. In the Senate, Raymond Meier is the new chair of the Committee on Social Services and Children and Families. A meeting of key people is scheduled for Monday, Feb. 28, 2005 and more will be

known at that time. On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, SCAA staff will be visiting Westchester County CPS staff to learn from their experience.

Linda Brown, Regional Director for the Office of Children and Family Services in Buffalo, attended the meeting and listened to panel members concerns over the fiscal crisis in Erie County and its potential impact on child protective services. As of today, she expects children's protective staff will be retained but unfilled positions will be eliminated. Concern was expressed over the capacity to respond to situations as they arise, especially those that involve children's safety. Panel members asked to be kept informed and may invite Michael Weiner to the next meeting. Cattaraugus County was mentioned as another county experiencing financial difficulties.

Panel members asked that SCAA staff draft a letter addressed to County Executive Giambra noting their concern for children's safety and urging the use of federal dollars to maximize services. Several members agreed to follow up the letter by meeting with Commissioner Weiner.

Members then gave their suggestions for the panel's work over the course of 2005 including:

1. There was a discussion about the intersection between CPS services, Child Advocacy Centers and Domestic Violence services. The group would like to engage in further inquiry and dialogue on these issues. Their interests include data and information about experiences in other states. A roundtable discussion with key people could be a possible action item.
2. Investigate the overall impact of NYS budget cuts on services at the county level in the region in view of the current financial crisis experienced in Erie County.
3. Monitor past goals including Dual Track and survey follow-up on training recommendations and timeliness of administrative reviews and fair hearings.
4. Work to move Dual Track legislation forward. As a possible action step, team members suggested holding a public hearing that could focus on the concept of dual track and what it can do for families. The panel's 2004 annual report calls for the creation of ten Dual Tract demonstration districts in the state.
5. Hold another meeting with local Department of Social Services commissioners and/or their representatives for a conversation about their concerns regarding CPS services. This discussion would be held in combination with updated data on services provided and a review of the OMA's. The meeting would serve as a means for panel members to receive input and recommendations.
6. Assess the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams. Interest includes operating efficiencies and effectiveness of such teams.

SCAA staff will draft a work plan to be submitted to panel members for review through emails prior to the next meeting. The work plan will help towards development of each meeting's agenda for the year.

The panel's next meeting is scheduled for Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup> at 12:00.