

Western Citizen Review Panel
Draft Minutes of the Meeting
May 18, 2007

Attendees:

Ellen Kennedy
James Vazzana

Augusta Welsh
Stefan Perkowski

Dennis Walczyk
Dan Sklarski

OCFS Staff: Renee Rider

SCAA Staff: Diane Mastin

Guests: Lt. Bill Miller Josie Forbragh Ann Marie Tucker

Handouts:

Agenda

2006 Child Welfare Legislation

Information chart: Panels' Recommendations and the 2007-8 NYS Budget

Budget language: Outcome-Based Provisions for Preventive Services

TANF funding

Child Advocacy Centers Demonstration Project

A6610b/S4009b Differential Response Legislation

S4098 proposed legislation

Joint Panel meeting survey

Draft Commissioners Survey

Mandating Multidisciplinary Review of Serious Child Maltreatment Cases, an Overview of Law and Policy Issues, Howard Davidson, J.D.

People First Listening Tour

Erie County Department of Social Services information regarding Chapter 494 Law Enforcement and Multi-Disciplinary Teams.

Minutes of the March 9th meeting

Danny Sklarski was welcomed as a newly appointed member of the panel. Panel members received updates on panel membership, the final 2007-2008 New York State budget and Differential Response Legislation. OCFS will be working with local districts to implement performance-based contracts for both TANF and preventive services. Panelists were asked to fill out the survey to help plan the joint panel meeting in October. Members were also asked to give their suggestions for changes to the Commissioner's Survey by email or fax.

The panel meeting was devoted to a discussion about Child Protection Services and Law Enforcement with Josie Forbragh, Erie County CPS Supervisor, Lt. Bill Miller of the Town of Tonawanda Police, and Ann Marie Tucker Executive Director of the Niagara County Child Advocacy Center.

Child Advocacy Centers (CAC) have changed the way law enforcement works with CPS in a positive way. Centers are where everyone comes together to keep kids safe. Communication between the various systems has greatly improved. CAC's have allowed relationships to form,

trust to develop, and work to be conducted collaboratively with a common goal of protecting the child.

Child Protection has been working to meet the various requirements of the 2006 law requiring CPS to notify law enforcement in certain cases and to conduct a joint investigation utilizing the Multi-Disciplinary Team. Erie County Dept. of Social Services sent out a letter in January to the 21 law enforcement agencies in Erie County explaining the new law requiring CPS to work in conjunction with law enforcement and asking for a person to be designated as their contact person.

Most of Erie County's cases are within the city of Buffalo. They have five senior caseworkers designated to work on the estimated 600 cases per year with serious injury, abuse, or fatalities. CPS workers do not always go out on a case with a police officer though they work collaboratively with law enforcement. Police have more time to investigate a case than the CPS worker has. CPS worker must begin an investigation within 24 hours of a report to the SCR and have to notify a person who is a subject of a report within 7 days. CPS brings cases to family court. Law enforcement brings cases to criminal court. There are some cases for which law enforcement has brought a charge of child endangerment against a parent or caregiver and the CPS worker has not indicated the report of child maltreatment.

The Niagara County's CAC sees about 250 cases per year. While there are challenges to working together, there are great advantages. CAC's focus on the child and family. The CAC maintains contact with the family so that when they are amenable to counseling, those services are available and families are more likely to access them. About 75-80% of the families do get counseling. To increase their connections with the schools, they have hired an education coordinator. They have also hired a specialist to conduct forensic interviews.

Some of the issues/concerns that were raised as a result of the discussion include:

- The philosophical differences reflected in practice when CPS is viewed as a social service meant to be helpful to families vs. an investigatory mechanism to assign blame and entry to the criminal system. CPS was placed under social services law but over time more emphases has been placed on the investigative function.
- The need to prepare workers in how to present information in court, how to work with law enforcement, and how to work within a CAC.
- Presenters indicated they are seeing more schools conducting their own investigations internally before calling police or CPS. Concern is that the school districts are doing this without the proper training.
- The need for OCFS funding for costs of co-location of services and for specialists such as a forensic interviewer. Dollars are especially needed to support the co-location of law enforcement.
- Question was raised as to whether or not as new initiatives are proposed, they could be discussed by the Citizen Review Panels. Panel members have a broad range of expertise across the state and could highlight some of the difficulties in implementation that should be considered.