

Western Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary September 20, 2023 • 10:00 AM

Attendees:

Eastern Panel Members

Carrie Jefferson Smith

JoAnn Merriman

Western Panel Members

Todd Sage

Ellen Kennedy

Sarlyn Tate

Guests

Paul Brady (NYPWA)

Welfare Research, Inc.

Darlene Ward

Liz Roberts

Felicia LaClair

Rumi Sarkar

Welcome – Liz Roberts

The meeting commenced at 10:00 a.m.

Discussion with Paul Brady, Executive Director, NYPWA

The executive director of NYPWA, Paul Brady, received introductions from the Western panel and other regional members. He discussed NYPWA's Board of Directors, which convenes annually in March to discuss program objectives extending beyond child welfare. A major concern for NYPWA is the plight of "cross-systems kids" involving mental health, developmental disabilities, and child welfare. Issues include children ending up in emergency rooms, abandoned by frustrated caretakers, leading to CPS involvement. The question arises whether these children need foster care, but the workforce crisis in organizations poses a challenge. Cross-collaboration is seen as essential to address these issues, along with other focuses such as housing, homelessness, and staffing problems.

Concerns about changes in Medicaid, including a significant cost shift, raise questions about filling the financial gap. The absence of stipends in Schools of Social Work to support the workforce entering child welfare positions is noted. The HELP program is discussed as a mechanism to address staffing issues by waiving civil service exams for certain job titles. A notable problem is children being kept in hospitals without reimbursement, contributing to a shortage of beds. Aftercare, particularly from a financial perspective, is viewed as beneficial for voluntary agencies. However, uncertainties exist about the operational perspective of Families First at the county level, with questions about costs, reimbursement fees, and a wait-and-see approach. The need for thoughtful implementation of Families First is emphasized, noting that other states are taking a similar approach. Collaboration is sought to amplify these issues, with Paul Brady expressing a desire to elevate the conversation to attract attention.

Debrief

As the panel debriefed, the discussion highlighted a gap in the child welfare system, lacking therapeutic foster homes and alternatives between institutional care. Concerns were raised about the absence of support for the real costs of caring for foster home kids. Kennedy suggested creating a team of professionals, potentially retired or experienced individuals, to provide on-call emergency intervention at home. This approach could offer in-home services to families in need. Sage proposed including this on the group's agenda for a potential recommendation, given the current lack of capacity to support these children. Criticism was voiced about New York's challenges in implementing Family First and a lack of personal sympathy in reading off Miranda rights.

CRP Roundtable

The possibility of an in-person roundtable was raised, with participants expressing the belief that being in the same room could be beneficial. There is interest in hosting an in-person panel meeting and a suggestion for a discussion on the nature of Child Protective Services (CPS) and its future direction. A relevant attachment was sent by WRI, aligning well with the proposal. The panel believes this message can be conveyed to the university, potentially prompting a revival of the CPS curriculum.

Membership Discussion

The panel shifted the discussion to membership and considered reaching out to dormant members to identify schedules that better suit them or explore potential alternative panel constituents. The idea of involving academic members, who can be supported from work, was suggested. There was also a consideration for including someone from the child mental health system. Urgency was emphasized in pushing OCFS to facilitate the inclusion of these names.

Meeting Adjourned: 11:57 a.m.