

Western Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary
May 3, 2023 • 10:00 AM

Attendees:

Western Panel Members

John Treahy
Ellen Kennedy
Sarlyn Tate

Welfare Research, Inc.

Liz Roberts
Felicia LaClair
Kerri Barglof

NYC Panel Members

David Lansner

Guests

Jason DeSantis, OCFS
David Haase, OCFS

Welcome – John Treahy

The meeting commenced at 10:04 a.m.

Discussion with Jason DeSantis, Director of the Child Fatality Review Unit:

Mr. John Treahy introduced and extended a warm welcome to Jason DeSantis, who serves as the Director of the Bureau of Protective Practice at OCFS (Office of Children and Family Services). In his introductory remarks, Mr. DeSantis expressed gratitude and provided a concise overview of his role within OCFS. He emphasized that his responsibilities encompass overseeing the unit responsible for producing the child fatality reports for the state. Additionally, he mentioned that he offers technical support and monitoring to 18 local child fatality review teams and child advocacy centers located throughout the state.

Mr. David Haase emphasized the Western panel's request to review child fatality reports in the Western region, including those not disclosed to the media. Upon analyzing the relevant legislation, David confirmed that the Western panel possesses the complete authority to examine all cases, irrespective of their public disclosure status. Additionally, the panel expressed interest in receiving information about cases that may be of particular importance and suggested initiating a conversation on forming an arrangement to stay informed.

Jason DeSantis provided a detailed overview of the child fatality review process. At the state level, OCFS focuses on cases where a child's death is suspected to be caused by abuse or maltreatment. Local regional teams examine these cases in a broader context, including instances like teenage suicide deaths that may not initially raise abuse or maltreatment concerns. OCFS's involvement extends to cases where there is a suspicion of abuse or maltreatment, or when the child is already in an open child welfare case, such as foster care or child protective services.

The number of reports varies annually, with approximately 300 reports registered by the SCR based on suspicions of abuse and neglect, and around 50 cases involving children listed in open foster care or preventative services. Once a report is registered, OCFS's team of 10 fatality report writers and 2 supervisors, covering the entire state, receives an immediate notification. The information is entered into a database, initiating the fatality review process. Similarly, if a child is in an open case, the system is triggered when the date of the child's death is recorded.

The first priority for OCFS is to ensure the welfare of surviving siblings by assessing any indications of danger, identifying those who removed the siblings from the home, drafting safety plans, and gathering the necessary information. After this initial response, OCFS has approximately 183 days to issue the report, typically writing the bulk of it around the fourth or fifth month. This allows time for the required directives, such as autopsy reports, police records, and child protective services reports, to be obtained. The draft report undergoes internal review before being shared with the local county for feedback and suggestions. Finally, the report is issued once all necessary revisions are incorporated.

One panel member then raised a question regarding the recipients of the final report. Mr. DeSantis explained that the report is sent to the county DSS (Department of Social Services) Commissioner, the executive officer of the county, the chairperson of the county legislative body, as well as the New York State Senate and Assembly. She further requested that the Citizen Review Panels also receive a copy of the draft report when it is distributed to the counties. Mr. Haase affirmed that he would investigate the possibility and directed the panel members to the public quarterly reports available on the OCFS website, emphasizing that personal identifying information is redacted in those reports.

Debrief:

The panel members expressed satisfaction with the outcome of their meeting with OCFS and felt an understanding was reached that the panel's request to review the draft reports would be elevated. They appreciated OCFS's recognition that sharing this information fell within the purview of the panels' responsibilities.

LDSS meeting discussion:

The panel reviewed the summaries of their recent meetings with various LDSS (Local Departments of Social Services) in the western region and found them satisfactory. They discussed the next steps, which involved meeting with additional western regions such as Seneca, Chautauqua, and Niagara. Concerns arose regarding the state education department's definition of educational neglect, and the panel considered reaching out to them to address this issue. They also explored the possibility of strengthening school social workers and their respective programs, potentially through collaboration with OCFS and engaging school social work programs and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to encourage participation in child welfare and child protection.

Additional feedback highlighted the consideration of counties accepting associate degrees for workers involved in making critical decisions about families staying together. The panel revisited their meeting with the Buffalo School of Social Work, noting that further inquiry by Todd Sage

would be pursued at a later time due to other pressing priorities for the school. The panel decided to include a more in-depth conversation about advancing the social work program and obtaining information on graduates' areas of interest in the agenda for the next meeting.

Draft legislation discussion:

During discussions with the Western panel, feedback was sought to improve the legislation and gather more support. The panel understood the rationale behind the proposed legislation but raised concerns about certain aspects, such as the lack of defined parameters in the SCR filtering process and the legislation's heavy legal focus rather than a more social worker relationship-centric approach. They did appreciate the application of the annual report recommendations where applicable.

WRI Updates:

WRI updates included the chair's intention of updating the panel's operating guidelines. This was initiated due to advocacy efforts, membership needs, and dormant members. A larger discussion on the topic will be held at the Joint panels meeting in June.

Meeting Adjourned: 11:25 a.m.

Next CRP Meetings:

- Joint Meeting w/ Hevesi: May 15th | 1:00 p.m.
- Joint Panels Meeting: June 15th | 2:00 p.m.
- Western Panel Regional Meeting: September 20th | 10:00 a.m.