

Eastern Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary
May 4, 2023 • 1:00 PM

Attendees:

Eastern Panel Members

Eunju Lee, Chair
Mary McCarthy, Vice Chair
Sharon Chesna
Kellyann Kostyal-Larrier
Kathy Halas
Carrie Jefferson Smith

Welfare Research, Inc.

Darlene Ward
Liz Roberts
Felicia LaClair
Kerri Barglof

Guests

David Haase, OCFS
Randall Williams, OCFS
Sara Simon, OCFS
Crystal Charles, SCAA

Welcome – Liz Roberts

The meeting commenced at 1:04 p.m.

Discussion with Crystal Charles: Child welfare and the Executive Budget:

Mrs. Mary McCarthy initiated panel member introductions with Ms. Crystal Charles from SCAA. Ms. Charles provided an overview of the Child Welfare portion of the Executive Budget, highlighting the Child Welfare Housing Subsidy's rise to \$725 a month. This raise will provide a positive impact on youth up to 21 years of age, while SCAA plans to push for this to extend to up to 24 years of age. She additionally featured the newly formed Child and Family Wellbeing Fund which are funds that are contributed directly to the communities through small local organizations that help provide families with concrete support systems, which are typically run by people they know and trust. The last priority on SCAA's radar is the Foster Youth College Success Initiative. This particular initiative is typically supported by legislators, with the funding increasing annually. This year the ask is for \$10 million, which wasn't answered, making it the first year it has remained the same at \$8.2 million.

One member reported the childcare system is better, however, the Empire Childcare Campaign was hoping to get \$1.2 billion additional dollars for the workforce, but the final budget reflected \$500 million. She added while the funding is something, it is very dangerous to have a poorly staffed childcare system, which reflects our current state.

Another member noted the domestic violence service providers were not included in the governor's budget for the cost-of-living increase, adding it was unfortunate and while they are identified as essential workers, they are not included within the hazard bonus ability. Her understanding was that there was bipartisan support for domestic violence providers to be included in that cost-of-living increase, however, the governor's office ultimately declined.

Ms. Charles circled back to report SCAA's legislative priorities, starting with their intent to push the housing subsidy to include youth up to age 24, as that is not directly a budget ask. She noted they are supporting the priorities led by the Parent Legislative Action Network, one of which is, informed consent for drug testing parents and babies. This would require a medical professional to provide informed consent to pregnant women and mothers before they or their babies are drug tested, which is already in effect in New York City. She added this is the memo noted to have the most traction for this session.

Discussion with Sara Simon, Regional Director of the Syracuse Regional Office and Randall Williams, Director of the HEARS Line:

Mrs. McCarthy provided a welcome and opened the floor to Randall Williams, Director of the HEARS line, who provided a presentation on what the HEARS line is, starting with the meaning of the acronym, Help Empower Advocate Resource Support. The mission of the HEARS line is to assist parents and families by providing resources and referrals to a variety of services. Caring representatives guide families to services including, food, clothing, housing, medical and behavioral health care services, parenting education, and childcare. He reported that some of the resources and referrals the HEARS line refer out to include, parenting, pregnancy, early childhood, housing, childcare, adoption and fostering, education, food assistance, financial assistance, elderly care, health transportation, domestic violence, legal assistance, and referrals to local DSS programs.

HEARS line call volume for March reflected a heightened topic of "Information Gathering", which is believed to align with the release of the mandated reporter training. Additional high-volume topics include Housing, Childcare, Mental Health, and Parent Health. Call volume trends since the beginning of the HEARS line implementation reflected a slow rollout, with a steady incline, with the trajectory following suit with schools.

Mr. Williams reported typical call times range from 20 to 40 minutes, as call center agents are doing research on behalf of the caller to find programs to fit their needs and are still within existence. They anticipate call volumes will continue to increase in time.

Ms. Sara Simon, the Regional Director for the HEARS Syracuse Regional Office, provided a regional view of Family First updates. She reported that they approved the qualified residential treatment programs, and they are now in the process of scheduling youth that met the threshold of a long-stayer review. Adding that for children under 13, it would be done within 6 months and for those over 13, it would be done at either 12 consecutive months or 18 non-consecutive months at the QRTP placement. The idea behind it is that a review would be conducted by the local district in collaboration with the agency that is caring for the individual, with the agency providing documentation support.

OCFS is currently working on ways to include family voices within its system, one way Ms. Simon reported was through the onboarding of Family Policy Advisors. These advisors will be embedded in both the regional and home offices but employed through Families Together in New York State. Efforts will include a revision of the newly released mandated reporter training. Other OCFS efforts include an update to the Care Portal, and a pilot program involving 150 families randomly selected to receive \$500 a month for 12 months. These families would be those within the CPS

database. Some surveys and information are released but on a limited basis as they do not want data to be impacted.

David Haase concluded with follow-up items with the Eastern Panel highlighting an interest in fatality case reviews and the process behind them.

Debrief:

As the panel debriefed, Mrs. McCarthy noted a reminder from a previous meeting with Families Together in New York State, recalling the need for an evaluation of their Family Policy Advisors. She voiced she would be happy to draft a letter of support and send it over to WRI for further edits. Mrs. Chesna agreed and noted the Strong Start program has been very successful which could be highlighted in the letter to OCFS.

WRI Updates:

WRI provided updates that the Western panel reviewed the draft legislation and had feedback and edits, encouraging any of the Eastern panel to provide any feedback they may have. Additionally, the Schuyler Center is extremely interested in joining with the panels and their intent on redefining neglect, with a possible connection in the future. The last updates included a rework of operating guidelines, particularly in membership and advocacy efforts.

Meeting Adjourned: 3:00 p.m.

Next CRP Meetings:

- Joint Panels Roundtable: October 10th | Time: TBD