

NYC Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary
May 9, 2023 • 11:00 AM

Attendees:

NYC Panel Members

David Lansner
Jocelyn Brown
Marion White
Mathea Rubin
Wayne Ho

Welfare Research, Inc.

Darlene Ward
Liz Roberts
Heather Ditch

Guests

Kristin Gleeson, OCFS
David Haase, OCFS
Nora McCarthy, *Director*, Family Policy Project

Welcome – Liz Roberts

The meeting commenced at 11:15 AM.

OCFS Discussion

David Haase clarified that all child fatality reports are de-identified when released to the public, but the panel can access the detailed reports if needed. He mentioned that annual reports are regularly posted on the website, in response to a request from David Lansner for the latest report.

In a discussion with Ms. Kristin Gleeson of OCFS, Social Services law 422.2.A, which pertains to a special unlisted phone number, was mentioned. Ms. Gleeson expressed interest in exploring this further. She additionally reported on efforts to adopt a more flexible approach for mandated reporters. They are now encouraged not to report unless there is a clear need, moving away from the previous practice of reporting all cases. The aim is to avoid unnecessary involvement of Child Protective Services (CPS) and instead provide families with resources. A HEARS line has been established to assist mandated reporters in accessing local resources.

A member expressed confusion about the responsibilities of school counselors in the reporting process. Questions were raised about when counselors should make a report, their role in connecting families to services instead of reporting, and their obligations for follow-up. While another member mentioned the difficulty of refraining from reporting, as reporters may fear blame if something goes wrong. She expressed interest in discussing this further in future conversations. Mrs. Gleeson from OCFS emphasized a non-punitive approach towards low-income families, aiming to collaborate with partners to connect them with resources. The goal is to reduce reports of neglect related to essential needs like food, clothing, and shelter. Hotline staff are instructed to gather caller details before making a report unless it's essential.

When asked about narrowing the reporting process, Mrs. Gleeson explained that if hotline staff engage with a mandated reporter regarding a family, they facilitate warm transfers to the HEARS line, providing information to help the family in need. OCFS is in discussions with legal experts to refine the definition of neglect and is actively working to address false reports. However, if there's a documented history with CPS involvement, a report is still required. Mr. Lansner expressed the panel's willingness to have a more extensive meeting to delve deeper into the discussed issues.

A question was raised about SCR reports concerning children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Mrs. Gleeson explained that data on this isn't always available unless documented in the SCR intake report. David Haase added that IEP information is optional for callers to share but should be added, according to previous information from OCFS. Mrs. Rubin pointed out that OCFS had previously indicated it would be added. Mrs. Gleeson suggested it might be included as a checklist question and that they could explore the possibility of running a report on this data, which she would look into further.

The panel further asked about the staffing at SCR, specifically how many employees are handling phone calls. Mrs. Gleeson provided the following information: There are 140 employees on the phones who work around the clock, along with 35 supervisors, 8 managers, 3 assistant directors, and 1 director. She also mentioned that she is the Associate Commissioner, and Brian Kelly is the Director. Mrs. Gleeson expressed her willingness to remain part of the team, assisting in finding answers and collaborating on ideas in the future.

Discussion with Nora McCarthy, *Director*, Family Policy Project

The Family Policy Project initiated data transparency efforts 18 months ago, urging ACS to commit to it. Hotline call data from 2019 is available on the website, and charts and data can be downloaded. Recommendations were made to conduct more research on the triggers for hotline calls and examine ACS involvement in relation to race and ethnicity. There are plans to collaborate with Columbia University on a study focusing on public health's impact on child welfare. The emphasis is shifting from individual factors to infrastructure. Regarding funding, ACS's budget lacks flexibility, with \$200 million allocated to various purposes, potentially limiting redistribution to other areas from child welfare.

Meeting Adjourned: 1:00 PM