

New York State (NYS) Citizen Review Panel for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary

May 5, 2020 • 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Participants:

Eastern Panel Members

Mary McCarthy
Kathy Halas
Sharon Chesna
Carrie Jefferson Smith
JoAnn Merriman

New York City (NYC) Panel Members

Wayne Ho
Stan Capela
Mathea Rubin
David Lansner
Marion White
Jocelyn Brown

Western Panel Members

Todd Sage
Melissa Cavagnaro
Ellen Kennedy
Linda C. Brown

NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)

Renee Hallock, Associate Commissioner
Shelly Aubertine-Fiebich, Child and Family Service Specialist III
David Bach, Associate Commissioner
Cassie Kelleher, Associate Attorney
Gail Geohagen-Pratt, Associate Commissioner
Kathryn Shelton, Associate Commissioner

Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI)

Jennifer Goldman
Ellen Unruh
Darlene Ward

Handouts

Agenda 5.5.2020

Welcome – Sharon Chesna, Eastern Panel Chair

Impact of COVID-19 on NYS Child Welfare – Discussion with OCFS

- The Panels invited OCFS staff to join the meeting and discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on the NYS Child Welfare System.
- Associate Commissioner David Bach shared innovations from the field including the use of WebEx to deliver trainings, Zoom and FaceTime to connect with children and families, expedited certification of foster homes, and expedited certificates of operation for specialized units of youth under quarantine.
- Associate Attorney Cassie Kelleher shared information on collaboration with other state agencies. She described close partnerships and information sharing with voluntary agencies, local departments of social services, state agencies such as the Department of Health, and the federal government. Executive orders from the Governor have also streamlined communications.
- Associate Commissioner David Bach then described how counties and voluntary agencies are implementing virtual supervision and health protections for caseworkers. OCFS is evaluating CONNECTIONS to make improvements to better capture virtual supervision and case contacts. OCFS has also been distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizer, including child-sized PPE.
- Associate Commissioner Kathryn Shelton described trends in reports to the Statewide Central Register since the start of COVID-10. Call volume has been noticeably lower. Staff continue to screen calls in the same manner as mandated by regulation and policy.
- Associate Commissioner Gail Geohagen-Pratt discussed impacts on safety assessments, visitation, foster care placements, and reunification. Mandates for safety assessment have not changed, the approach has just been adjusted. Workers are now assessing safety through virtual contact as well as outside in-person visits, while practicing social distancing. OCFS distributed guidelines for virtual visitation as well as safe, in-person visitation to counties and voluntary agencies. The guidelines are available on the OCFS website (<https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/news/COVID-19/guidance.php>). OCFS has also been distributing PPE to local districts and voluntary agencies for distribution to foster families.
- Associate Commissioner Renee Hallock described impacts on access to family court. OCFS has been working closely with the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to minimize impact as much as possible. Courts have been utilizing virtual hearing for case procedures deemed high priority and hope to slowly open as the environment becomes safer. Some delays are occurring, but OCFS is mindful of case delays and is tracking them closely.

Parent Representation – Discussion with OCFS

- OCFS will begin utilizing IV-E federal funding to provide parents with legal representation and is working on guidance for the field.

Debrief and Next Steps

- OCFS agreed to provide answers in writing to unanswered follow up questions.
- Panel Members discussed recruitment efforts and meeting topics/guests for upcoming meetings.
- Panel Chair Sharon Chesna adjourned the meeting.
- Next Panel Meeting – Thursday, June 11th 10:00 am to 12:00 pm