

Joint Chairs Citizen Review Panels for Child Protective Services

Meeting Summary
June 15, 2023 • 2:00 PM

Attendees:

Eastern Panel Members

Kellyann Kostyal-Larrier
Mary McCarthy
Sharon Chesna
Kathy Halas

NYC Panel Members

David Lansner
Jocelyn Brown
Karen Steinberg
Marion White
Wayne Ho
Mathea Rubin

Western Panel Members

Todd Sage
Ellen Kennedy

Welfare Research, Inc.

Darlene Ward
Liz Roberts
Felicia LaClair
Kerri Barglof

Guests

Susan Chinitz (CFJI)
Kate Wurmfeld (CFJI)

Welcome – Liz Roberts

The meeting commenced at 2:03 p.m.

Presentation: Center for Justice Innovation

The panel members and those in attendance from the Center for Justice Innovation (CFJI) provided introductions. CFJI provided the panels with their mission of aiming to enhance justice system responses at national and international levels and provided more details on their Strong Start Court Initiative. This initiative is based on the national infant/toddler court team model and focuses on a two-generational systems approach to address the needs of very young children in abuse and neglect cases. It encourages collaboration at both the case and systems levels, providing timely intervention services for children and families. Piloted in various locations since 2015. CFJI noted the focus on infants and toddlers is justified by the significant number of babies involved in family court cases. Adding, in 2022, NYC family courts had 7,700 cases involving children aged birth to 3 years, with 39% of children under court jurisdiction for child protective cases having cases filed before age three. The intervention model involves clinical coordinators partnering with a dedicated Family Court Judge and an Infant Mental Health Specialist, along with other components like monthly conferences and specialized community service providers.

During the discussion, questions were raised about the program's research and evidence, with the response mentioning challenges posed by the pandemic. Despite limitations, initial findings indicated a reduction in the recurrence of abuse and maltreatment. The program remains under ongoing evaluation with a larger sample size and collaboration with national researchers.

Concerning case disposition, coordinators stay with families through court supervision, providing post-court support. Funding primarily comes from private foundations, with recent federal funding from HRSA for statewide expansion. The hope for sustainability involves efforts to diversify funding sources. Workload and barriers in accessing services were discussed, highlighting NYC's resource-rich environment and the challenge of resource disparities outside the city. Friction points were acknowledged, with resource challenges being a significant obstacle, especially in areas outside of NYC. The program is exploring strategies for addressing these challenges, emphasizing ongoing efforts and a focus on sustainability.

OCFS Meeting Planning

The panel discussed the agenda for the upcoming OCFS meeting, with a focus on addressing outstanding questions. WRI confirmed Acting Commissioner Suzanne Miles' attendance and emphasized the importance of understanding her priorities and vision. Wayne Ho highlighted her intent to become the appointed commissioner and suggested exploring potential action items related to primary prevention, federal funding utilization, and less invasive approaches with parents. The panel recognized the need for relationship-building early on and expressed interest in hearing the acting commissioner's priorities and vision before addressing lingering questions.

Operating Guidelines

Discussion arose about potential changes to the NYSCRIP operating guidelines, prompted by a letter from OCFS stating that the panel lacked the authority to dismiss members without following established rules. The issue of dormant members and vacancies was raised, and there was consideration of sending a letter to dormant members seeking their participation. The panel acknowledged the need for clarity on their authority and contemplated potential updates to the operating guidelines. The importance of legislation over guidelines was highlighted, with a suggestion to create guidance if not specified in legislation. In response to OCFS' letter on member disposition, there was a proposal to draft a letter emphasizing the need for collaboration to fill vacant positions.

WRI Updates

WRI delivered updates on ongoing child welfare legislative actions, discussing the passage of the anti-harassment and reporting bill in the assembly but not the Senate. Issues were raised about Senator Brisport's challenges in receiving responses from ACS and the mayor's office, a situation mirrored in the Family Miranda Rights bill. The Informed Consent bill was tabled due to a lack of consensus, leading to disappointment among the panel, considering the Governor's focus on children and youth. WRI also shared upcoming advocacy meeting dates and mentioned the soft launch of a new NYSCRIP website in the coming weeks.

Meeting Adjourned: 3:57 p.m.