

OCA Nominating Committee Minutes

Meeting Minutes
November 12, 2025
5:00 – 8:00 pm

Date of meeting: Wednesday, November 12, 2025
Start time: 5:00 pm
End time: 6:53 pm
Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Member Votes		Present	Vote I*	Vote II	Vote III	Vote IV	Vote V
1	Kiame Mahaniah – Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) (<i>Chair</i>)	X	X	X	O	X	X
2	Staverne Miller – Department of Children and Families (DCF) Commissioner	X	-	-	O	X	X
3	Cecely Reardon – Department of Youth Services (DYS) Commissioner	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	Beth Lucas – Department of Mental Health (DMH) Acting/Interim Commissioner	X	A	X	X	X	X
5	Jennifer Valenzuela – Children’s Trust, Executive Director	X	X	X	O	X	X
6	Linda Sagor – Pediatrician experienced in treating victims of child abuse, designated by the Mass Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics	X	X	X	O	X	X
7	Neha Sharma – Child Psychiatrist, designated by Mass. Psychiatric Society	X	X	X	O	X	X
8	Margo Townsley – Child Psychologist, designated Mass. Psychological Association	X	X	X	O	X	X
9	Meri Viano – Associate Director of the Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL); Representative from Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH)	X	X	X	X	X	X

10	Rachel Gwaltney – Representative of organization that advocates for children at risk of abuse designated by Children’s League of Mass (CLM)	X	X	-	X	X	X
11	Daniel Mahoney – Attorney experienced in care and protection cases designated by the Mass. Bar Association	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	Sandra Best Bailly – Social Worker designated by the Mass Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers	X	-	X	O	X	X
13	Kate Shea - Representative of organized labor designated by the president of a collective bargaining unit that represents social workers (SEIU 509)	X	X	X	X	X	X
14	Amy Nechtem – Person with experience in the juvenile justice system designated by the Chief Justice of the Juvenile Court Department	X	X	X	O	X	X

* (X) Voted in favor; (O) Opposed; (A) Abstained from vote; (-) Absent from meeting or during vote

Call to Order & Approval of Minutes

Secretary Mahaniah called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Meeting minutes from the prior session were approved by rollcall vote following a motion by Dr. Margo Townsley and a second by Kate Shea.

Proceedings

Formation of a Subcommittee

Structure & Membership

Secretary Mahaniah explained that the Open Meeting Law permits creation of a subcommittee provided it remains smaller than a quorum of the full Nominating Committee. He proposed subcommittee members include Undersecretary of Human Services, Mary McGeown and Deputy Director, Talent Acquisition and Recruitment Operations, Thomas McCartney, as they can provide expertise and support and do not count toward the quorum.

Vote I approved to form a subcommittee.

Several members volunteered to participate in the subcommittee, including:

- Justice Amy Nechtem
- Dr. Margo Townsley
- Kate Shea
- Jenn Valenzuela
- Dr. Neha Sharma
- Meri Viano
- Commissioner Cecely Reardon

- Rachel Gwaltney

After discussion and Rachel Gwaltney's offer to step back, the subcommittee members were identified and accepted by a vote (Vote II) included: **Reardon, Valenzuela, Sharma, Townley, Viano, Shea, and Nechtem.**

Candidate Pool Overview

Secretary Mahaniah then invited Undersecretary McGeown to share information regarding the process. She noted that over 120 individuals applied for the Child Advocate position. A preliminary review identified those meeting minimum qualifications, though many applicants possessed substantial experience. She indicated the subcommittee will later decide how many candidates to interview, and materials will be shared with them.

Recusal Considerations

Justice Nechtem raised concerns about possible recusals given the number of members working within child-serving systems. Undersecretary McGeown shared she would take this question to legal and provide information to the Committee on how to proceed.

Member Backgrounds and Intent to Serve

Several members briefly described the perspectives or expertise they would bring to the selection process:

- **Justice Nechtem** – 23 years as a judge; deep understanding of juvenile system responsibilities and gaps.
- **Kate Shea** – Representative of SEIU; experience in prevention, systemic reform, and worker-centered advocacy.
- **Rachel Gwaltney** – Executive Director, Children's League; offered to step back to ensure broad representation; works extensively with OCA on data initiatives.
- **Meri Viano** – Represents MAMH; brings lived experience and understanding of challenges faced by families.
- **Dr. Sharma** – Systems-level expertise she believes will be beneficial.
- **Jenn Valenzuela** – Public health social worker and Executive Director at Children's Trust; collaborates with OCA on prevention, mandated reporter training, and neglect reduction initiatives; also an ER social worker.
- **Commissioner Reardon** – Nearly 30 years in human services; legal and social work training; former public defender; eight years as DYS General Counsel; interested in oversight and quality.
- **Dr. Townsley** – Former DCF worker; psychologist traveling across Western MA; emphasizes variation in DCF office practices and the need for consistent services and testing across DYS/DMH/DCF.

Interview Process & Development of Questions

Overview of Options

Undersecretary McGeown explained that the Committee must determine a process for developing interview questions. Two options were proposed:

1. The full Committee submits questions in an open meeting, then the subcommittee refines them in Executive Session.
2. The subcommittee selects a subset of the submitted questions and presents them to the full Committee for approval.

She emphasized balancing fairness and transparency, noting that potential candidates may be observing the meeting. She also recommended sharing finalized interview questions in advance with interviewees.

Discussion Points

- **Question format:** Will interviews be structured questions with designated questioners?; McGeown confirmed 45-minute interviews with 6–7 core questions, with limited follow-up due to best practices and time constraints.
- **Candidate materials:** Were cover letters requested?; Thomas shared that cover letters were not required for this job posting.
- **Committee involvement:** Expression of preference for the full Committee to participate in drafting questions.
- **Workflow concerns:** Some members suggested written submissions of proposed questions, with subcommittee distilling them; others noted time constraints if the Committee attempted to handle both candidate review and question development in one meeting.
- **Public participation:** Several members emphasized the importance of having the full Committee's expertise shape the question pool before refinement.

Multiple members supported a process where:

- The **full Committee share interview questions presented during an open meeting**,
- Those questions enter the public record,
- The **subcommittee refines and finalizes the list in Executive Session**,
- The full Committee then reviews and approves the final set.

A motion was made and seconded to vote by rollcall and this approach adopted by consensus after two rounds of voting with discussion in-between votes (Vote III & IV)

Process Planning & Next Steps

Key logistical topics included:

- Use of a shared folder for materials suggested
- Ensuring members receive candidate résumés and job descriptions in advance.
- Need for clarity on screening processes (to be guided by Thomas).
- Recognition that two meetings may be needed: one for candidate identification and one for question development.

- Planning for a subsequent meeting that will enter Executive Session.

Secretary Mahaniah acknowledged concerns about timeline extension into January.

Thomas presented an overview of best practices and offered his business cell number for logistical issues.

Adjournment

Secretary Mahaniah requested a motion to adjourn. A Committee Member moved, another seconded, and the meeting adjourned by roll-call vote at **6:53 p.m.**