

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES –APPROVED

Office of the Child Advocate  
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families  
Thursday, December 16, 2021  
11:00AM-12:30PM

*Meeting held virtually via WebEx pursuant to the Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, s. 20 signed by Governor Baker on March 12, 2020.*

**Data Work Group Members and/or Designees Present:**

Maria Mossaides, OCA Director, Co-Chair  
Linda Spears, DCF Commissioner, Co-Chair  
Lauren Matteodo, Office of Senator Adam Gomez  
Lisa Rosenfeld, Office of Representative Finn  
Julie Wilson, Harvard Kennedy School  
Mike Dsida, CPCS  
Tammy Mello, CLM  
Bob Gittens, Cambridge Family and Children's Service  
Susan Elsen, MLRI  
Mary McGeown, MSPCC

**Government Associates:**

Ann Narris, CPCS  
Caitlyn Letourneau, Office of Senator Velis  
Kathleen Bitetti, Office of State Auditor

**Staff:**

Ruben Ferreira, DCF  
Emily Hajjar, DCF  
Paola Ferrer, DCF  
Andrea Grossman, DCF  
Cristina Tedstone, DCF  
Etta Lappen Davis (DCF)  
Kristine Polizzano, OCA  
Jessie Brunelle, OCA  
Janice Neiman, OCA

**Members of the Public:**

Rachel Gwaltney, CLM  
Kate Lowenstein, Citizens for Juvenile Justice  
Kate Nemens, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee  
June Ameen, Friends of Children  
Polly Crozier, GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders  
Sarah Ryley  
Other members of the public on the phone who did not self-identify

DWG = Data Work Group

OCA = Office of the Child Advocate  
DCF = Department of Children & Families

**Meeting Commenced:** 11:02am

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Ms. Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the virtual meeting. Ms. Mossaides recognized the presence of a quorum of Data Work Group members in the session. A roll call was not held due to the number of participants in the virtual meeting; members of the public were asked to identify themselves in the Zoom chat room.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Draft minutes from the November 19, 2021, meeting of the Data Work Group were provided to members via email in advance of the meeting to facilitate approval. Ms. Mossaides invited questions or concerns with the draft minutes as proposed and hearing no objection she asked members to vote on their meeting minutes via roll call.

Maria Mossaides, Linda Spears, Lauren Matteodo, Lisa Rosenfeld, Julie Wilson, Mike Dsida, Susan Elsen, Bob Gittens, Mary McGeown all voted in the affirmative. No members abstained or voted no.

The November Data Work Group meeting minutes were approved.

**DCF Annual Report**

Commissioner Spears briefly introduced this year's DCF Annual Report which includes new data elements suggested by the Data Work Group. She reported overall trends impacted by the pandemic. She introduced Mr. Ferreira, who said the most recent caseload data is starting to look like pre-pandemic trends. Commissioner Spears highlighted the fact that schools are back to reporting at their pre-pandemic levels, and reports from public safety have increased 17% since FY19. The Department believes that these reports are driven largely by an increase in domestic violence and drug-related concerns. Ms. Mossaides provided context that the rates of substance abuse have increased across the nation; increases have been reported by Massachusetts' Department of Public Health (DPH) as well.

The Commissioner opened the meeting up to questions and reflections on the annual report.

Members thanked DCF for the improvements in this report and offered suggestions for future reports.

A member suggested a deeper dive on educational attainment metrics to help identify early interventions to support youth in the child welfare system. The Commissioner agreed and clarified data definitions for the current graduation metrics. The graduation data only accounts for youth who are still in DCF care/custody who were eligible to graduate that school term on the date the

data is pulled. This number does not include kids who get their HiSet. A member suggested providing additional details on other educational attainment measures, including school stability, school discipline, IEP/504 plans, attendance, etc. This may need to be done as a separate, regular, special report. The Commissioner agreed that these are all important data points for youth in DCF care. Ms. Mossaides said DESE data is submitted on different timelines that may not line up with the DCF annual report.

A member added that the education data should also be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, age, and other demographics. One way the Department can do that is by using Tableau dashboards. The Commissioner stated the Department is working on their capacity to do a data visualization tool.

Another member added this report gives a good idea about who is in DCF care and provides opportunities for cross-agency reporting on special topics. Some of the data that would help inform policy/practices changes may not be in structured data. One other specialized report topic of discussion during this meeting included a mandated reporter report. The Commissioner said this could add some value, but the Department needs to balance priorities for additional data and annual report improvements.

The group discussed other recommendations for future annual reports including adding additional data to show racial/ethnic disparities across all DCF process points compared to Massachusetts general youth population demographics in addition to what is already reported—using Massachusetts youth population for some points and Massachusetts DCF population for other measures. The group discussed that both measures provide important information but explaining the difference between the measures is nuanced and requires more conversation. A member also recommended disaggregating kinship adoption and guardianships by race/ethnicity.

A member asked if the quarterly reports will be updated to reflect the changes made in the Annual Report. The Department has not considered changes to the quarterly report yet. The member suggested prioritizing special supplemental reports as discussed in this meeting and the Annual Report over updating the quarterly reports. Ms. Mossaides reminded the group that the quarterly report's purpose is to respond to more immediate issues and trends.

The group asked about a transition plan for the Data Work Group which is set to sunset at the end of January. Ms. Mossaides told the group the legislation extending this group is still held up in the Legislature. The Department and the OCA are open to discussion and comments from the public. Ms. Mossaides stressed the old legislative reporting mandates still exist and currently, do not reflect all the work the Department has done to update their annual and quarterly reports. The Commissioner said producing old reports and these new reports is a significant strain on her staff, and she would like to see the legislation updated as well. She made a commitment to continue to grow and evolve the annual and quarterly reports.

The group discussed the urgency around getting legislation updated to reflect the changes the Department has made. Ms. Mossaides said there has not been a lot of discussion around this particular bill recently. She has spent numerous hours speaking to the Legislature on this issue, and members who are able to reach out to the Legislature should do so. A member suggested continuing to discuss improving the annual report at the January meeting.

**Concluding remarks:**

Ms. Mossaides thanked Tammy Mello for all her contributions to this group as she moves on to her new role as Executive Director at the Key Program.

In closing, Commissioner Spears and Ms. Mossaides thanked everyone for their time.

**Adjournment:** 12:05PM