

Office of the Child Advocate  
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families  
MEETING MINUTES  
Thursday, February 25, 2021  
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

*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  
Representative Michael Finn, House Chair of Joint Committee  
Representative Natalie Blais, House Vice-Chair of Joint Committee  
Senator Adam Gomez, Senate Chair of Joint Committee  
Katie Verra, designee of Senator John Velis, Senate Vice-Chair of Joint Committee  
Susan Elsen, MLRI  
Bob Gittens, CFCS  
Mary McGeown, MSPCC  
Tammy Mello, CLM  
Ann Narris, CPCS (*alternate*)  
Julie Wilson, HKS

**Government Associates:**

Danielle Allard, Office of Senator Adam Gomez  
Debra Bercuvitz, Department of Public Health, FIRST  
Kathleen Bitetti, Office of State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump  
Abby Eshghi, Office of the Attorney General, Child & Youth Protection Unit  
Collin Fedor, Office of Representative Denise Garlick  
Michael LaFlamme, Office of Representative Michael Finn  
Philip Lynch, Office of Representative Denise Garlick  
Lauren Matteodo, Office of Senator Adam Gomez  
Jordan Meehan, MA Commission on LGBTQ Youth  
Lisa Rosenfeld, Office of Representative Michael Finn

**Staff:**

Andrea Bartolo, DCF  
Jean Clements, OCA  
Ruben Ferreira, DCF  
Paola Ferrer, DCF  
Crissy Goldman, OCA  
Emily Hajjar, DCF  
Etta Lappen Davis, DCF  
Kristine Polizzano, OCA  
Andrew Rome, DCF

**Members of the Public:**

June Ameen, Friends of Children, Inc.  
Anna Lee, GLAD

Norma Finkelstein, Institute for Health and Recovery  
Cristina Freitas, Freitas & Freitas, LLP  
Debbie Freitas, Freitas & Freitas, LLP  
Kate Lowenstein, Citizens for Juvenile Justice  
Jane Lyons, Friends of Children, Inc.  
Kate Nemens, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee  
Davida Schiff, Mass General Hospital for Children HOPE Clinic  
Jennifer Seaberg, Bay State Community Services  
Katharine Thomas, Institute for Health and Recovery  
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

Joint Committee = Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities

**Meeting Commenced:** 10:00 a.m.

### **Welcome and Introductions:**

Ms. Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the virtual meeting. She indicated that the meeting notice was posted on both the OCA's and DCF's web pages, and a copy of the agenda was filed with the regulations division of the Secretary of State's Office on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. 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 large number of participants in the virtual meeting; members of the public were asked to identify themselves in the Webex chat room and a copy of that chat room transcript is included in these meeting minutes.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

Draft minutes from the September 23, 2020 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 requested a show of hands to indicate voting members' approval. The September 23, 2020 Data Work Group meeting minutes were approved without abstention or exception.

### **DCF Presentation:**

Ms. Mossaides introduced the co-chair, DCF Commissioner Linda Spears, who spoke briefly about the disproportionality decision points to be described in the PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Spears then introduced Ruben Ferreira who displayed the presentation and reviewed the details and charts on each slide in detail. Mr. Ferreira presented race and ethnicity data breakdowns at each of

the following protective custody process points: 51A intake, 51B Supported Responses, Case Openings, Home Removal Episodes, Reunifications, Adoptions, Guardianships, and Exists at 18 or Older. At each process point he presented overall frequencies, the rates of disproportionality and relative rate indexes. Mr. Ferreira explained that data shows disproportionality evidence at the “front door” of the system. While disproportionality is not exacerbated as a child is processed through the child welfare system, data indicates disproportionality trends are not reversed either.

Discussion on the presentation continued with questions from the Chat window also being addressed. Questions included how the data was collected, and if DCF can look at the data by geography as well. Concerns were raised about the disproportionality at the 51A filing stage, and the point was raised by Ms. Mossaides that this data is also informing the work of the Mandated Reporter Commission the OCA chairs.

Other guests attending the meeting asked if data was collected on dually involved youth (youth involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems), and Commissioner Spears responded that is in discussion.

Ms. Mossaides indicated that the DCF presentation slides and a copy of the questions asked in the Chat window during the meeting will be circulated.

#### **Update on Legislation:**

Ms. Mossaides introduced Emily Hajjar, who was congratulated on her new position as DCF Legislative Director. Ms. Hajjar provided an explanation of the status of pending bills that are related to the work of the DWG.

Additional questions were raised about specific groups of data and next steps for this group.

#### **Concluding remarks:**

In closing, Ms. Mossaides invited members to contact her with ideas and suggestions, indicating that the OCA and DCF will work together to develop recommendations and at the next meeting of the DWG there will be a presentation of what has been assembled.

**Adjournment:** 11:05 a.m.

Draft minutes prepared by Jean Clements (OCA)

DRAFT MINUTES APPROVED AS FINAL ON JUNE 11, 2021