

Office of the Child Advocate
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families
Tuesday, January 25, 2022
10:00AM-11:30AM

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
Mary McGeown, MSPCC
Bob Gittens, Cambridge Family and Children's Service
Lisa Rosenfeld, Office of Representative Finn
Lauren Matteodo, Office of Senator Adam Gomez
Susan Elsen, MLRI
Mike Dsida, CPCS
Julie Wilson, Harvard Kennedy School
Rachel Gwaltney, CLM

Government Associates:

Ann Narris, CPCS
Kathleen Bitetti, Office of State Auditor
Debra Bercuvitz, DPH

Staff:

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

Members of the Public:

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
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: 10:02am

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 December 16, 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, Mary McGeown, Bob Gittens, Lisa Rosenfeld, Lauren Matteodo, Mike Dsida all voted in the affirmative. No members abstained or voted no.

The December Data Work Group meeting minutes were approved.

Discussion on DCF data visualization strategy update

Commissioner Spears introduced Ruben Ferreira who presented the Department's plans to acquire data visualization software. Data visualization software can help DCF modernize their data presentation. Mr. Ferreira presented the benefits of data visualization software and the capabilities of programs to:

- Expand access to data reports and visuals
- Help people see and understand data
- Make it easier to explore and use data to solve problems
- Speed up the process of discovery and insight building

Mr. Ferreira presented on the scope of work and process the Department has made to acquire this software. DCF is currently deciding which software is best for the Department's reporting needs. Once the software is chosen, DCF will work to get internal reporting dashboards implemented and then work to get publicly reported dashboards online. Mr. Ferreira and the Commissioner opened the conversation up to questions or feedback.

Members asked what the priority is for selecting the right data visualization tool. Mr. Ferreira said ease of use is a priority. Mr. Ferreira reiterated the timeline of releasing public dashboards to the group.

Legislative report outline review and discussion

Next, Ms. Hajjar presented the overview of the legislative report this group is mandated to submit since the group's mandate officially ends 1/31/22. The group discussed the outline of the draft report and asked what the purpose of the report was. Members mentioned that some elements of

the group's work were not captured in the outline. Ms. Mossaides questioned what those elements were and stated that the original legislative language agreed on by this group has since been modified and stalled.

Members suggested including a section of the report that would capture some of the "unfinished business" the group previously spoke on. A member mentioned the importance of educational outcome data included in that section. Other topics mentioned included benchmark reports, residential care reports, kinship guardianship subsidies, service deliver, racial disproportionality and decision-making points by area office. The Commission and Mr. Ferreira mentioned some of that data is incorporated from the Annual Report redesign. Members expressed concern regarding the draft outline recommendation to eliminate old reports that no longer are included in the Annual or Quarterly Reports.

Commissioner Spears stated her concern with leaving old reports in statute considering the Department does not have the ability to produce some of those reports. She stated to the group that redefining the reports and soliciting feedback on new reports has been helpful, but the Department cannot meet the reporting requirements as currently defined in statute.

The group discussed the original intent of the DWG and members mentioned they understood much of the old reporting would be captured in the re-designed Annual Report. The group discussed prioritization of other topics that have been discussed to varying degrees over the past two years and if the right membership is in the room at this point.

The group discussed the work of the DWG continuing, and the co-chairs agreed they would not convene the group without a legislative mandate but would continue to welcome feedback on the Department's reporting capabilities on an ongoing basis. Commissioner Spears reiterated her support for transparency but stated her concerns about continuing the group involved resources and the most effective tool and process to achieving the Department's reporting standards and goals.

Concluding remarks:

In closing, Commissioner Spears and Ms. Mossaides thanked everyone for their time and commitment to this work. The co-chairs expressed gratitude for the productive work that has resulted from this group's discussions and input. Members thanked the co-chairs for their work with this group as well. The group may submit comments and edits to the draft legislative report before submission to the Legislature.

Adjournment: 11:17AM

