

Office of the Child Advocate  
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families  
MEETING MINUTES –APPROVED  
Friday, July 9, 2021  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00p.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  
Lisa Rosenfeld, Office of Representative Michael Finn  
Lauren Matteodo, Office of Senator Adam Gomez  
Susan Elsen, MLRI  
Bob Gittens, CFCS  
Tammy Mello, CLM  
Mike Dsida, CPCS  
Julie Wilson, HKS

**Government Associates:**

Danielle Allard, Office of Senator Adam Gomez  
Debra Bercuvitz, Department of Public Health, FIRST  
Ann Narris, CPCS  
Kathleen Bitetti, Office of State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump

**Staff:**

Ruben Ferreira, DCF  
Emily Hajjar, DCF  
Paola Ferrer, DCF  
Lian Hogan, DCF  
Cristina Tedstone, DCF  
Jean Clements, OCA  
Kristine Polizzano, OCA

**Members of the Public:**

June Ameen, Friends of Children, Inc.  
Kate Lowenstein, Citizens for Juvenile Justice  
Lauren Koster, Skadden Fellow at the Children's Law Center of Massachusetts  
Kathleen Bitetti, Office of the State Auditor  
Cathy Madsen, Staff attorney at CPCS (CAFL Division).  
Audrey Shreve, Children's Law Center of MA  
Kerin Miller, State Senator Adam Gomez's Office  
Caitlyn Letourneau, State Senator John Velis's Office  
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

RRI= Relative Rate Index

RoD= Rate of Disproportionality

**Meeting Commenced:** 10:05 a.m.

### **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 large number of participants in the virtual meeting; members of the public were asked to identify themselves in the WebEx chat room.

### **Approval of Minutes:**

Draft minutes from the June 11, 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 them meeting minutes via roll call.

Maria Mossaides, Linda Spears, Lisa Rosenfeld, Lauren Matteodo, Susan Elsen, Bob Gittens, Tammy Mello, Mike Dsida, and Julie Wilson all voted in the affirmative. The June Data Work Group meeting minutes were approved without abstention or exception.

### **Presentation of Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Data based on MA Youth Population**

Ms. Mossaides introduced the co-chair, DCF Commissioner Linda Spears. Commissioner Spears told the group that they would spend time today following-up on June's meeting looking at data on disproportionality in the child welfare system.

Mr. Ferreira presented Relative Rate Index (RRI) data from FY21 Q1-Q2. He explained a request was made to keep the same comparison population across decision points using Massachusetts census date. He explained he will show the analysis for the intake process, but explained it is not logical to compare youth in DCF Custody to the general population; the more accurate comparison for that group would be the youth who are screened in to DCF.

He presented the RRI data from prior meetings. Mr. Ferreira explained to the group that when you do it this way, by pinning the base rate of disproportionality to 51A reporting, it accounts for the disproportionately out of DCF's control. Anything above 1.0 is potential bias for DCF and can increase equity across points.

Mr. Ferreira presented the data when the base rate of comparison is Massachusetts youth population. He showed how the data changed from prior measures (as shown as lower-case labels on the chart) to this month's (as shown as the capitalized labels on the chart). Members appreciated the data provided. The Commissioner indicated the discussion that is important for this group is to get to the "How?" and "Why?" of these disparities.

The Commissioner said she was struck by the dramatic underrepresentation of white youth and families that is not captured in this data. She reiterated to the group that there is no research supporting abuse and neglect differs depending on race and ethnicity of the families.

A member asked about surveying mandated reporters to understand their training better. The member also stressed the Asian race-category can be disaggregated further.

A member asked if a comparison between home removal episodes and case openings can be done. Mr. Ferreira said that is possible he has not done that yet. Another member proposed that RoD and both versions of the RRI be provided as side-by-side comparisons at each stage of the DCF process. They stated that other points of interest to conduct RRI and RoD for would be children aging out of foster care without a permanent caregiver.

A member stressed the importance of socioeconomic status and how to incorporate census data to identify a deeper analysis. Ms. Mossaides stressed the importance of deeper dives as a result of the Mandated Reporter Commission. She also stressed the difference in school districts across the state that also offer services to families before filing.

The Commissioner stressed the difference in referrals when wealthy communities have increased access to resources compared to other areas, and thus, depressed referrals. The Commissioner highlighted that disparities are a result of individual bias, systemic intentional bias, and systemic unintentional bias. Another member mentioned there has been discussion on service availability across the state and suggested that plays a role in under/overreporting. Ms. Mossaides told the group the FY22 budget includes \$1 million to a state child trauma center which will look at these issues starting in FY22.

### **FY22 Research Questions Brainstorm**

Ms. Mossaides introduced the next agenda item to brainstorm questions this group would like the DCF data to answer. The Commissioner said these conversations have been helpful in what DCF includes for racial and ethnic disproportionality in their annual report.

A member mentioned a previous request to continue to look at other decision points within DCF that is already reported in the DCF annual report. For example, children in kinship care and youth aging out are two other data points to look disproportionality. Ms. Mossaides mentioned data around the transition age youth pilots will also be coming out this year.

Mr. Ferreira said he can go through the list or data already reported by DCF and see what DMC data analysis can be included. He stressed that other data points will require additional coding requirements or policy changes.

Ms. Mossaides reminded the group that legislation is currently stalled to continue this group. She reminded the group of the other topics they also wanted to discuss including data on sexual orientation and gender identity, visitation, and outcomes. A member asked if this group would continue beyond the legislation. The Commissioner said that is fine, but at some point, she will be put in a position that she will have to reconsider if there is no legal mandate.

A member stated there are more data topics listed in the pending statute including kinship guardianships and educational stability. The Commissioner said some of that data is already availability.

Ms. Mossaides suggested another DWG meeting to be scheduled in August. She asked the group to fill out a Doodle poll to determine when that meeting should take place.

**Concluding remarks:**

In closing, Ms. Mossaides summarized for the group that the Commissioner and her team will work together to look at the additional questions raised and what RRI and RoD data should be added to the FY21 annual report. The group will also look at the other data points not yet addressed by this group that is in statutory language. A draft of the disproportionality data outline for the FY21 annual report can be circulated without violating Open Meeting Law. The Commissioner and Ms. Mossaides thanked everyone for their time.

**Adjournment:** 11:39AM