

Office of the Child Advocate  
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families  
MEETING MINUTES –APPROVED  
Friday, June 11, 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  
Lisa Rosenfeld, Office of Representative Michael Finn  
Lauren Matteodo, Office of Senator Adam Gomez  
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  
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  
Collin Fedor, Office of Representative Denise Garlick

**Staff:**

Ruben Ferreira, DCF  
Emily Hajjar, DCF  
Paola Ferrer, DCF  
Lian Hogan, DCF  
Cristina Tedstone, DCF  
Jean Clements, OCA  
Jessie Brunelle, 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

**Meeting Commenced:** 10:01 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 February 25, 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. Commissioner Spear, Lisa Rosenthal, Lauren Matteodo, Bob Gittens, Tammy Mello, Julie Wilson, Susan Elsen and Mary McGowean all voted in the affirmative. The February Data Work Group meeting minutes were approved without abstention or exception.

### **Presentation of Data: 51As filed/Youth by Race/Ethnicity at the Area Office Level**

Ms. Mossaides introduced the co-chair, DCF Commissioner Linda Spears. Commissioner Spears told the group that they would spend time today following-up on February's discussion on racial disproportionality data in the child welfare system. She explained this is brand new data analysis looking at data by DCF Region and Area Office. She explained the data looks at the "front door" of the child welfare system since that is where data disparities are largest.

Commissioner Spears then introduced Ruben Ferreira who displayed the presentation and reviewed the details and charts on each slide in detail. Mr. Ferreira explained to the group that there were some caveats to the data he wanted to start this presentation with: 1) Census data used for race/ethnicity rates of given towns (and subsequently DCF Area Office) is based on the general population for that county and not the area office. The Census data for that level of detail is not available. 2) The data presented are for a different time period than last meeting's; this data is for FY21 Quarter 3. 3) He added other race categories to the analysis from last meeting including Native American and Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. He cautioned that the relative rate index that

he uses to measure racial and ethnic disparities is extremely sensitive to small caseload population numbers and disparities for Native American and Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander should be interpreted with caution. That means relatively small numbers can inflate the RRI.

Mr. Ferreira presented the RRI data at the state, region and area office level. Relative to white children. Hispanic youth were 4.3 times more likely and Black youth were 3.1 times more likely than white youth to be subject of a 51A report. There is still much missing data at this phase. He showed disparity data for each DCF region including Boston, Central, Northern, Southern, Western. He also showed the available data based on DCF Area Office. The Commissioner noted that, importantly, there is no evidence that race alone increases the risk for abuse and neglect, and she emphasized the data represents structural issues. Some members asked about specific Area Office breakdowns, for which Mr. Ferreira reminded the group small populations can influence RRI.

### **Presentation of Data: 51As filed/Youth by Race/Ethnicity by Mandated Reporter Type**

Mr. Ferreira told the group this data analysis is brand new and looks at reporter type: mandated reporter, not a mandatory reporter, or anonymous reporter and what category of mandated reporter if that applied. Ms. Mossaides reminded the group to write down their questions based on what they learned.

Mandated reporters, more than non-mandatory or anonymous reporters, reported Black and Hispanic youth as subjects of 51As disproportionately more than white youth. Mr. Ferreira broke down mandated reporter type by safety, school, hospital, or other mandated reporters. The greatest level of RRI was for schools. He proceeded to show the data broken down by DCF region.

The meeting opened to questions. Members requested DCF report the number of distinct 51As filed so the RRI had context. Mr. Ferreira agreed and clarified that the RRI looks at individual children. 51As on the other hand can report more than one child per filing. Other members suggested looking at other indicators with this data like socioeconomic status to see if that plays a role in reporting disparities. Ms. Mossaides told the group that this data is essential for another mandated commission—the Mandated Reporter Commission—and thanked Ruben on the behalf of the OCA and this group. Commissioner Spears added that while DCF does not have control over what is reported, they have a role in helping to solve these disparities. She told the group that while it is important to solve disparities within DCF process points as well, one way to make big impact is by addressing this “front door.” Commissioner Spears reiterated that there can be more than one factor at play in addition to race. It is not an “either race or something else” problem; it is a matter of figuring out how multiple factors can drive disparities in reporting. Members suggested bringing this data up to higher levels and digging deeper into individual reporting practice especially considering anticipated increases in reporting once the pandemic restrictions fully lift. Members were grateful for the data to support in advocacy efforts and bringing all stages of the system together to address disparities. Ms. Mossaides said it is important to monitor 51A reporting in

context of any major events during the timeframe studied. For example, this data looks at FY21 Q3 data in which the OCA submitted a public investigation report into the death of David Almond. During this time, students returned to schools and reports could increase due to that return. The Commissioner stressed when people react from emotion that leaves room for bias.

The group discussed other ways of looking at the data that were requested. The group discussed how to best prioritize all the research questions and data requests people have on this topic. Commissioner Spears stated her priority would be to look at outcome and timeliness data. Members also mentioned doing an analysis of all DCF process points using RRI compared to Massachusetts general youth population, not just to the DCF population at each stage. Mr. Ferreira said he did an initial analysis of RRI using Massachusetts general population data, but that looked like what he has already presented on. The Commissioner stated that DCF can do a “side by side” analysis of this data but emphasized the group’s role in determining the next set of questions that can lead to strategy and action regarding this data. Ms. Mossaides recognized that it is important to educate the public on how to read and accurately interpret data.

Members asked for the data request subject of this conversation be shared with the Data Work Group so they could meaningfully participate. Ms. Mossaides suggested a longer meeting in July to discuss remaining questions. She asked members to reach out to the OCA with their questions and thoughts ahead of time so the group can discuss questions organized by topic.

**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:** 11:05AM