

MEETING MINUTES –APPROVED BY DATA WORK GROUP 12/16/2021

Office of the Child Advocate
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families
Friday, November 19, 2021
1:00PM-3:00PM

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:

Kathleen Bitetti, Office of State Auditor
Caitlyn Letourneau, Office of Senator Velis
Danielle Allard, Office of Senator Gomez
Katie Verra, Office of Senator Velis
Ann Narris, CPCS
Cathy Sinnott, CAFL
Cathy Madsen, CAFL

Staff:

Ruben Ferreira, DCF
Emily Hajjar, DCF
Paola Ferrer, DCF
Lian Hogan, DCF
Cristina Tedstone, DCF
Kristine Polizzano, OCA
Jessie Brunelle, OCA
Janice Neiman, OCA

Members of the Public:

Rachel Gwaltney, CLM
Kate Lowenstein, Citizens for Juvenile Justice
Ivana Boyd, CfJ
Polly Crozier, GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders
Kate Nemens, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
Izzy Jorgensen, Harvard Kennedy School

June Ameen, Friends of Children

Etta Lappen Davis

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: 1:06 p.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 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 September 28, 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, Tammy Mello all voted in the affirmative. No members abstained or voted no.

The September Data Work Group meeting minutes were approved.

DCF/OCA Response to SOGI Data Collection and Reporting Letter

Commissioner Spears updated the group that DCF has been working with its IT and Research Departments to walk through where birth sex, sexual orientation and gender identity data are collected. Federal guidelines require the collection of birth sex data, and DCF added in the ability to collect in sexual orientation and gender identity.

Commissioner Spears noted two areas she anticipates change regarding SOGI data collection soon:

1. Family assessment and action planning (FAAP): The FAAP will include the opportunity to provide gender identity and sexual orientation data. DCF is aiming for an April 1 implementation date for this new action plan which will include additional staff trainings.

2. Applications for Family Resources for Foster Parents, Pre-Adoptive and Kin Homes: The Commissioner explained the importance for foster parents, pre-adoptive and kin homes to be able to identify themselves, have a diverse representation of homes for youth to see themselves reflected in, and make sure families have the necessary skills and training to be able to support

LGBTQ youth. The implementation timeline for this is not set yet, but the Commissioner is aiming for some time in Summer 2022.

Commissioner Spears stressed the importance of being able to input SOGI data at any time throughout an open case. She told the group that DCF continues to offer SOGI-focused trainings. The Commissioner told the group she aims to include specialized training for this population of youth in addition to the current awareness trainings.

Next, the Commissioner introduced Ruben Ferreira who discussed the data field changes to iFamily Net (iFN) that have taken place. This included a change to the terminology “birth sex” with Female, Male, and Intersex options. He explained this information is collected once a case is “screened in.” Mr. Ferreira explained sexual orientation and gender identity data elements are collected at the response phase and beyond. These are not mandatory fields. He told the group that the Department hopes to make these mandatory fields sometime in Spring 2022. Last, Mr. Ferreira explained how naming conventions work in iFN. Currently, the system must use legal names and can use an “alias” field for other names. Preferred pronouns are not collected in structured data, but caseworkers can note a client’s preferred pronouns in their case notes.

A member asked if there was a plan to include “preferred pronouns” in structured data. The Commissioner said she is in conversation with the Department’s IT professionals to create mock-ups of new data fields within iFN which she can share with the group at a future meeting.

DCF Presentation of Annual Report Data

Commissioner Spears told the group the Annual Report will be released shortly. In the meantime, she asked Mr. Ferreira to explain to the group some key data highlights that can be found in this year’s annual report.

Mr. Ferreira started by explaining to the group that the Department received fewer protective intakes in FY21 compared to pre-COVID period. The rate of investigations that resulted in support or substantiated concern was slightly higher than the three-year average proceeding FY21. 51A reports from public safety officials increased this year, which the Department thinks is a result of increases overdose calls. The group discussed how this is further corroborated by an increase in after hours calls.

Mr. Ferreira explained this year’s annual report provides more racial and ethnic disparities measures throughout the protective process points. He highlighted that the “front door” (51A reports filed) is still a concern with Hispanic/Latinx and Black children over two times more likely to be referred to the Department. Mr. Ferreira continued to explain to the group that the data in the annual report reflects that DCF screens in reports and supports allegations (or finds substantiated concerns) at relatively consistent rates across race and ethnicity. This means DCF is not mitigating

the overrepresentation of Black and Hispanic youth but also does not appear to be adding to the disproportionality.

Mr. Ferreira continued to provide a high-level overview of the data in this year's annual report including data measures on caseload numbers, placement types, siblings' placements, young adult caseloads, and graduation rates. He added that this year's annual report provides more breakdowns to understand the sexual orientation and gender identity of DCF's population.

Mr. Ferreira explained a few areas of improvement and some concerns that can be seen in the data:

1. Placement stability increased to 79.5% which was a significant improvement. The Department believes this increase can be attributed to the prioritization of kinship placements and an emphasis to match children with foster families that can best meet their needs.
2. An increase in support to 18–22-year old's who volunteered to stay on with the Department. This also increased the number of Adolescent Outreach Workers who work alongside caseworkers to support life skills and transitional services.
3. There was an increase in time to reunification for the children who were reunified during FY21. The Department noted that while there was an increase in time spent in out of home care, reentry rates show more children are staying safely at home once they do return.
4. There was an increase in placement length of stay for those youth who exited placement during FY21.
5. There was an overall longer time to permanency resulting from court delays due to the pandemic.

The group discussed the disproportionality data and Mr. Ferreira suggested the need for a specialized report on the topic. A member suggested writing this report before the DWG disbands in 2022. The group discussed the adoption rates despite the COVID challenges.

Members were interested in hearing more about the increase in public safety reports. The Commissioner noted that reports coming from schools are still down and she believes that is because they are busy and overwhelmed right now. She suggested the increase in reports from public safety officials reflects the extraordinary stress families are under and the large number of parental overdoses. A member suggested correlating the time of allegation with allegation type. Ms. Mossaides said the OCA annual report, as well as DPH's reports, reflect similar concerns.

Concluding remarks:

Ms. Mossaides suggested members review the Annual Report between now and the next meeting. She announced the OCA will be sending out a survey to educators to understand their knowledge of their mandatory reporter responsibilities. This information will inform an RFR to create an evidenced based mandatory reporter training for teachers to pilot in summer 2022. Ms. Mossaides

mentioned the pilot will include a pre- and post-test for the teachers as well as data collection measures. A member suggested sending the survey out in January instead of December. In closing, Commissioner Spears and Ms. Mossaides thanked everyone for their time.

Adjournment: 2:26PM