

Office of the Child Advocate
Data Work Group co-chaired by the Department of Children & Families
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, September 23, 2020
11:30am – 12:30pm

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, Director, OCA - Chair
Linda Spears, Commissioner, DCF - Chair
Kathryn Cohen, CLM (*alternate*)
Michael Dsida, CPCS
Susan Elsen, MLRI
Collin Fedor, Office of Representative Denise Garlick
Bob Gittens, CFCS
Emily Hajjar, Office of Representative Khan (*alternate*)
Kay Khan, House of Representatives
Mary McGeown, MSPCC
Tammy Mello, CLM
Ann Narris, CPCS (*alternate*)
Maia Raynor, Office of Senator Chang-Diaz
Julie Wilson, HKS

Staff:

Andrea Bartolo, DCF
Rebecca Brink, DCF
Jean Clements, OCA
Ruben Ferreira, DCF
Paola Ferrer, DCF
Ryan Fitzgerald, DCF
Lian Hogan, DCF
Etta Lappen Davis, DCF
Kristine Polizzano, OCA
Andrew Rome, DCF

Members of the Public:

June Ameen, Friends of Children, Inc.
Kathleen Bitetti, Office of State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump
Polly Crozier, GLAD
Cristina Freitas, Freitas & Freitas, LLP
Juliana Hillis, MLRI
Kate Lowenstein, Citizens for Juvenile Justice
Jane Lyons, Friends of Children, Inc.
Jordan Meehan, MA Commission on LGBTQ Youth
Matt Pecoraro, Judge Baker Children's Center
Johanna Wakelin, Office of Senator Joan Lovely
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: 11:30am

Welcome and Introductions:

Ms. Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the first Data Work Group session of FY21. She indicated that the meeting notice and agenda were posted on both OCA's and DCF's web pages over the weekend, and a copy was filed with the regulations division of the Secretary of State's Office on Monday morning. Ms. Mossaides stated that the last meeting of the group was held on January 31st and that it had not been possible to maintain the quarterly meeting schedule due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ms. Mossaides introduced OCA staff members and then invited Data Work Group co-chair DCF Commissioner Linda Spears to introduce the DCF team. A roll call was held during which attendance of voting members, guests, and members of the public were noted.

Agenda & Presentation:

DCF Commissioner Linda Spears reviewed the agenda and briefly described each item that would be addressed. An on-screen slide presentation provided details on each of the agenda topics, and the Commissioner led the discussion on each of the items allowing for time to answer questions as they arose. Commissioner Spears stated that the agency's annual report is due to be released at the end of October; she highlighted the inclusion of addition data areas in newly redesigned reports, indicating that the changes were based on the Data Work Group's prior recommendations. In response to a question about the new reports, Ms. Mossaides answered by saying that in some areas this is the first time there will be structured data included which will cause many new questions to be raised.

Representative Kay Khan congratulated DCF on their work to make the improvements discussed, indicating that she was pleased with progress and wished to express thanks to all the workers and volunteers who participated in the data-gathering and analysis.

Moving to the next section of the agenda, Ms. Mossaides asked Commissioner Spears to describe the FY21 work plan for which slides were presented. The Commissioner reviewed each of the subjects in detail and answered questions as time allowed. Commissioner Spears spoke to the point that many of the changes needed to support the work plan will require funding for I.T. that is not currently in the budget. When asked about priorities for data collection moving forward, the Commissioner responded that there need to be decisions on where to put the focus, front door or back, and until then it is not clear which data elements will be prioritized.

Discussion on agenda items continued followed by questions and responses as time allowed. Commissioner Spears informed the group of two major procurements in the coming year that will affect DCF's ability to report, as items to be measured need to be defined. She also indicated that a redesign of the agency's financial management system will be a major project for the organization.

Ms. Mossaides addressed the group about the quarterly meeting structure and expressed the opinion that it will take too long to cover the "parking lot topics"; she suggested that group members think about breaking out into smaller working groups covering specific topics, including a group to comment on the annual report. Ms. Mossaides assured the group that the Open Meeting Law requirements would be met for the smaller working groups as required. She requested that members reach out to her to discuss the suggestion and to decide with which group or groups each individual would want to participate.

Concluding remarks:

In closing, Ms. Mossaides indicated that the focus of the next full meeting of the Data Work Group will be to set priorities for the year. She also stated that the DCF presentation slides and a copy of the questions asked in the Chat window during the Webex virtual meeting will be circulated.

Adjournment: 12:37pm

Draft minutes prepared by Jean Clements (OCA)

DRAFT MINUTES APPROVED AS FINAL ON FEBRUARY 25, 2021