



# The Office of the Child Advocate Strategic Framework FY24-26

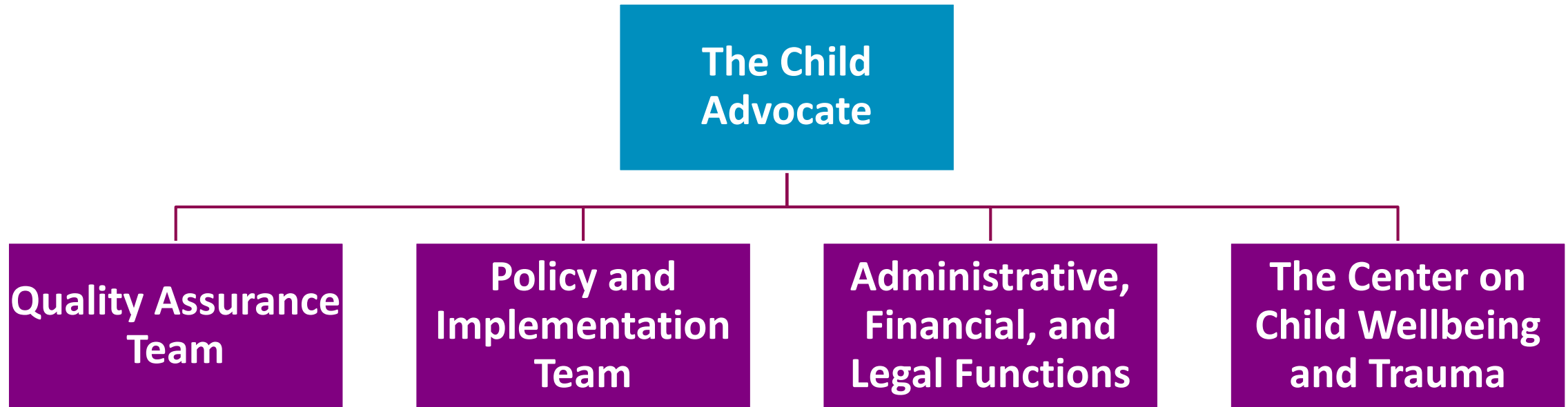
MARIA MOSSAIDES, DIRECTOR

# Our Vision for the Commonwealth

The OCA envisions a future where all our Commonwealth's children, and their families, have the opportunity to thrive.

The OCA believes that significant change is needed over the next several years to ensure the future our children, and specifically our children in the care and/or custody of the state, deserve.

# OCA Organizational Chart



# Our Mission

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) provides independent oversight of state services for children to ensure that children receive appropriate, timely and quality services, with a particular focus on ensuring that the Commonwealth's most vulnerable and at-risk children have the opportunity to thrive.

Through collaboration with public and private stakeholders, the OCA identifies gaps in state services and recommends improvements in policy and practice. The OCA also serves as a resource for families who are receiving, or are eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth.

# Senior Leadership Team

- ▶ **Christine Palladino-Downs** – Senior Director of Quality Assurance
- ▶ **Melissa Threadgill** – Senior Director of Policy & Implementation
- ▶ **Cristine Goldman** – General Counsel
- ▶ **Dan Arnold** – Chief Administrative & Financial Officer
- ▶ **Ari Fertig** – Legislative and Communications Director
- ▶ **Audrey Smolkin** – Executive Director, Center on Child Wellbeing & Trauma

# Strategic Planning

- ▶ Planning cycle is for three years – most recently FY24-FY26
- ▶ Based on 8 goals
- ▶ Annual planning happens within this framework and helps determine which projects are prioritized
- ▶ Year two planning is scheduled for the spring 2024

# Policy and Implementation Team Functions

## ▶ **Policy Research & Recommendations**

- ▶ Conduct policy research & draft policy reports on key topics related to the provision of state services to children.
- ▶ Staff OCA-led Commissions (Juvenile Justice Policy & Data Board, Childhood Trauma Taskforce).

## ▶ **Implementation & Evaluation**

- ▶ Incubate, in partnership with others, innovative new programs and services designed to improve the quality of state services (e.g. Diversion, Transition Age Youth Housing Support & Services).

## ▶ **Legislative & External Relations**

- ▶ Manage OCA's advocacy with Legislature.
- ▶ Manage OCA communications & external affairs.

# Quality Assurance Team Functions

- ▶ **Complaint Line**

- ▶ Staff listen to concerns and provide resources, information, and other options to help address the problems raised.

- ▶ **Reviews of DCF-Substantiated Abuse/Neglect in Out of Home Settings**

- ▶ Staff review reports to evaluate the safety and wellbeing of the child(ren) involved and the quality of the DCF investigation.
  - ▶ Staff also identify trends and patterns in substantiated reports in out-of-home settings to respond to systemic and cross-agency issues.

- ▶ **Critical Incident Reports (CIRs)**

- ▶ Staff carefully review each critical incident report, follow-up with the agency to learn more about the situation and, as appropriate, provide recommendations for improvement of state agency policy, procedure, or case practice.
  - ▶ Can also lead to multi-system investigations (e.g. David Almond, Harmony Montgomery).



# General Counsel

- ▶ **Mandated Reporter Training with Educator-Specific Module**
  - ▶ Launched in August 2023: online, on-demand, free, evidence-based
  - ▶ child-centered analysis, promoting structured thinking, addressing cultural and demographic bias and disproportionality, provides a resource library
- ▶ **Residential Schools Working Group**
  - ▶ Continuation of work begun in 2016 that resulted in the 2017 recommendations to improve the oversight and monitoring of residential schools
  - ▶ Interagency meeting designed as an early-warning and problem-solving team: OCA, EOE, EEC, DCF, DMH

# Center on Child Wellbeing and Trauma

- ▶ Created from recommendation of the Childhood Trauma Task Force
- ▶ Initial implementation began as a pilot conducted through UMass Chan Medical School – ForHealth (formerly Commonwealth Medicine)
- ▶ In FY24 is transitioning from UMass to OCA
- ▶ Spreading Trauma Informed and Responsive (TIR) methods in three areas
  - ▶ **Assessment and Coaching Exploration and Readiness** - Trauma-Informed Organizational Assessment (TIOA)
  - ▶ **Learning Communities** - Supporting child-serving professionals in becoming TIR
  - ▶ **Systems Transformation** - Worked directly with a variety of state agencies to increase state employee and provider knowledge of TIR care

# External Relations

- ▶ Meeting with advocacy groups
- ▶ Meeting with Legislature
- ▶ Ensuring youth know their rights and have access to OCA complaint line
- ▶ Reaching out to congregate care



Questions?