

Office of the Child Advocate
Annual Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
Thursday, November 7th, 2019
1:30pm-3:30pm

Council Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides, The Child Advocate, Chair
Secretary Marylou Sudders (EOHHS)
Secretary James Peyser (EOE)
Commissioner Joan Mikula (DMH)
Commissioner Peter Forbes (DYS)
Commissioner Steven Florio (MCDH)
Mary Skahen (DTA)
Nina Marchese (DESE)
Michelle Cristello (Child Support Enforcement Agency)
Michael Dsida (CPCS)
Tom Capasso (Juvenile Court)
Jack Miller (Children's Trust)
Joseph Ayoub (Public Designee)
Janet George (DDS)
Commissioner Samantha Aigner-Treworgy (EEC)
Susan Levin (MCB)

OCA Staff:

Christine Palladino-Downs (OCA)
Crissy Goldman (OCA)
Melissa Threadgill (OCA)
Lindsay Morgia (OCA)
Alicia Raphalian (OCA)
Melissa Williams (OCA)
Kristine Polizzano (OCA)
Karen Marcarelli (OCA)
Jean Clements (OCA)

Meeting Commenced: 1:35pm

Welcome and Introduction from the Child Advocate:

Maria Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the Office of the Child Advocate's 2019 annual Advisory Council meeting, and each person introduced themselves.

Ms. Mossaides recognized this is her 4th year in the role of the Child Advocate and spoke generally about the office's accomplishments and goals. She referred to the OCA as a "neutral convener" between the state agencies and providers to address ongoing issues affecting children and youth.

Ms. Mossaides discussed the new mandate that was assigned to the OCA last fiscal year, which was to develop and chair the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board (JJPAD) as well as the Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF). Melissa Threadgill, the OCA's Director of Juvenile Justice Initiatives, has since launched the board and task force. Ms. Mossaides explained that both the JJPAD and CTTF are expected to continue with no sunset provisions in place. Ms. Threadgill will present on the JJPAD's current initiatives and findings thus far, further into the meeting.

Ms. Mossaides reviewed the agenda and stated that she would like to have an open discussion on the role of the Advisory Council. She stated that the OCA's enabling legislation requires them to host their Advisory Council on an annual basis (at minimum) and would like to build a greater understanding on the members' expectations and thoughts regarding their participation.

Lastly, Ms. Mossaides mentioned that OCA staff will provide updates on the activities and current initiatives of the office.

Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board (JJPAD) and Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF) Presentation:

Ms. Mossaides introduced Ms. Threadgill, who will present on the current status of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board (JJPAD) and the Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF).

Ms. Threadgill explained the JJPAD and CTTF were created and launched as a result of the Criminal Justice Reform Bill from FY19. She then discussed the purpose and goals of the JJPAD and CTTF.

The JJPAD was tasked with evaluating the juvenile justice system while acknowledging its overlap with the child welfare system. The Board had three main goals for its first year.

1. Improving Aggregate Data Collection
2. Improve and Expand Community Based Interventions
3. Evaluate the Impact of the Juvenile Justice Bill

Improving Aggregate Data Collection

Ms. Threadgill explained that various state agencies manage their own data for juvenile-justice system involved youth. As a result, analyzing the data systems currently in place has been challenging as each agency collects data using different methods. She stated that in the first year, the JJPAD has cataloged the types of available data, data collection methods, and used data to figure out what point youth are entering the system and what youth are going into DYS programs. The Board also started looking into geographic and racial disparities. A report was released in June 2019 to the Legislature and can be found on the OCA's website. The OCA and JJPAD understands that there are many outside stakeholders that have an interest in juvenile justice data, and because of this, the OCA is in the process of creating a user-friendly aggregate data website with a target launch date of 2020.

Improve and Expand Community Based Interventions

Ms. Threadgill stated that there are four entities that can divert youth in the Commonwealth, and they include law enforcement, judges, district attorneys, and clerk magistrates. In an effort to look further into this, the JJPAD developed a Community-Based Interventions Subcommittee that focuses on this specific topic, especially in terms of understanding what services are currently available and what services are missing. The JJPAD will release a CBI report this Fall 2019.

Evaluate the Impact of the Juvenile Justice Bill

The JJPAD Board explores trends and issues that practitioners are experiencing and seeing in the field. In order to get a deeper understanding, the Board developed working groups in specialized areas such as juvenile arrest procedures and school resource officers. These working groups meet regularly and have each released their own reports. They are currently working on a report for this Fall with recommendations on next steps.

Ms. Threadgill then discussed the purpose of the Childhood Trauma Task Force, which is to look at how experiences of trauma can lead youth into the juvenile justice system. The initial report will be released in December 2019. One of the primary findings of this task force was that although there has been an enormous focus on childhood trauma, there is no universal definition and agreed-upon best practices for being Trauma-Informed and Responsive (TIR). The task force is in the process of creating a broad guidelines document on Trauma-Informed and Responsive practices that can be adapted and used across various sectors such as law enforcement, early childhood education, educators, and providers. This will include developing recommendations on how the Commonwealth can provide assistance to agencies implementing the Trauma-Informed and Responsive work.

Ms. Threadgill allotted time for questions and comments and the discussion resulted in conversations surrounding the possibility of working with university students to assist with the data analysis, focusing on special populations including deaf and hard of hearing and LGBTQ youth, and making sure that we remain aware of hidden and unanticipated barriers that can be created as a result of expanding access to services.

Ms. Threadgill wrapped up her presentation by inviting everyone to attend any of the JJPAD, CTTF, or subcommittee meetings as all of these meetings are open to the public. Ms. Mossaides then acknowledge how fortunate the OCA is with having a wide range of stakeholders come to the table to discuss the broad range of issues that impact children.

FY20 Project Plan:

Ms. Mossaides provided a brief overview on the OCA's current projects and initiatives.

1. **Transition Age Youth Project:** Through collaboration with UMass Medical School and the Children's League of MA, the OCA has launched a project with the purpose of evaluating the services offered to youth who are transitioning out of state care. The goal of this project is to develop standards in services offered across agencies in order to make the process of transitioning to adulthood as easy and beneficial as possible.
2. **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Commission:** Through collaboration with DCF's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, UMass Medical School, and Elder Affairs, the OCA provided input and funding on a study related to the increase of grandparents raising grandchildren due to the opioid crisis and parental substance use.
3. **Review of the Mandated Reporter Law:** The OCA commissioned a stakeholder group with a purpose of conducting a thorough review of the current Mandated Reporter law. The current statute does not include many adults who have daily interactions with children and youth such as coaches and higher education professors. Along with that, there is no singular state agency responsible for setting standards and for overseeing the training of mandated reporters.

Ms. Mossaides introduced Crissy Goldman, the Office of the Child Advocate's Director of Policy and Legal Counsel, who will speak in depth about the Mandated Reporter Working Group and its current activities.

Ms. Goldman explained the Mandated Reporter Working Group is comprised of various child-serving state agencies and representation from the MA Legislature. At this point, they have

completed phase one which was to take a look at the 51A and 51B statute to see what's included and what the implications are of those inclusions.

The second phase of the Mandated Reporter Working Group is to meet with various stakeholders and speak with mandated reporters from different professions to better understand what their experiences with reporting 51As have been. The final phase will be to look at the legislation and provide recommendations through a formal report submitted to the Legislature.

Ms. Mossaides next introduced Ms. Palladino-Downs, the Office of the Child Advocate's Senior Director of Quality Assurance, who will speak about the office's traditional core mandates.

Ms. Palladino-Downs briefly discussed the OCA's Complaint Line and the office's mandate to receive complaints on behalf of children receiving services in Massachusetts. She recognized that feedback has been provided to the OCA in past Advisory Council meetings and those changes were implemented over the past couple of years. As an example, after receiving feedback from the Advisory Council where members recognized that not all Complaint Line contacts were made up of actual complaints, the OCA developed a method of categorizing Complaint Line contacts to demonstrate that we receive both complaints and information/referral requests. Information and Referral requests are contacts that do not have any inherent concerns or complaints embedded within the inquiry. Along with the type of call, the OCA tracks data on the role of the person contacting the office, what their complaint or information/referral request was about, state agency involvement, and the recommendations the OCA provided to the person. One trend that the OCA has been tracking is the lack of services in certain areas of the state, such as Western Massachusetts.

Ms. Palladino-Downs explained the OCA receives 400 initial contacts on average each fiscal year. The database system that the OCA utilizes does not have the capacity to track the number of follow-up contacts with a specific individual. Instead, we track how many unique individuals contact the OCA for the first time each fiscal year. In other words, if a person calls five times regarding the same situation, our numbers will only reflect one initial contact.

Ms. Palladino-Downs discussed the OCA's outreach plan that was developed and launched in FY19 as a result of recognizing the lack of visibility of the Complaint Line across the Commonwealth. She also spoke about the OCA's statute and how the office is mandated to take complaints from youth, focusing specifically on youth in foster care. In an effort to increase the number of youth who contact the Complaint Line, the OCA is in the process of developing a youth outreach plan with a launch date of FY20. Along with this, the OCA is also in the process of developing a Complaint Line follow-up survey to be launch in January 2020 in an effort to better understand the helpfulness of the Complaint Line and what improvements can be made.

Ms. Palladino-Downs allotted time for questions and comments and the discussion resulted in conversations surrounding trends found on the Complaint Line, the breakdown of complaints versus information and referral requests, confidentiality, and the process of responding and following-up on Complaint Line contacts.

Ms. Palladino-Downs then spoke about the OCA's mandate to receive all Critical Incident Reports from child-serving state agencies. She stated that in FY17, the mandate expanded to include the requirement of reporting all emotional injury CIRs to the OCA along with the already established fatalities, near fatalities, and serious bodily injuries. Emotional injuries occur when any child receiving state services is known to witness a fatality or near fatality of another person. The majority of the emotional injury CIRs involve children and youth witnessing the fatal and non-fatal overdoses of their parents and caretakers. As a result of this, the OCA is currently working with UMass Medical School to look into the services available for children who have experienced these types of emotional injuries to better understand promising practices, frameworks, and to address gaps in services. The OCA will then make recommendations on how to best support these youth.

Discussion on the Role of the OCA Advisory Council:

Ms. Mossaides discussed the role of the OCA Advisory Council and the value of its members and meetings. She explained that the Massachusetts OCA is one of 11 OCA agencies nationwide that operate independently. Out of the independent OCAs, one state has an advisory board with one member from each county present, and two other independent OCAs have advisory boards inclusive of legislative members.

Ms. Mossaides allowed room for discussion in order to get a sense from the Advisory Council members on what changes they would like to see happen with their role, their contributions, and if the OCA should request the statute to be amended regarding the requirement of an advisory board. Formally, Ms. Mossaides understands that an annual meeting does not seem to be beneficial for both the agency and its council members.

Advisory Council members appreciated the opportunity to speak about their perceived role and how to create a framework that allows for members to add value to the work of the OCA. The absence of mandated duties in the enabling legislation surrounding the purpose of the Advisory Council limits the council's current value and its vagueness offers no guidance. One idea that was brought up was to diversify the membership of the council to include parents, outside experts, transition age youth, and other people who are impacted by the work of the OCA.

It was decided that the OCA will establish a small subcommittee made up of current council members to discuss the purpose of the board, expanding membership, and next steps. Ms.

Mossaides asked members to reach out to her directly if they wish to be a part of the subcommittee.

Ms. Mossaides thanked everyone for their collaboration throughout the year and mentioned that the work of the OCA could not be done without them.

Adjournment: 2:38pm

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