

Office of the Child Advocate
Advisory Board
November 28, 2023
3:00PM-4:30PM
Meeting held virtually
DRAFT MINUTES – NOT VOTED ON

Board Members or Designees Present:

Secretary Tutwiler (EOE)
Commissioner Kershaw (EEC)
Commissioner Ryder (DDS)
Commissioner Sotonwa (MCD)
Commissioner McCue (DTA)
Commissioner Oliviera (MCB)
Deputy Commissioner Cristello (DOR)
Erica Bedard (DCF)
Rachel Wallack (AOJC)
Brian Pariser (AOPFC)
Arielle Mullaney Poncia (EOPSS)
Thula Sibanda (DYS)
Jennifer Valenzuela (Children's Trust)

OCA Staff:

Maria Mossaides
Christine Palladino-Downs
Cristine Goldman
Melissa Threadgill
Ari Fertig
Audrey Smolkin
Dan Arnold
Dana DeShiro
Bekah Thomas
Jean Clements
Arianna Turner

Other Attendees:

Heidi Gold (EOE)
Delaney Corcoran (EOE)
Casey Cunningham (EOE)
Anna P (interpreter)
Jo Linda (Interpreter)

Meeting Commenced: 3:03PM

Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the OCA Advisory Board virtual meeting and invited members to introduce themselves. She then presented an overview of the meeting structure.

Review and Approval of Minutes from the 2022 Meeting

Ms. Mossaides stated that a quorum of members who attended the 2022 advisory board meeting was not present, and the minutes were unable to be approved.

Presentation of the OCA's Strategic Framework FY24-26

Ms. Mossaides provided an overview of the meeting's presentation. She then presented the OCA's vision for the Commonwealth and the OCA's mission, reviewed the OCA's organizational chart, and introduced the OCA's senior leadership staff.

Ms. Mossaides provided an overview of the OCA's strategic planning process, highlighting the eight specific goal areas that the OCA has for FY24-26:

- Safety, high quality services and continuous quality improvement
- Prevention and breaking the cycle
- Transition into adulthood
- Addressing the needs of diverse populations, especially newcomer children
- High/complex behavioral health needs
- Awareness of services
- High quality data
- OCA capacity

Ms. Mossaides then welcomed Ms. Threadgill to present on the functions of the Policy and Implementation Team.

Ms. Threadgill introduced herself and began presenting the policy research and recommendations functions of the team. She highlighted several notable current projects, including Children Requiring Assistance legislation, a Family Resource Center deep dive, a Problematic Sexual Behaviors project, and a Language Access project.

Ms. Threadgill then provided an overview of the implementation and evaluation work of the team, explaining that the OCA incubates ideas and then finds permanent spaces for successful programs within state agencies. She shared the successes of two such programs: the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program and the Transition Aged Youth Housing Stabilization and Support Program.

Ms. Threadgill wrapped up her portion of the presentation by sharing that Mr. Fertig would dive into the legislative and external relations functions of the team later on.

Ms. Mossaides then welcomed Ms. Palladino-Downs to present on the Quality Assurance Team Functions.

Ms. Palladino-Downs shared that the quality assurance team manages the three core statutory functions of the office and provided an overview of those functions:

- Running the Complaint Line, which receives 500 initial calls a year.
- Reviews of DCF-substantiated abuse/neglect in out of home settings
- Critical Incident Reports

Ms. Palladino-Downs also discussed the team's investigative work and several initiatives the team has worked on including projects about youth suicide, infant safe sleep, and work with the Child Fatality Review team.

Ms. Mossaides then welcomed Ms. Goldman to present on her role as general counsel at the OCA.

Ms. Goldman introduced herself and then provided an overview of two recent projects:

- A mandated reporter training with an educator-specific module
- A residential schools working group which has monthly meetings focused on addressing the challenges of residential schools with the goal of ensuring stability

Ms. Mossaides then welcomed Ms. Smolkin to present on the Center on Child Wellbeing and Trauma.

Ms. Smolkin introduced herself and presented an overview of the history of the CCWT, its recent transition to the OCA from UMass, and its core function of providing training and technical assistance. She then explained the CCWT's work in 3 different areas:

- Assessment and Coaching Exploration and Readiness
- Learning Communities
- Systems Transformation

Ms. Mossaides then welcomed Mr. Fertig to present on the external relations functions of the office.

Mr. Fertig introduced himself and began presenting, highlighting the OCA's work with advocacy groups aimed at ensuring those working closely with youth have their voices heard. He briefly described ongoing work with the Legislature and introduced a youth engagement project

designed to promote the work of the complaint line and ensure youth receiving state services know their rights.

Mr. Fertig then shared about visits that Ms. Mossaides and Ms. Threadgill conducted at Department of Youth Services facilities, which led to the OCA funding quick turn around infrastructure improvement projects.

Ms. Mossaides welcomed questions from the group.

Commissioner Sotonwa asked if the presentation would be shared. Ms. Mossaides stated that the presentation would be sent out and posted on the website following the meeting.

Closing Comments

Ms. Mossaides thanked attendees for joining the meeting and for their ongoing work and collaboration. She invited members to contact the senior leadership team if questions arose and expressed gratitude for the strong partnerships that the OCA has with their state agency colleagues.

Meeting Adjourned: 4:04PM