

Office of the Child Advocate
Advisory Board
November 14, 2024
2:00PM-3:30PM

Hybrid meeting held virtually and in person

Board Members or Designees Present:

Director Mossaides (OCA)
Undersecretary McGeown (EOHHS)
Justice Ricciuti (Chief Justice of the Superior Court) (virtual)
Commissioner Reardon (DYS)
Commissioner Miller (DCF) (virtual)
Commissioner Kershaw (EEC)
Commissioner McCue (DTA)
Commissioner Oliviera (MCB) (virtual)
Commissioner Sotonwa (MCDHH) (virtual)
Commissioner Gagnon (CJIS)
Brian Pariser (AOPFC) (virtual)
Arielle Mullaney Poncia (EOPSS) (virtual)
Emily Mallozzi (Children’s Trust) (virtual)
Iraida Alvarez (DESE) (virtual)
Elaine Fitzgerald Lewis (DPH) (virtual)
District Attorney Joe Early (MDAA) (virtual)
Anna Marie Ritchie (Trial Court) (virtual)
Faith Ambrose (EOE)
Michele Cristello (DOR)
Daniel Mahoney (CPCS) (virtual)
Rachel Gwaltney (Children’s League)

OCA Staff:

Christine Palladino-Downs
Cristine Goldman
Daisy Perez
Ari Fertig (virtual)
Audrey Smolkin
Dan Arnold
Dana DeShiro (virtual)
Bekah Thomas (virtual)
Jean Clements
Arianna Turner
Kerin Miller (virtual)

Other Attendees:

Anna P. (Sign Language Interpreter) (virtual)

Shari (Sign Language Interpreter) (virtual)

Meeting Commenced: 2:03 PM

Meeting Materials:

Meeting Agenda

OCA Fiscal Year 2025 Strategic Plan

OCA Values Statement

Draft Meeting Minutes from 11/28/2023

OCA PowerPoint Presentation

Welcome and Introductions

Director Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) Advisory Board hybrid meeting and invited members to introduce themselves.

Review and Approval of Minutes from the 2023 Meeting

Director Mossaides indicated that members had been provided with the draft minutes in the meeting materials. Director Mossaides stated that a quorum of members who attended the 2023 advisory board meeting was not present and therefore the 2023 minutes were unable to be approved.

Presentation of the OCA's Strategic Framework FY25 and Key Projects

Director Mossaides presented the OCA's vision for the Commonwealth and the OCA's mission. She then reviewed the OCA's organizational chart, noting that last year, the Center on Child Wellbeing and Trauma (CCWT) joined the OCA.

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

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

- Complaint Line
- Reviews of DCF-substantiated abuse/neglect in out-of-home settings
- Critical Incident Reports (CIRs)

Ms. Palladino-Downs welcomed questions. None were raised.

Ms. Palladino-Downs then reviewed key Complaint Line data from FY24, including the number of cases, the percentage increase in cases from FY23, the nature of the calls, and the number of people who contacted the Complaint Line. She also shared that DCF-related complaints were

generally about DCF personnel, placement issues, and/or concerns about the care and custody of a child. Ms. Palladino-Downs then reviewed data about requests for information and referrals.

Ms. Palladino-Downs reviewed several quality assurance team projects including the youth engagement initiative and Complaint Line outreach.

One member asked if other states have more youth who use a Complaint Line or a similar mechanism for contacting their OCA. Ms. Palladino-Downs shared that New Hampshire has more youth who contact them due to their high number of kids who are placed out of state. She also noted that most OCAs struggle to engage kids in the ombuds work. Director Mossaides added that the OCA is working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to ensure that Massachusetts kids who are placed out of state are in appropriate placements.

Ms. Palladino-Downs then continued presenting quality assurance projects and shared information on the recent overhaul of Salesforce database.

Director Mossaides welcomed questions. None were raised.

Director Mossaides then welcomed Ms. Goldman to present on her role as General Counsel at the OCA.

Ms. Goldman introduced herself and her team's work and then provided several updates, including information on the mandated reporter training.

One member asked how the OCA would evaluate the training's goal of reducing the number of inappropriate 51As filed.

Director Mossaides shared that one goal of the training was to redirect teachers with concerns that did not rise to the level of abuse or neglect to other resources, like Family Resource Centers. Director Mossaides stated that after the OCA collects three years of data, they will compare school system data to see if there was a reduction in inappropriate filing. She added that the OCA is hoping to identify the next professions for which they can create training modules.

Ms. Goldman added that the OCA will take a qualitative approach and examine how many cases are not reaching the threshold of abuse and neglect. Ms. Goldman also shared that the training website contains a resource library that has Massachusetts specific resources that is constantly updated and accessible by anyone.

Director Mossaides and Ms. Goldman then discussed the measures put into the training to address bias and shared that a report on this training will be published in the coming months. One member asked if there are plans to expand the number of languages in which the training is offered.

Ms. Goldman shared that the OCA is looking into which languages the training should be translated into next based on where most of the need lies and that they are open to suggestions for languages.

Ms. Goldman then continued presenting legal team updates including:

- The creation of the new role of Senior Legal Counsel at the OCA
- Increased administrative support to accommodate the OCA's growth

Ms. Smolkin then introduced herself and presented an overview of the mission of the CCWT, its recent transition to the OCA from UMass, and its FY25 workplan. She then presented information on EEC collaborations. Commissioner Kershaw thanked the OCA for their continued collaboration with EEC.

Ms. Smolkin then continued presenting on CCWT projects and discussed the JDAI Trauma and Racial Equity Empowerment Academy (TREE). Commissioner Reardon expressed her gratitude for the OCA's partnership on this project.

Director Mossaides added that it is important to the OCA that families have the same experience across all child-serving state agencies and that those agencies work in collaboration with one another to understand their shared clients' needs.

Ms. Perez then introduced herself and began presenting the policy research and recommendations functions of the OCA. She highlighted several notable current projects, including:

- Child sexual abuse prevention
- Agency training assessment
- Youth diversion expansion

One member asked if the expansion of the diversion program into youth sexting diversion was a result of a recent law which passed the Massachusetts Legislature. Director Mossaides confirmed that it was.

Mr. Arnold then introduced himself and discussed the goal of organizational excellence, including information on:

- Administrative operations, with record management as a key priority
- Administrative staff professional development
- Equity framework

Director Mossaides then provided background on the growth of the OCA and the changes that have taken place as a result. She shared that the OCA made the goal of organizational excellence to address the needs of the growing agency.

OCA Presentation of OCA's Core Values

Director Mossaides then presented on the development of the OCA's core values, which include:

- We are child centered
- We are trauma informed and responsive
- We believe diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are central to our work
- We value collaboration
- We strive for excellence

Director Mossaides welcomed questions.

One member shared gratitude for the OCA's collaboration and collegial relationship with other state agencies.

Closing Comments

Director Mossaides thanked attendees for joining the meeting and for their ongoing work and collaboration and left the meeting.

Discussion and vote on the salary of the Child Advocate

Undersecretary McGeown introduced herself and introduced the topic of the salary of the Child Advocate and how determining the salary of the Child Advocate is a statutory duty of the Advisory Council. Undersecretary McGeown noted that the OCA statute has a statutory cap on the Child Advocate's salary and that there is legislation pending that would tie the Child Advocate's salary to a percentage of the salary of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court.

Undersecretary McGeown then recommended the formation of a subcommittee of council members to discuss the salary of the Child Advocate with the goal of reconvening the Advisory Council and providing the full Council a recommendation on a salary. She also welcomed a further discussion of the salary and proposal for a subcommittee.

One member asked who sponsored the current legislation in the Massachusetts Legislature which would change the way in which the Child Advocate's salary was determined. Undersecretary McGeown answered that it was sponsored by Representative Finn, the former chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities.

Commissioner Kershaw moved that a subcommittee of members of the council be formed and that the subcommittee members be from agencies/entities not overseen by the OCA to determine

a recommendation for the salary of the Child Advocate. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McCue, and a roll call vote was taken.

Undersecretary McGeown, Commissioner Reardon, Commissioner Miller, Commissioner Kershaw, Commissioner McCue, Commissioner Oliviera, Commissioner Sotonwa, Commissioner Gagnon, Mr. Pariser, Ms. Poncia, Ms. Mallozzi, Ms. Alvarez, Ms. Lewis, Mr. Early, Ms. Ritchie, Ms. Ambrose, Ms. Cristello, Mr. Mahoney, and Ms. Gwaltney all voted in the affirmative. Justice Ricciuti abstained. No one opposed. The subcommittee was formed.

Commissioner McCue indicated that he would be part of the subcommittee. Undersecretary McGeown stated that the goal was for the subcommittee to meet in the next two weeks and for the full Advisory Council to reconvene shortly thereafter.

Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner McCue and seconded by Commissioner Reardon.

Meeting Adjourned: 3:12PM