

**Office of the Child Advocate
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
October 30, 2017**

Council Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides, Child Advocate, Chair
Secretary James Peyser (EOE)
Secretary Marylou Sudders (EOHHS)
Commissioner Peter Forbes (DYS)
Commissioner Jeff McCue (DTA)
Commissioner Joan Mikula (DMH)
Commissioner Heidi Reed (MCDHH)
Commissioner Linda Spears (DCF)
Commissioner Tom Weber (DEEC)
Michele Cristello (DOR/CSE)
Nina Marchese (DESE)
James Morton (AOJC)
Ilene Mitchell (AOPFC)
Mark Dumas (DDS)
Mike Dsida (CPCS)
Joseph Ayoub, Governor's Appointee
Amanda Kesterson, Governor's Appointee

Other Attendees:

Christine Palladino-Downs (OCA)
Karen Marcarelli (OCA)
Edith Rathbone (OCA)
Lindsay Morgia (OCA)
Melissa Christiano (OCA)

Meeting Commenced: 3:00PM

Introduction and Legislative Update:

Maria Mossaides welcomed the attendees and each person introduced themselves.

Maria spoke generally about her goal for the OCA continuing to be one of "adding value" to the work of the child serving agencies. The OCA is often utilized as a "neutral convener" to address identified issues that arise among and between agencies and providers. She also said that in the past year she has spent considerable time helping members of the press understand child welfare issues.

Maria then talked about the OCA's work on legislative issues, including bills to prevent child sexual abuse; to raise the age of marriage in Massachusetts; and to prohibit female genital mutilation. The OCA does not support a bill which seeks to create a new agency for Foster Care Review as the OCA believes that function is appropriately part of the Continuous Quality Improvement process at the Department of Children and Families.

Lastly, Maria discussed the work of the OCA with the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Taskforce (of which she is co-chair) as it does its outreach work across the state. The Taskforce is focused on reaching organizations that do not contract with state agencies, who therefore do not have as much access to information about preventing child sexual abuse.

OCA Fiscal Year 2017 Data Analysis:

Christine Palladino-Downs, Director of Quality Assurance for the OCA, introduced this section by reviewing the OCA's Core Functions as a framework for analyzing the data relating to the following areas:

OCA Complaint Line: In addition to providing the numbers for the Complaint line, detail was provided regarding the OCA's improved internal data tracking methods which are being used to look for trends in complaints and to shape the OCA response process. In addition, the OCA is using the information it compiled during its mapping work to augment its lists of available resources which are often used in responding to people who contact the OCA. This information will be added to the OCA website as well. The OCA is looking at the Complaint Line data on a continuous basis to help identify underlying service issues.

Reports of Abuse or Neglect in Out-of-Home Settings: Data was presented detailing the reports of abuse and neglect that have been investigated and supported by DCF in out-of-home settings. Christine reported that, based on reviews of these investigations, the OCA contacted a number of state agencies to discuss issues and trends. In addition, the OCA has developed a coding system for the supported investigations of abuse and/or neglect in residential placements and foster homes. The coding is a tool to better identify the types of abuse and/or neglect that is being found which helps the OCA "fine tune" its response to the agencies.

Critical Incident Reports: Lastly, Christine reviewed Critical Incident Reports (CIR). These reports cover fatalities, near fatalities or serious bodily injuries of children or youth receiving services from a state agency. In FY 17 the OCA improved its review process by better defining types of incidents and then refined its internal database to track which critical incidents were discussed with the reporting agencies. Additionally, the OCA expanded its liaison relationship with DCF and established one with, DYS, DMH and DESE and is working to develop similar relationships with other agencies. The purpose of the liaison relationship is to be able to discuss issues that the OCA identifies after its review of CIR.

Council members offered feedback and suggestions on the presentation and use of the data being collected by the OCA to better inform the public as well as to assist the agencies in improving the quality of their services to the children of the Commonwealth.

Child Fatality Review Program Needs Assessment:

Lindsay Morgia, Research and Policy Analyst for the OCA, explained the background of Child Fatality Review (CFR) in Massachusetts. She then explained that the OCA had agreed to undertake an assessment of how CFR is conducted in Massachusetts. She outlined the findings of the OCA's assessment of the local teams, including both the strengths and weaknesses of their current functioning. She then described the process for the assessment of the statewide team, which is in progress.

As part of this discussion, the issue of safe sleep arose and Council members discussed the many aspects of safe sleep and possible best ways to approach the issue as well as what resources might be available to do this.

Residential Schools Project

Maria gave a short update on progress on the Residential Schools Project, which is now in phase two. The OCA has contracted with a consultant to implement the recommendations from phase one, which includes improving the communication between and among the involved agencies and the providers.

Meeting adjourned: 5:00pm

Materials used in the meeting:
PowerPoint presentation