

Office of the Child Advocate
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 22, 2018

Council Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides, The Child Advocate, Chair
Undersecretary Ann Reale (EOE)
Commissioner Tom Weber (EEC)
Commissioner Joan Mikula (DMH)
Commissioner Linda Spears (DCF)
Commissioner Jeff McCue (DTA)
Commissioner Heidi Reed (MCDHH)
Associate Commissioner Lindsay Tucker (DPH)
Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner (DESE)
Nina Marchese (DESE)
Janet George (DDS)
Cecely Reardon, General Counsel (DYS)
Michele Cristello (DOR/CSE)
Michael Dsida (CPCS)
Ilene Mitchell (AOPFC)
Chief Justice Amy Nechtem (Chief Justice of the Juvenile Court)
Suzin Bartley (Children's Trust)
Chief Justice Judith Fabricant (Chief Justice of the Superior Court)
Alyssa Sciuto (DCJIS)
Lisa Beatty, ADA, Norfolk County (District Attorney's Association)
Dahalia Jackson (MCB)
Joseph Ayoub (Gubernatorial Appointee)

Other Attendees:

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

Meeting Commenced: 2:05pm

Welcome and Introduction from the Child Advocate:

Maria Mossaides welcomed the attendees to the 2018 Annual Advisory Council meeting and each person introduced themselves.

Maria recognized the 10th year anniversary of the Office of the Child Advocate and spoke generally about the office's accomplishments and goals. She commented on how the OCA acts as a "neutral convener" between the state agencies and providers to address ongoing issues. Maria also spoke about the OCA's recent work on refining the focus of the OCA and setting parameters for what projects the OCA would work on.

Maria then discussed the new mandate assigned to the OCA to develop and chair the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board (JJPAD) as well as the Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF). The OCA has hired Melissa Threadgill as its Director of Juvenile Justice Initiatives to launch the board and task force. She explained that Melissa was not at the meeting due to a family emergency and that Lindsay Morgia would be presenting in her place.

Juvenile Justice Initiatives:

Lindsay Morgia, OCA Research and Policy Analyst, discussed the new Juvenile Justice initiatives that the OCA is engaged in.

Lindsay explained the purpose of the JJPAD is to study and make recommendations for improving juvenile justice system data collection, reporting, and interagency coordination. At this point in the planning process, the key areas of focus include youth justice system diversion, community-based juvenile justice services, dually-involved youth, juvenile justice and mental health care, as well as gender, racial, and ethnic disparities.

Next, Lindsay discussed the purpose of the CTTF which is to review the current processes for identifying school-aged children who have experienced trauma and to examine the feasibility of providing school-based trainings on trauma screening, assessment, and interventions.

Melissa Threadgill has spent the past few months meeting with key agencies and stakeholders to review the existing research and the current related juvenile justice initiatives. The JJPAD Board and CTTF's first meetings will be held in the upcoming months.

Overview of the Office of the Child Advocate's Statutory Functions:

Everyone in attendance received a handout with an overview of the OCA's statutory functions. Maria described each statutory function and explained how the OCA fulfills each of the mandates. Handout attached.

Maria mentioned the OCA's database transition from IQ to Salesforce as an asset to helping the office run reports on data collected. Maria also commented on the work the OCA did with external agencies to redefine the Critical Incident Report (CIR) definitions in order to provide better clarity and a mutual understanding for all entities involved.

Overview of the Office of the Child Advocate's Projects and Initiatives:

Maria provided an overview of the OCA's current projects and initiatives. She explained the process for how the OCA decides whether or not a proposed project is an appropriate task for the agency. The OCA first determines if it has the necessary skills to complete the project and secondly, determines if the project is of enough significance to a special youth population or if it will have a broader effect on Massachusetts as a whole. The OCA also takes into account whether key stakeholders are interested in the project as well as if the OCA is seeing an increased demand of our intervention through case reviews and boards/committees it sits on. Some of the OCA's work during the past fiscal year include:

1. Data Working Group: The OCA is working with DCF and others to improve DCF's reporting to ensure that when public policy is made, it is done with the best information available.
2. Child Fatality Review: The OCA completed a comprehensive review which resulted in both local and state team recommendations.
3. Rewrite of the mandatory reporting bill: Maria explained that the current mandatory reporting bill is one of the oldest bills in the country and is not clear and concise as to who is required to be a mandatory reporter. Maria sees the value in adding sports coaches and persons involved in extracurricular activities to the list of mandatory reporters as these people have frequent contact with youth in an out-of-home setting. Maria discussed the need for online trainings being tailored to professions as abuse and neglect often have different signs depending on the setting. Although the new mandatory reporting bill has not passed, the OCA will continue to work on improving the current version.
4. Residential Schools Initiative: Two years ago the governor asked the OCA to convene a work group to consider the oversight and accountability of residential schools. The OCA

has completed the first two phases of this work through collaboration with DCF, DMH, DPPC, EEC, and DESE. The third phase will include a closer examination of programs to identify which programs are at risk of mismanagement.

5. Safe Sleep Initiative: An interagency collaboration, which includes the OCA, has developed a public awareness campaign to address safe sleep practices which will be first launched on October 23rd, 2018. Maria commented on how the numbers of safe sleep related deaths are climbing and that these are preventable deaths. One area of focus for this group is making sure staff at Commonwealth funded shelters are trained on safe sleep practices.
6. Transition Age Youth Program Evaluation: Through collaboration with UMass Medical School and the Children's League of MA, the OCA is launching a new project to evaluate the services offered to youth who are transitioning out of state care. The purpose of this project is to develop standards in services offered to make the process of transitioning to adulthood as beneficial as possible. The first meeting for this project will be held in early November.

Adjournment: 3:25pm

Overview of OCA Statutory Functions			
Mission/Responsibilities	1. OVERSIGHT: Ensure all children receive appropriate, timely and quality services.		
	2. ASSESSMENT and COLLABORATION: Collaborate with public and private stakeholders to examine services to children and identify gaps and trends.		
	3. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: Make recommendations to improve the quality of services.		
	4. RESOURCE: Serve as a resource for families who are receiving, or eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth.		
Statutory Function	How does the OCA fulfill this mandate?	PURPOSE - Why are we doing this?	OUTCOME - What is the result/impact of our effort?
Receive and review critical incident reports.	Review critical incident reports as they are submitted. Follow-up with state agencies as needed/identified. Recommend systemic improvements in policy or practice.	To inform our mission, perform our oversight functions, and identify gaps and trends.	Informs the OCA's work in all areas, but especially as it relates to oversight and making recommendations for systemic, policy and practice improvements in child-serving state agencies.
Investigate services provided (or lack thereof) to children and families of the Commonwealth.	Investigations result from information received on the complaint line, a critical incident, or through review of supported reports of abuse or neglect in out-of-home settings.	To identify systemic deficits and gaps, as well as opportunities for policy and practice improvements.	The OCA makes recommendations for the improvement of policy, practice and services in child-serving state agencies.
Ensure children and youth in out-of-home care are receiving necessary and appropriate services to meet their needs.	Review of critical incident reports and supported allegations of abuse or neglect of children/youth in out-of-home care. Quarterly meetings with DCF, DMH and DYS.	To make sure children and youth in any out-of-home setting are safe and that their needs are being met. Identify gaps, trends, and opportunities for policy and practice improvement.	The OCA identifies gaps and trends in services, policy and practice. The OCA makes recommendations for the improvement of services, policy and practice in child-serving state agencies.

Serve as a resource for and receive complaints about state services provided to children and families. (Complaint Line)	Review each complaint and follow-up with the agencies as identified/needed to gather more information or ask for a review of a complaint. We provide external resources to help individuals resolve their concerns.	To learn about concerns with services provided to children and families. To aid children and families.	The OCA can provide assistance and information to individuals who are involved with one or more of the child-serving state agencies.
Educate the public about the OCA and state services available to children and families.	Annual report, website and Twitter. Participation in committees, boards, councils. Presenting at conferences about the work of the OCA.	To educate the public about the OCA and state services for children/families.	Increased public awareness of the OCA.
Annual Report	Published on an annual basis.	To inform stakeholders about the priorities and activities of the OCA.	Increased public awareness of the activities of the office and the delivery of services to children of the Commonwealth.
Meet with the OCA Advisory Council	Hold an annual meeting with the 25 named members.	To present the short and long-term priorities and goals of the office.	The OCA receives feedback on its priorities.
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board	OCA will chair the board and hired a Director of Juvenile Justice Initiatives to lead the work. Once all board members are appointed, OCA will convene the Board for a first meeting.	To identify systemic deficits and gaps, as well as opportunities for inter-agency collaboration and policy and practice improvements.	Develop research reports that identify system deficits, gaps and room for improvement and best practices from other states. Make recommendations for the improvement of juvenile justice policy, practice and services.
Childhood Trauma Task Force	OCA will chair the Task Force and hired a Director of Juvenile Justice Initiatives to lead the work. Once all Task Force members are appointed, OCA will convene the group for a first meeting.	To identify systemic deficits and gaps, as well as opportunities for inter-agency collaboration and policy and practice improvements.	Develop research reports that identify system deficits, gaps and room for improvement and best practices from other states. Make recommendations for changes in policy and practice to better address the impact of childhood trauma.

Overview of OCA Projects and Initiatives				
Mission/Responsibilities	1. OVERSIGHT: Ensure all children receive appropriate, timely and quality services.			
	2. ASSESSMENT and COLLABORATION: Collaborate with public and private stakeholders to examine services to children and identify gaps and trends.			
	3. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT: Make recommendations to improve the quality of services.			
	4. RESOURCE: Serves as a resource for families who are receiving, or eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth.			
OCA Project/Initiative	About the Project/Initiative	State Agency Collaboration	PURPOSE -Why are we doing this?	OUTCOME- What is the result/ impact of our effort?
Child Fatality Review	OCA completed a comprehensive review of local and state child fatality review teams; currently developing a plan and strategy for implementation of the recommendations.	DPH, OCME	Improve child fatality review at state and local level.	Better informed policy and practices to prevent child deaths in MA.
Critical Incident Definitions and Reporting	The OCA and DCF collaborated on a multiphased pilot project to develop more concise critical incident definitions for near fatality, serious bodily injury and emotional injury.	EOHHS and EOE child-serving agencies	To create more consistency in critical incident reporting within and among state agencies.	Improved critical incident reporting to the OCA, which will enhance our ability to analyze services provided to children and families of the Commonwealth.
DCF Data Working Group	The Child Advocate and the DCF Commissioner are co-chairing a working group to streamline DCF reporting to the Legislature.	DCF	To improve the Legislature's understanding of DCF's work.	Better reporting to the Legislature.
DCF Foster Care Review	The OCA is working with DCF to address stakeholder recommendations for areas requiring improvement to the foster care review process.	DCF	To help improve foster care review and to keep the Legislature informed about DCF's progress towards that goal.	Improved outcomes for children in foster care.

Residential School Initiative	The OCA is working with partner agencies to improve the safety of residential schools by re-engineering the licensing, monitoring and investigation processes for special education residential programs. Phase 1, an evaluation of current processes and identification of 26 key safety factors, was completed in April 2017. Phase 2, which is ongoing, focuses on identifying the gaps between the definitions and critical safety factor tracking processes of the two licensing agencies (EEC and DESE).	DCF, DMH, DPPC, EEC, DESE, DPPC	To improve oversight and accountability in residential schools.	Improved monitoring and safety of the children and youth placed in residential schools.
Mapping of Children's Services	From FY16-FY18, the OCA conducted a mapping project of the internal processes and services available to children and families from the EOHHS child-serving state agencies.	EOHHS child-serving agencies	To develop a greater understanding of the EOHHS child-serving state agencies.	Developed the <i>OCA Resource Guide: Child-Serving State Agencies</i> , available on the OCA website. OCA uses the mapping project information to inform our work in all areas.
Safe Sleep Initiative	Interagency collaboration to develop a public awareness campaign. OCA is leading a statewide assessment of safe sleep policies, practices and training among child-serving state agencies.	DCF, DPH, DHCD, EEC	To increase awareness of unsafe sleep, and improve consistency among state agencies' messaging and training related to sudden unexpected infant death (SUID).	The prevention and reduction of SUID.
Transition Age Youth Program Evaluation	Collaboration between UMASS, the Children's League and the OCA to evaluate DDS, DCF, DMH, DYS ability to properly support children aging-out of state care.	DDS, DCF, DYS, DMH	Develop standards for transitioning youth across the state systems.	Better agency and interagency consistency and services for transition age youth.