



Alaska Citizen Review Panel

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The Alaska Citizen Review Panel evaluates the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies for effectiveness in discharging their child protection responsibilities. The Panel is mandated through CAPTA 1997 (P.L. 104-235), and enacted through AS 47.14.205.

April 2, 2016

Honorable Representative Paul Seaton, Chair;
Members
House Health & Social Services Committee
Alaska House of Representative

Dear Rep. Seaton, and Members,

Alaska Citizen Review Panel is mandated to evaluate the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection service agencies, and conduct public outreach to inform its work. All members are volunteers, selected through a structured recruitment process. Minimal staff support is provided through a contract managed by the Office of Children Services (OCS). I am pleased to inform you that the Panel accomplished its tasks during the year 2014-2015, and made six recommendations addressing various components of OCS. All recommendations were accepted by OCS, and several changes were initiated in response.

Please note that the Panel begins its work in August/September of each year and completes its work by June of the subsequent year. An annual report of its activities and recommendations is released by June 30 each year/ OCS submits its written response to each recommendation by December 31 of that year. This document includes a brief summary of the following:

- Panel's recommendations and OCS' response for the year 2014-2015;
- Panel's goals for the year 2015-2016;
- Continuing review of key indicators;
- Changes to Panel's operations.

Due to a severe and unplanned 18% reduction of its FY 2016 budget, the Panel is unable to travel to Juneau for an in-person presentation. This reduction will severely limit the Panel's ability to continue its independent, unbiased, and constructive review of policies and practices that affect some of Alaska's most vulnerable children. Alaska CRP is widely respected for its work in Alaska, and is increasingly being recognized as a model for other CRPs across the nation.

Thank you for your attention and support of the Panel's work.

Sincerely,

Diwakar Vadapalli
Chair

Panel's recommendations and OCS response - 2014-2015:

The Panel completed three site visits that included numerous interviews with OCS personnel and staff and leaders of several partner organizations and state agencies. After reviewing several components of OCS policies and examining practices through the year, the Panel made six recommendations. Outcome measures and evaluation is the central theme of most recommendations. The Panel agrees with OCS that many aspects of OCS operations are driven by continuing crises. However, the Panel recommends that OCS specify outcomes measures and assess its progress in a more structured manner. This, we believe, will allow better monitoring and improves chances of success. Each recommendation and corresponding response from OCS are summarized below:

Recommendation 1: OCS continue to implement the Panel's 2013-2014 recommendations on intake policy.

OCS Response: OCS is implementing all recommendations of the panel with the exception of the suggestion of uniform online reporting form. While OCS acknowledges the benefits, creating a universal form to meet the diverse needs of reporting agencies and ensuring the confidentiality of reports appear to be considerable challenges. All other recommendations are said to be on track and will be implemented in full following the hiring of a manager of the new and centralized intake system.

Recommendation 2: OCS constitute an internal task force to specifically focus on in-home service model. This task force should be tasked with operationalizing Strategy 2.A.2 of the 2015-2019 CFSP.

- In collaboration with local service providers, assess the existing in-home model as it exists in each region.
- Identify additional, more specific outcomes with respect to Strategy 2.A.2 of the 2015-2019 CFSP.

OCS Response: OCS acknowledged the identified challenges and shortcomings of the current in-home services model, but plans to persist with the current model in the near future with a significant role for tribal partners.

Recommendation 3: OCS address the root cause of the Initial Assessment (IA) backlog:

- Identify the nature of cases that are due past 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, and 120 days.
- Revisit the Differential Response process and examine its fit to the current situation.

OCS Response: An OCS internal committee is working on modifying the Initial Assessment program, and a pilot is planned for implementation during the first quarter of 2016. This revised program is expected to not only reduce the processing time and backlog, but also enhance child safety.

Recommendation 4: Improve efforts to recruit and retain resource families across the state:

- Identify, and advertise through appropriate channels, a clear message on the approximate numbers of resource families needed.
- Identify outcome measures and track success of recruitment and retention efforts.



OCS Response: OCS reports that it is working closely with Alaska Center for Resource Families (ACRF) to enhance its mechanisms to track the success of recruiting and enlisting resource families.

Recommendation 5: Improve the survey instruments and reporting of results on various surveys that OCS QA unit conducts to assess important components of OCS operations.

OCS Response: CRP is collaborating with OCS to revise and conduct its 2016 staff survey. Graduate students from UAA's College of Business and Public Policy are conducting the survey. Survey results will be released by mid-May.

Recommendation 6: Adopt a method to identify, measure, and assess various components of workload of frontline workers.

OCS Response: OCS is working on multiple fronts to more effectively manage workload. This continues to be a concern with the recent phenomenal increases in the number of reports of harm and the numbers of children in care.

Panel's goals for the year 2015-2016:

The Panel's work plan for this year identified four goals:

Goal 1: Explore the evolving relationships between Tribal organizations and Office of Children Services (OCS).

Goal 2: Strengthen panel's skills and organizational policies and capacities.

Goal 3: Determine whether current and former foster parents and agency partners' experiences align with OCS foster care policies.

Goal 4: Evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of the new administrative review process.

Goals 1, 3, and 4 examine different components of OCS operations. Policies pertaining to these components are reviewed; and practices are examined through interviews and focus group discussions during the five planned site visits to OCS regional and field offices.

Through Goal 2, the Panel is examining its own policies and practices to be more efficient and effective.

Continuing review:

In addition to the goals each year, the Panel continues to review few key indicators each year. These include the turnover rates among the frontline workers, quality assurance indicators of field and regional offices, backlog of initial assessments, budget, and proposed changes to practice.

Changes to Panel's operations:

The Panel's self-examination and review continue on three fronts:

Internal processes and structure: Many processes have been streamlined in the last couple of years. Templates were developed for many standard processes. The Panel is currently examining its recently adopted 'operational guidelines' to make necessary revisions.



Relationships with OCS and other stakeholders: The Panel continues to maintain a critical but constructive perspective in its work. Relationship with OCS is built on respect, and recognition of mutual roles and responsibilities. The Panel also recognizes the overlapping responsibilities of many other review mechanisms in Alaska, and continues to build relationships to avoid duplication of efforts.

Public outreach: This is an integral part of the Panel's mandate. However, the Panel recognizes its responsibility as not only to collect public input to inform its review but also to inform the public of its work and contribute towards raising awareness of the acute challenges of child protection in Alaska.

