



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 11, 2017

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### **Alaska Citizen Review Panel to follow up on the Grand Jury investigation into the Office of Children Services.**

Alaska Citizen Review Panel's (CRP) annual report, submitted to the Office of Children's Services (OCS) on June 30, 2017, dug deeper into the specifics of the allegations made by Rep. Tammy Wilson (R-North Pole). The annual report makes it clear that the panel is acting upon recent Grand Jury recommendations.

In December 2016, a Grand Jury advised the CRP to take up parts of the investigation that fit the scope of the panel's statutory mandate. Panel Chair Diwakar Vadapalli added, "The panel will also explore potential collaboration with the Ombudsman's Office. This may be easier if the panel is moved into the Ombudsman's Office. There is a proposed bill to that effect, currently spearheaded by Sen. Coghill's office."

The panel's annual report includes all of the panel's activities during FY2017 and offers six recommendations (*listed below in italics*) to OCS based on the Panel's observations during the course of its efforts. Each recommendation is based on extensive work and consideration of information from multiple sources. OCS committed to respond to the report in writing within three months, even though the statute allows six months.

Following is a discussion of the recommendations, as well as some of the work being done to fulfill them:

The panel retained its recommendation from last year asking OCS to *assign a more instrumental role for CRP in implementing "Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children: Strategic Plan 2016-2020."* A survey by the panel found that very few tribal child welfare personnel were aware of this plan or provided any input. Community engagement is one of the panel's responsibilities.

OCS implemented its new grievance policy in 2014 in response to a 2012 Ombudsman's investigation. The panel examined the new policy this year and found that its implementation needs attention. The panel recommends that OCS *speed up the process of implementing the new system to track grievances, connect case files with any associated grievances while ensuring necessary protection for worker identity, and publish monthly aggregate information on the number and nature of grievances received.*

Despite CRP's consistent efforts to fulfill its mandated functions, it cannot do so without a mutually respectful and constructive relationship with OCS. In light of OCS' responses to the panel's previous years' recommendations, the panel reiterates that *OCS work with CRP to strengthen the panel, and rely on it.* The panel suggested a *participatory evaluation framework*, and recommended that *OCS continue to work with CRP to identify a clear working relationship under this framework.*

## Alaska Citizen Review Panel

### Members

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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.

Vadapalli said, “This report and OCS’ response are part of a continuing dialogue involving many stakeholders. I hope everyone takes the time to read the panel’s report and engage in the conversation.”

The complete report and appendices are available on the panel’s website, CRPALaska.org.

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