

WORK PLAN

2017 -2018

Approved: September 15, 2017



ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL
880 H Street, Suite 106, Anchorage, AK 99501

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 47.14.2015.

www.crpalaska.org

This document outlines the proposed work and annual calendar of the Alaska Citizen Review Panel for the year 2017-2018. During the course of its work, the Panel often identifies specific practices, procedures, or policies for deeper examination at a later time. A list of these has been maintained over the years and serves as a primary source of focus areas for the Panel's work. A set of 4-6 goals are identified each year which either address one or more policies, procedures, and practices of the state's child protection agency in Alaska, or are focused on the internal functions of the Panel.

The Panel held a meeting August 26th, 2017 in Anchorage Alaska to discuss the goals and focus areas for the upcoming year. There were guest speakers, partners, advisors and legislators who spoke with the CRP during this meeting, and the goals outlined in this document reflect the outcome of these and other discussions. This document consists of three main sections: goals, other major work, and calendar.

Goals: Each goal may start out being broad, vague or containing multiple sub goals. Each goal will be further specified and may be narrowed or broadened through the year. In addition, goals from the previous year may continue to be relevant or may not have been fully addressed. All potential goals are discussed by the Panel before adopting goals for the year.

Other major work: The Panel also continually collects and compiles data and information on several other components of OCS' work, and addresses selected issues of importance that may surface during the course of the year. Each year's annual report provides specific content on these issues. The Panel also conducts surveys to collect public input, maintains and manages an active website, and presents at various venues to increase public awareness about the Panel's work and functions.

Calendar: The Panel meets quarterly, as required by the mandate. In addition, the Panel meets with OCS senior leadership each month, conducts site visits, presents to the legislature, and attends the national CRP conference. Some of the dates identified in the calendar are tentative when this document was approved.

GOALS FOR THE YEAR 2017-2018

- GOAL 1:** Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process
- GOAL 2:** Examine if 'family reunification' is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home placement, and OCS' efforts in pursuit of 'family reunification'.
- GOAL 3:** Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.
- GOAL 4:** Expand Public Outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.
- GOAL 5:** Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.

GOALS

GOAL 1: Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process

The panel continues to hear two major concerns about the new administrative review process adopted by OCS in 2015:

1. The new process is too short and does not allow the opportunity for all parties of the case to know each other, nor discuss many aspects of the case.
2. The process serves mostly to check for minimal compliance and identify the next impending deadlines, with minimal attention to substantive progress on the case.

The new review process was a substantial change, and examining its efficacy and efficiency in comparison to the old process has been a goal for the CRP since the change. Our past work revealed that OCS senior management made the change to primarily improve efficiency, and ensure the reviews were completed on time.

This has traditionally been an area of strength for OCS. According to the CFSR that just concluded, periodic case reviews were found to be a strength (Item 21). There were only three reviews overdue as of January 2017. Though data were unavailable on this item in 2009, stakeholder interviews established that case reviews were conducted regularly and on time. While it is clear that reviews are being completed in a timely fashion (efficiency), the CFSR does not assess the effectiveness of these reviews. CRP continues to receive complaints about their effectiveness since moving the reviews to the QA section. In discussions with OCS, the agency leadership expressed a desire to better understand these concerns.

Therefore, the panel intends to reach out to various stakeholders to better document the concerns with the current QA reviews. The panel will:

1. invite various stakeholder agencies, individual professionals, and other interested parties to relay their concerns through written statements, during one-on-one interviews, or through a survey.
2. closely examine the intended outcomes of the new administrative review process, establish criteria of effectiveness, and assess effectiveness of the process.

GOAL 2: Examine if ‘family reunification’ is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home placement, and OCS’ efforts is pursuit of ‘family reunification’.

The panel outlined five allegations stemming from the packet of information forwarded to the panel by Alaska Department of Law (DOL), Office of Special Prosecutions on January 18, 2016 (see the panel’s 2017 Annual Report). Among those, it was alleged that OCS does not prioritize family reunification, and spends very little resources on this effort.

Reunification is a widely preferred outcome when children are removed from their home. Federal law requires ‘reasonable efforts’ in all cases, and ‘active efforts’ in cases where the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is applicable, to return the child home. Both federal and

state laws provide exceptions in cases where reunification is not possible. Considerable debate over several decades pitching family reunification against the safety of the child caused wild shifts in federal policy. Irrespective of the debates, OCS' policies and practice must adhere to the current set of federal and state statutes and regulations. However, since circumstances of each case are unique, and the courts have some discretion in determining if reunification is preferred in a particular case, OCS' practices may vary over a spectrum of possible paths in pursuit of permanency.

To determine if reunification is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home placements, the panel will:

1. examine OCS' data on permanency outcomes to determine trends in reunification over time
2. examine OCS' policies and procedures to determine if and how family reunification is prioritized

Since many factors impact the permanency outcome, and reunification is one among many possible permanency outcomes, it is extremely difficult to establish adequacy of effort. The courts overseeing a child protection case are required to examine every case for either reasonable or active efforts. Therefore, the panel will

3. consult with the Alaska court system to explore the possibility of determining adequacy of efforts
4. confer with OCS staff, relevant stakeholders, and service providers to collect perspectives on adequacy of efforts

GOAL 3: Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.

In its 2017 Annual Report, the panel outlined five allegations stemming from the packet of information forwarded to the panel by Alaska Department of Law (DOL), Office of Special Prosecutions on January 18, 2016. Among those, it was alleged that the efforts of OCS' workers in searching for relatives of children in foster care for their placement were inadequate.

Federal payments for foster care and adoption assistance are contingent upon Federal law under title IV-E of the Social Security Act, which requires that a state "consider giving preference to an adult relative over a nonrelated caregiver when determining placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant State child protection standards" (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(19)). Alaska OCS defined relative as "an individual who is related to another by blood, adoption, marriage, or Tribal custom" (CPS Policy Manual § 3.5.4, updated 12/12/2016).

Title IV-E (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(29)) further requires "that, within 30 days after the removal of a child from the custody of the parent or parents of the child, the State shall exercise due diligence to identify and provide notice to the following relatives: all adult grandparents, all parents of a sibling of the child, where such parent has legal custody of such sibling, and other

adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents), subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence, that

- A. specifies that the child has been or is being removed from the custody of the parent or parents of the child;
- B. explains the options the relative has under Federal, State, and local law to participate in the care and placement of the child, including any options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notice;
- C. describes the requirements under paragraph (10) of this subsection to become a foster family home and the additional services and supports that are available for children placed in such a home; and
- D. if the State has elected the option to make kinship guardianship assistance payments under paragraph (28) of this subsection, describes how the relative guardian of the child may subsequently enter into an agreement with the State under section 673(d) of this title to receive the payments;

Chapter 3 of the OCS' Child Protection Manual provides detailed instructions on relative search. Adequacy of efforts can only be assessed against certain criteria. In response to the allegation that efforts of OCS' workers in identifying relatives are not adequate, the panel will:

1. Examine relevant federal and state statutes, regulations, and OCS' policies to determine criteria for adequacy
2. Confer with OCS staff, relevant stakeholders and service providers to identify practices and procedures for relative search
3. Identify if these practices meet the criteria identified above

GOAL 4: Expand Public Outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.

"Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children: Strategic Plan 2016-2020" was released in August 2016, and is a product of innovative and collaborative work by OCS, several other state agencies, and many leaders from various Alaska Native tribes and tribal organizations. In response to the panel's insistence, OCS invited the CRP to participate in any of the six Priority Area Working Groups to implement the plan. The panel consistently participated in two priority area group deliberations during this year.

The panel's participation in the priority area groups opened some potential opportunities, specifically under the Community Engagement Priority Area of the plan. In recognition of the statutory responsibilities and current efforts of Alaska CRP in engaging various stakeholders and community partners, and due to considerable overlap between the panel's duties and the goals of the Community Engagement Priority Area Workgroup, OCS and CRP committed to leverage current CRP efforts in furthering the work of this Workgroup.

Members of this priority area group have been discussing various ways of leveraging CRP efforts, and avoiding duplicate efforts. Specifically, they identified two tasks for next year:

1. Town hall meetings: The panel plans to conduct a town hall meeting during every site visit this year. The Community Engagement Priority Area Group identified this as an opportunity for community outreach. The panel will work with the Priority Area Group members to design and conduct town hall meetings in way that will further the goals of both entities.
2. Survey of ICWA workers and Tribal Service Providers: CRP conducts an annual survey of all attendees at the BIA Social Services sessions of the BIA Providers Conference. OCS conducts a periodic survey of tribal service providers. Where both surveys are conducted in different ways, they cover similar topics and reach the same target population. In order to maximize the benefit and avoid duplication, these surveys will be combined into one, and will be conducted by the panel.

GOAL 5: Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.

Recruitment – The panel agreed that recruitment needs to be a top priority and that participation of panel members must be encouraged. The opportunity to serve as a panel member needs to be advertised and promoted, and existing panel members should be encouraged to suggest potential members. An updated Job Description for Panelists should be disseminated and suggestions need to be followed up by the CRP Coordinator.

Website – The CRP Coordinator will continue improvements and regular maintenance of the CRP website, and will distribute the link to panel members on a regular basis. Materials will continue to be posted in a timely manner.

Mailing Lists – The CRP needs mailing lists or access to mailing lists to conduct the service providers' survey. Lists should be solicited from various groups of stakeholders.

OTHER IMPORTANT WORK

Proposed restructuring of the panel

Senate Bill 122, introduced during the 2017 legislative session, proposes to move the Alaska CRP from its current location within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) to the Alaska Ombudsman's Office. The bill also proposes to significantly reorganize the panel's functions, membership, and accountability structures with respect to OCS. This is a substantial change, and the panel looks forward to contributing to the conversations that will significantly impact its functioning in the future.

Indicators of OCS performance

During the course of its work over the years, the Panel identified the following indicators that are useful in understanding OCS' operation, and helpful in contextualizing the panel's findings.

1. Performance of each OCS field office of Quality Assurance (QA) reviews: CRP collects data from each QA review through the year, and compiles a database to assess relative strengths and challenges of various field and regional offices. This has been very helpful in choosing locations for panel's site visits, and quickly identify the systemic challenges of each field and regional office.
2. Quarterly data on vacancy and turnover: The panel compiles this data by quarter, specifically among frontline Protective Services Specialists positions. Turnover among these positions has consistently been close to 35% over the last fifteen years. Many other challenges faced by OCS are directly related to this. This data allows the panel to better understand the factors enabling such high turnover.
3. Employee survey data: The panel's report from the OCS employee survey in 2016 was appreciated by OCS' as having more depth in analysis. While OCS appreciated the work, it chose to have its internal QA unit conduct the next employee survey. The panel will continue to collect data from the employee survey conducted by OCS and examine trends on various employee-related challenges and opportunities.
4. Backlog of Initial Assessments (IA): The panel has been concerned with the periodic high backlog of Initial Assessments at OCS. While many of these backlogged IA's may be low priority investigations that were never closed due to high workloads, this is nevertheless an indicator of many issues including high workloads, turnover, and other systemic issues at OCS. The panel will continue to monitor the high backlog of IAs.

Outreach

The panel will continue to present its work to the following:

- Committees on Health and Social Services in the Alaska House and Alaska Senate
- Advisory Board of the Alaska Center for Resource Families
- Alaska Court Improvement Project

- BIA Providers Conference
- Alaska's Children's Justice Act Task Force
- The National CRP Network

The panel also plans to conduct a series of town hall meetings as part of its site visits to the five OCS regions this year. In addition, the panel will be available to any group of stakeholders or individuals for presentations. Much of the information about the panel, and all its published documents, are available on the panel's website.

CALENDAR

Quarterly Panel Meetings

The Panel will meet for 90 minutes quarterly on the second Tuesday of each the month, unless otherwise noted. A public notice of the panel’s meeting, along with the agenda and related materials will be posted on the State of Alaska Public Notices system at least one week ahead of the meeting. While these meetings are public, they are business meetings, with opportunity for the public to witness the work of the panel. All meeting dates in the table below are tentative, subject to change due to scheduling conflicts.

Quarter	Date	Time
1	Tuesday September 19, 2017	12:00 – 1:30 pm
2	Tuesday December 12, 2017	12:00 – 1:30 pm
3	Tuesday March 13 th , 2018	12:00 – 1:30 pm
4	Tuesday June 12 th , 2018	12:00 – 1:30 pm

Meetings with OCS senior leadership

The panel meets with OCS senior leadership every month during the panel’s work year (August through June). These meetings are not open to public. The purpose of these meetings is to continue to discuss important matters as they relate to the current challenges and opportunities facing OCS, the panel’s progress on its work plan goals, and other matters as necessary.

Site Visits

The panel intends to complete five site visits this year, one in each of the five OCS regions. We plan to conduct one each during the months of October 2017 through February 2018.

National CRP Conference

The 2018 National CRP Conference is scheduled for May 15-17, 2018, in Detroit, MI. Two individuals will be representing Alaska’s panel at the national conference.

AUTHORITY: The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is federally mandated through the 1996, 2003, and 2010 amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and authorized through Alaska Statute Sec. 47.14.205. The Panel operates under a set of operating guidelines which are available on the Panel's website.

FUNCTIONS: The primary purpose of the Citizen Review Panel is to help state and local child protective services be more responsive to community needs and to give stakeholders the opportunity to participate in improving child protective services through public outreach and engagement.

The Panel is neither a grievance redress mechanism nor an audit mechanism, and thus is not equipped to address any concerns or situations involving individual cases or contracts. Where applicable, the Panel may review individual cases and contracts to examine systemic issues.

PRIMARY FUNCTIONS OF THE ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Evaluates the extent to which OCS is effectively discharging its child protection responsibilities under:

- The state plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under 42 U.S.C. 5106a(b);
- Child Protection standards under federal and state laws; and
- Any other criteria that the CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children.

Conducts public outreach and gathers public comment on current OCS procedures and practices involving children and family services.

Advocates for relevant actions that would help improve the child protection services system in Alaska.

STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP: Membership on the Panel is voluntary and is expected to represent the diversity of the state. The Panel selects its own members through a formal recruitment and application process. Members elect a Chair and Vice Chair from among the membership. While members are expected to serve for at least two years, there are no stipulated term limits.

STAFF SUPPORT: Denali Daniels & Associates (DDA) provides staff support under a contract with the Office of Children's Services. The CRP Coordinator can be contacted at:

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