



## Alaska Citizen Review Panel

### Members

Diwakar K. Vadapalli, Chair  
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The Citizen Review Panel is a statewide group of volunteers mandated by federal and state law to provide oversight to the Office of Children's Services.

### Teleconference with OCS Staff Friday, June 13, 2014 Noon to 1:00 p.m.

Present: Dana, Margie  
Absent: Diwakar, Bettyann, Rodreshia, Ben  
Guests: Christy Lawton, Travis Erickson

### Minutes

- 1) CRP shared that we will be sharing meeting minutes from our joint meetings from now on.
- 2) What are plans for the \$1.45 million allocated to address the workload study?

Travis stated there was not a final decision yet. OCS is determining where the needs are greatest. They plan to get the positions posted by July 1<sup>st</sup>. It's 13 new PCNs: three from within the department, Two licensing for WRO—a supervisor and a worker, The worker will support unlicensed relatives. A third is a Wasilla SSA focused on WRO travel. The remaining ten they have done preliminary thinking about. The recommendation from the workload study was about SSAs per case worker. We have been evaluating the current situation and figuring out how to use positions for centralized duties to increase efficiencies, e.g., take something off every case worker's plate in a region. Maybe place an SSA in each region to do relative searching. That would go back to the worker for engagement, but compiling it would help all workers rather than assigning new SSAs to just one unit. We'll decide in early July.

Workers don't have widespread access to Accurent (a relative finding service). There's a fee associated with it. A dedicated person would have access to the databases they need. Workers can request funds to access Senica Center which searches all databases. Child support also can search (CSED); we have a new agreement with them. The cost is per search not per user so maybe more people can access.

Margie noted that it's a great idea to have more licensing staff for WRO. Christy noted that they have lots of investigations. They will hire the supervisor first and then that person can help hire the worker.

- 3) Update on turnover and vacancy

Christy said they are doing well on the vacancy rate. Over the last six months, OCS had the lowest turnover rate in DHSS. Northern Region has no vacancies right now. Turnover has slowed in Wasilla. WRO has made progress—they are closer to having all positions filled and keeping people longer. SERO still challenges.

Travis noted that Wasilla has a 95% retention rate this year, the best in the state. WRO has the highest vacancy rate. WRO did have a couple days of being fully staffed, and now they are almost back to fully staffed. Both St. Mary's positions have been filled for 6 weeks. That's a grand success because they have had full time staff since May 1.

Dana wondered if they were receiving more PSRs from St. Mary's as people are more confident they someone will look into it. Travis noted there is no case backlog from St. Mary's because Bethel was covering the area. The staff are surviving and working, but he doesn't know where they are living. Christy noted that because the housing wasn't going to be "home" they could deal with lesser housing than if it was home.

#### 4) Discussion of the OCS centralized intake paper

Christy noted that the paper was not a decision, but research in advance of a decision. It's a direction that OCS needs to go. But it can be overcome. Services and decision making will be much better. She would love our support for statewide intake.

Dana asked if after hours contractors would still be needed. Christy noted they would not be. Intake would move to a hotline approach with OCS staffing to cover. One additional driving force is that both the supervisory counsel and the worker group brought up on-call as a primary issue that relates to retention and moral. Being on-call rotates and it's a burden. People don't like it. It impacts their well-being. In some places the phone rings a lot, others not at all, but it's still a burden. Dana clarified if regional intake is handled by three answering services. Christy noted they are the middle man; they just pre-screen. But OCS is not confident that they are making the right decisions about what to pass on immediately and what can wait till business hours. With statewide, staff will man phones till midnight—they can do so much work to contact law enforcement, etc. that it will greatly reduce on-call calls.

Margie state she thought it was a great idea to have the line always staffed with trained folks. She noted on site visits we hear from people that they don't like regional intake. They want to know person on other end of the line and know that something is happening. Improved feedback on PSRs will increase confidence.

Christy noted that with the ability to manage one group rather than five it will be more consistent. Right now there's no singular person overseeing it which leaves room for different practice. Statewide will allow them to build relationships. They could get people to communities not just for introduction of statewide intake, but more regular mandated reporter trainer. Currently they don't reach out to groups, but go when asked. They could be pro-active about training mandated reporters. They are also looking for capacity to find ways to promote and recruit bi-lingual intake folks.

Sylvan noted that what people don't like about regional intake (not knowing the person, it not being local) doesn't get worse with statewide. Once it's not local, going to statewide shouldn't matter.

Christy said they are moving to make feedback an opt-out not opt-in situation since most people want to know that something happened. She wants calling collaterals to be mandatory. Currently, NRO does it for all intakes. Christy said she didn't share the work plan on statewide intake because it was written without knowing the end date when implementation would start. She wanted the work plan to include preparing the communities and how to talk to communities. Once that's more fully flushed out she will share.

#### 5) Director Lawton's choice

**Recruiting video:** Dana noted he looked at the other recruiting video Christy shared. He felt it was good for people coming into the field, but that it didn't feel Alaska specific. There are unique challenges here. Christy noted that anyone watching it is applying to work in Alaska so should have some sense of the place. Dana thought the video was to make the challenges of working in rural Alaska more apparent. Christy said that wasn't the focus. She wasn't focused on people coming from Outside; in urban areas they are mostly hiring Alaskans. She wants people to know what a CPS job is like. We have another video showing what working in rural Alaska is like. That one shows lots of driving or fly-in communities. With this one she just wanted to show what people were getting into with CPS which is unique and challenging work.

**Substantiation policy:** Christy noted that they are just about ready to kick off a pilot project reconstructing how make substantiation findings. Statute 47.10 and 47.17, which are the conditions used to file in court are very incongruent with the language in policy. Consequently they lose when people challenge it. They are looking for new methodology for doing that perhaps using a military model. Alaska will be one of the first states to rework how findings are made. There are currently huge differences among how staff make findings. They have write ups on this and a white paper on this issue. It maps out the current state, the practice, the problem and where they are going. OCS will pilot it in Anchorage and Juneau. They have done four cases so far, so it is active.

**IV-E waiver application:** Christy noted that at the end of February OCS submitted a IV-E waiver application; it was withdrawn last week. After crunching numbers with FMS and the Commissioner—and given that over time they expect the number of kids in custody to increase—the budget was a concern. They are screening in more cases and taking custody more...OCS is never going to reduce the number of kids in out of home enough to make it cost neutral. Thus it was too big a risk to take for Alaska. They want more flexibility. Alaska has been fortunate to have a generous legislature; the budget is not getting cut and cut. Tribal partners in Southeast aren't happy that it was withdrawn.

Instead they submitted a letter of interest to Annie E. Casey. They have a big initiative that pinpoints areas OCS has bigger challenges. It focuses on the front end--decision making and oversight of decision making...expand TDM (or something like it), create differential response, enhancing safety decision making, more structured and reliable method for determining who is screened in and out. They will visit before end of summer. It's a five year project. (They

supported Family to Family.) They are great to work with—have support and funding. It was hard to let the waiver go, but this still has a piece. Flawed decision making at the beginning of cases leads to flawed decision making through life of case.

- 6) CRP let Christy know our next site visit will be in Anchorage on October 2-3<sup>rd</sup>. She or Travis is welcome to join us.

*Minutes accepted by Panel on August 5, 2014.*



*Diwakar Vadapalli, Chair*