



Alaska Citizen Review Panel

Policies & Procedures

2023-2024

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PURPOSE OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this document is to establish methods to be followed by the Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP or Panel) for general operations. This document provides the framework for carrying out the duties of the Panel, establishes the roles and responsibilities of Panel members, and procedures for electing officers. This document also establishes policies for elections, committees, recruitment, orientation, conducting meetings, conflict of interest, and a code of conduct. The Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is federally mandated through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA); Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003. The CRP is also mandated through Alaska Statute Sec. 47.14.205. In 2020, State Child Protection Citizen Review Panel (7 AAC 58) regulations were adopted. This document is intended to accompany federal and state statutes and to align with state regulations adopted in 2020. This document is made available to the public and will be used to guide operations of the Panel.

MISSION, PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS, AND ANNUAL ACTIVITIES

MISSION: The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) will review the practices, procedures, and policies of the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) and evaluate the same for compliance with federal and state laws and the state plan. The Panel will make recommendations based on its findings to ensure the safety and well-being of Alaska’s children.

PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS: The Panel has three principal functions– evaluation, public outreach, and advocacy.

Evaluation: The Panel will evaluate OCS compliance with federal and state laws, examining policies and procedures for consistent statewide implementation while still being responsive to the diversity of needs across the state. The CRP shall evaluate 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. The Panel may identify other criteria critical to ensuring the protection of children, including the level and efficiency of coordination of foster care and adoption programs in the state. The Panel focuses on systemic issues. Individual cases or particular, unique situations will not be reviewed by the Panel.

Public Outreach: The Panel will identify and implement means to gather feedback on procedures and practices in delivering child protection services in Alaska. Information thus collected will be utilized in its evaluation function as specified above.

Advocacy: The Panel will conduct appropriate actions that will help improve the child protection services system in Alaska.

WORK CALENDAR: The Panel's work year runs from July 1 to June 30. General work calendar dates for required activities are identified in bold below and are subject to change based on the Work Plan that was developed during the Quarter 1 meeting.

Q1 Meeting: Annual Retreat (August or September)

Q2 Meeting: October or November

Q3 Meeting: January or February

Q4 Meeting: Annual Meeting (May)

Annual Report: June 30th distribution

Additional Meetings: While not required, the Panel strives to meet with the Office of Children's Services (OCS) once a month. Special work sessions or additional meetings may be called to meet the needs of the Panel.

Work Plan Activities: The CRP develops its Annual Work Plan during its Annual Retreat in Q1. That Work Plan will determine the activities and corresponding events for that calendar year.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel members are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that exemplifies their status as leaders and role models for the people of Alaska.

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel members are expected to act in a manner that recognizes that all people are entitled to be treated with respect and dignity. In order for the CRP to be effective, Panel members will:

- Conduct themselves in a responsible and courteous manner in all affairs when they are representing the Citizen Review Panel;
- Endeavor to attend and participate in all Panel meetings and conference calls;
- Endeavor to work together respectfully in all Citizen Review Panel affairs;
- and Conduct their business in a legal and professional manner.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Alaska Citizen Review Panel members are expected to participate actively in their nominated capacity and duty. They recognize the CRP is a volunteer Panel, and there is no financial compensation for participation in Citizen Review Panel activities. Panel members will conduct business in person, by email, through virtual meetings, and by telephone as needed. In carrying out duties, each Panel member is responsible for exercising due diligence in the performance of duties, as follows:

1. Ensure the work of the Citizen Review Panel aligns with the mission and is relevant to the needs of our community;
2. Advise on the development of the strategic plan and implementing the strategies therein;

3. Work with the CRP to promote health, wellness, and effective strategies within our local Office of Children's Services.

The CRP is responsible for the following duties as individual members and as a Panel:

1. Duty of Care: Take care of the Panel by ensuring prudent use of all assets, including facility, people and goodwill;
2. Duty of Loyalty: Ensure that the Panel's activities are, first and foremost, advancing its mission; Recognize and disclose conflict of interest; Make decisions that are in the best interest of the Panel, not in the best interest of the individual member.
3. Duty of Obedience: Ensure that the Panel obeys applicable laws and regulations, follows its own policies, procedures, and operating guidelines, and adheres to its stated purpose/mission.

Each member of this Citizen Review Panel commits to:

- Make a good faith effort to attend all CRP meetings, either virtually or in-person; attend at least 51% of CRP meetings per year, including quarterly Panel meetings and CRP/OCS teleconferences. Panel members with more than three consecutive unexcused absences from CRP meetings may be asked to step down. Absences are considered excused with 48 hours advance notice.
- Participating in the CRP's Annual Retreat, CRP planning sessions, site visits, and work plan activities
- Regular email participation about Panel business, including when feedback or input is requested by the Chair or Coordinator (email participation does not replace meeting attendance)

- Holding this organization to a high standard of performance and supporting the Chair and Coordinator in CRP business as needed
- Understanding their roles and responsibilities and becoming sufficiently knowledgeable about the organization and its operations to make informed decisions •
- Reading the materials sent to the CRP and coming prepared to retreats and planning meetings
- Arriving at meetings on time and staying for the entire meeting
- Asking for clarification on any matters or material that they do not understand before making a decision
- Listening carefully to other Panel members with an open mind and an objective perspective
- Avoiding emotional outbursts or anything that could be considered threatening or intimidating
- Ensure each matter is dealt with in a fair, equitable, and impartial manner
- Respect and adhere to the rules, policies, and guidelines of the Panel
- Panel members should participate in panel voting, striving for a decision by consensus. When it is not possible to reach a consensus and reasonable exploration has been conducted, the Panel will default to a decision by the majority.
- Courteously accept decisions made by the majority of the Panel, regardless of a possible conflicting opinion.
- Serve in a rotational leadership capacity to help with agenda setting and planning for productive discussions during panel meetings
- Ensure the ability for full participation by all members

- Actively working towards decisions and solutions that are in the CRP's best interest
- Respecting the confidentiality of the Panel's business
- A term of three years with a limit of two terms
- Agree to be informed about and observe all CRP policies and procedures

These commitments and agreements are made by new members through their signatures during orientation and by all members through their signatures on an annual basis.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

In addition to their roles and responsibilities as Panel members, Executive members of the Panel have clearly defined roles and responsibilities as outlined below:

Chair Duties and Responsibilities

- Attend all Panel meetings
- Monitor Panel discussions and ensure that the Panel meeting time is used effectively
- Ensure that no single Panel member is dominating the discussion and work toward operating as a team
- Contribute to the work of the Panel without dominating or over-influencing
- Make sure that Panel members are clear about their individual Panel commitments
- Develop a close working relationship with the CRP Coordinator and Vice Chair
- Act as official spokesperson for the Panel when required
- Review all Panel reports
- Two-year term as officer (see Elections Policy for details)

Vice Chair Duties and Responsibilities

- Attend all Panel meetings
- Know the objectives and goals of the CRP and the Panel Chair's duties

- Be prepared to perform the Panel Chair’s duties when called to do so
- Work closely as a consultant and advisor to the Panel Chair
- Develop a close working relationship with the CRP Coordinator
- Two-year term as officer (see Elections Policy for details)

PANEL ELECTION POLICY

The CRP is a self-electing Panel and shall seat a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 9 members, depending on the needs of the Panel. Panel member terms are a period of 3 years, and up to two consecutive terms may be served. Panel officers serve a single, two-year term. Nine seats will be divided into three groups with staggering terms:

- Group 1: January 1, Year 1 – December 31, Year 2
- Group 2: January 1, Year 2 – December 31, Year 3
- Group 3: January 1, Year 3 – December 31, Year 4

When a Panel Member is elected, they fill an open seat and assume that seat’s term. They can serve up to two full consecutive terms; a vote for the second term will be held at the end of the first term using a simple majority vote.

Regular Panel member terms follow the calendar year. A Panel member’s term will begin in January of their starting year and end in December of the year their term is up. The Panel may choose to hold a simple majority vote to extend the expired Panel member’s term until a new qualified Panel member can be recruited for replacement. A simple majority vote is utilized to elect and remove members from the Panel. A vote will be taken for each term.

Officer elections for the next fiscal year will be held at the end of each year during the Annual Meeting. The Panel may, at any time, appoint a member to fill an officer vacancy in the interim

period until an election is held during the Annual Meeting or a special meeting is called.

Interpretation of officer term limits is up to the discretion of a Panel majority vote.

PANEL COMMITTEE POLICY

The Citizen Review Panel may establish Standing or Ad-Hoc Committees to meet the ongoing requirements of the organization. CRP Committees may not make decisions on behalf of the Panel; instead, the decisions of Panel Committees will become recommendations to the Panel as a whole.

PANEL RECRUITMENT POLICY

All Panel members will participate in actively recruiting new members with the aim of representation outlined in the regulations. New members will submit an application that includes consent for a background check to be conducted as part of the review process. Membership applications can be submitted using the online application on the CRP website or by submitting a paper form through mail or email. The CRP Coordinator is responsible for communications between the proposed member, the Panel Chair, and the background check. Once the initial review is complete, the Coordinator will forward the proposed member's application and accompanying documentation to the Director of the Office of Children's Services for consultation prior to Panel action on the membership.

PANEL ORIENTATION POLICY

1. All Panel members will receive formal orientation on the philosophy, mission, principles, goals and objectives, and programs (where applicable) of the Citizen Review Panel. On election or appointment to the Citizen Review Panel, Panel members will complete an onboarding process with the Chair to orient them fully to the Citizen Review Panel and the goals of the team.

2. As part of the orientation process, Panel members will be provided with a copy and discussion of the following documents:

- a. Alaska Citizen Review Panel Policies & Procedures Manual
- b. Alaska Citizen Review Panel Operating Guidelines
- c. Alaska Citizen Review Panel Long-Range Strategic Plan
- d. Most recent Alaska Citizen Review Panel Annual Work Plan
- e. Most recent Alaska Citizen Review Panel Annual Report

3. New members will be asked to sign an official statement of commitment and agreement to the roles and responsibilities outlined in all the presented orientation materials. New members will be asked to identify in what ways they wish to volunteer.

PANEL MEETINGS POLICY

The Citizen Review Panel plans to meet quarterly on a regularly scheduled date to conduct business. Such meetings may be supplemented with additional emails as required. The Annual Retreat, whose purpose is to strategize future goals and plan the annual work of the Panel, and the Annual Meeting, which is held to develop the Annual Report, will serve as two of the Quarterly meetings. The CRP may choose to have two of their monthly OCS meetings serve as the two other Quarterly meetings. Additional meetings may be called at the Citizen Review Panel's discretion based on members' availability and the urgency of the matter.

The Panel will conduct business in person, via email, virtual meetings, or by telephone. The timely circulation of an agenda and background material will precede all meetings. The intended purpose is to provide members with an opportunity to review materials and provide comments prior to the commencement of the meeting.

The Citizen Review Panel Chair, CRP Coordinator, or designate will facilitate all Citizen Review Panel meetings to ensure agenda items are afforded the appropriate time necessary for a full and proper discussion by all members. The CRP Coordinator shall maintain minutes of proceedings and decisions of Citizen Review Panel meetings. Minutes shall be distributed to all Citizen Review Panel members.

OPEN MEETINGS

The Citizen Review Panel is required by law to abide by the State of Alaska's Open Meetings Act (AS 44.62.310-.312), which requires that all meetings of a public entity's governing body be open to the public and that the body provides reasonable notice of its meetings.

An Executive Session may be called under the following circumstances:

- a. matters, the immediate knowledge of which would clearly have an adverse effect on the finances of the government unit;
- b. subjects that tend to prejudice the reputation and character of any person provided the person may request a public discussion;
- c. matters which by law, municipal charter, or ordinance are required to be confidential;
- d. matters involving consideration of government records that by law are not subject to public disclosure.

There must be a legitimate need for the executive session, and the reason must be spelled out in the motion called to go into executive session. The motion must state the nature of what will be discussed and must be approved by a majority vote. The motion must contain enough detail that the public (and, if necessary, a court) will be informed of exactly why the executive session is

appropriate without defeating the purpose of going into executive session. The information discussed in executive session shall remain confidential.

In accordance with the Open Meetings Act and state regulations, CRP meetings will be publicly noticed two weeks in advance and will have a public comment period. The meeting time and location will be posted on the CRP website and the State of Alaska Online Public Notices website. All public testimony will be summarized in the meeting notes and will become part of the public record.

PANEL MEETINGS PROCEDURES

Quorum of the Panel: Three members constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. There is a maximum of 9 seats on the Citizen Review Panel. Those actions that require a quorum include but are not limited to:

- Election of Executive Officers
- New member approvals and removals
- Site visit reports
- Annual Report
- Annual Work Plan
- Updates to Long-Range Strategic Plan

Any other actions related to the Panel carrying out its duties consistent with regulations or its Policies and Procedures will be identified by the Chair for action.

INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

If a report is received regarding inappropriate conduct by a member of the Citizen Review Panel, the report should be submitted to the Panel Chair or Coordinator, who will then review the report. The Panel Chair and Coordinator may, upon review of the report:

1. Dismiss the allegations contained in the report
2. Render a summary decision with respect to the allegations contained in the report or,
3. Determine if the allegations in the report warrant an overall CRP review

In the event a committee review is deemed appropriate, the Panel member who is the subject of the report and the person who reported the inappropriate conduct shall be invited to attend and present their individual positions.

In the event the allegations in a report are substantiated, the Panel may render a decision and will make a determination regarding corrective action or removal of the individual from the Panel.

The procedure for removal requires a majority vote.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Members of the Citizen Review Panel have been entrusted to promote and protect the Citizen Review Panel's interests. Because the CRP's principles recognize the need to foster a balanced, ethical, collaborative, transparent, and open environment, it is important that all members be seen always to place the interests of the CRP above their own when engaged in Citizen Review Panel business. The following points are intended to provide guidance for the Citizen Review Panel and for individual Panel members in cases where real, apparent, or potential conflicts of interest may arise.

DEFINITIONS

Conflicts of interest include situations:

1. Where a Panel member's private affairs or financial interests are in conflict with their duties and responsibilities or result in a perception that a conflict exists;
2. Where a Panel member's actions compromise or undermine the trust that the public and members place in the Citizen Review Panel;

3. Which could impair or appear to impair the Panel member's abilities to act in the Citizen Review Panel's interest.

Conflicts of interest can include both financial and material interests. In addition to an actual conflict of interest, an apparent or potential conflict of interest may also arise. An apparent conflict of interest occurs when the answer to the following question is "yes": Would a reasonably informed person perceive that the performance of the Panel member's duties and responsibilities could be influenced by their financial or material interest? A potential conflict of interest is a situation that may develop into a real conflict of interest.

Special note regarding involvement with OCS: Diversity in experiences and perspectives is welcomed on the CRP, so individuals with past interactions or involvement with OCS are encouraged to apply for membership. In order to avoid a conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest, any involvement with OCS must be at least two years prior to applying for membership. Any OCS interactions or involvement, whether personally or as an employee, must be disclosed at the time of application. Current members must immediately disclose any OCS involvement that arises during their time on the Panel. Panel members may be asked to take a leave of absence while involved in an active case. Once the OCS case is closed, and if there is no substantiation of claims against the Panel member, they may resume their duties on the Panel.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST PROCEDURE

The following guidelines direct all actions and decisions regarding potential and actual conflicts of interest in activities sponsored or supported by the Citizen Review Panel. These principles apply to both for-profit and not-for-profit activities. Every Panel member shall:

- Declare any conflict of interest
- Act in the best interests of the members of the Citizen Review Panel;

- Not communicate confidential information to anyone not entitled to receive the same;
- Not use information, confidential or otherwise, that is gained in the execution of his or her office and is not available to the members of the society generally to further, or seek to further, a Panel member's private pecuniary or other interest;
- Not use his or her position as a Panel member to secure special privileges, favors, or exemptions for himself or herself personally or for any other person;

It is the duty of the Citizen Review Panel to decide whether such individuals may participate in any discussions or vote on the issue that has given rise to the conflict.