

May 4, 2017

Comments to the Tribal State Meeting

SLIDE 1

Thank you for inviting the CRP to present to this group. To be honest, I do not know who constitutes Tribal-State Collaboration Group. I have a vague idea, but it has never been clear to me.

Of course, the CRP itself has its share of vagueness. But, I can confidently say that we in Alaska are far ahead in understanding its true scope and purpose than almost anyone else in the nation.

Most of you know me. As much time as I spend on CRP affairs, this is not my actual job. I am a faculty member at the Institute of Social and Economic Research, at UAA. My research is in child protection services.

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

As some of you know, I will be stepping down as Chair of the Alaska CRP on June 30 of this year. Rebecca Vale, a current member, will be taking over as the Chair.

Today, I thought I will use my limited time here to dispel some myths about CRP, and hopefully bring you all along with the narrative we have been working on for the last several years.

I did not prepare any slides specifically addressing any particular issue or recent developments. I will leave that to you to ask about, and I can respond within the limits of my authority.

HISTORY

As the TSCG is getting organized beginning in 1994, Congress was considering the challenge of CPS agencies getting more insular from the populations they were serving. In response, CRPs were mandated in each state in 1996. Every state had until 1999 to get them up and running. Many states took longer. Our panel began operations in 2002.

Then in 2005, Alaska legislature enacted our own state statute for CRP. Many states do not have a state statute.

Every state is required to provide staff support to their panels. Alaska did that through an OCS staff person in the early years. With the new statute in 2005, a private consulting firm has been hired to provide that staff support. Currently, that contract is \$100,000 a year.

All CRPs are supposed to be made up of volunteers. Federal statute only suggests that members should have some expertise and experience in child maltreatment prevention and treatment. It does not exclude anyone. Alaska state statute is almost a mirror image of the federal statute. On an average, Alaska CRP members spend about 1500-2000 hours on CRP tasks each year. This is in addition to staff time.

MANDATES

It is often easy to miss the phenomenal breadth of the scope of CRP. This is the language. Key words are highlighted in red. Before we talk about the scope, let me point out some basics:

A CRP's focus is the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local CPS agencies. In Alaska that is the Office of Children Services. One can argue that all the ICWA offices across the state are providing child protection services. A good question to think about here - Would the CRP be responsible to work with those offices too?

Two functions are clear from these statutes - Evaluate, and conduct public outreach. A third function, advocacy, is not mentioned in the statutes, but was discussed during the debates in Congress in 1996 when the amendments to CAPTA were being voted upon.

PRIMARY FUNCTIONS

Therefore, the central focus of Alaska CRP's activities are the policies, procedures, and practices of OCS.

The panel has three specific functions – review, outreach, and advocacy.

Review/Evaluate: The statute identifies three standards against which such an evaluation should be conducted – States' CAPTA Plan, which is rather obsolete now, and the panel now focuses on the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP); CPS Standards; and any other criteria. While the first two are rather clearly defined,

the third one really opens up any component of OCS operations for review by the panel.

Outreach: Collect public opinion to assess the impacts of OCS policies, procedures, and practices on children and families – such assessment should inform the CRP review above.

Advocacy – make recommendations for relevant changes in CPS policies, procedures, and practices. Beyond that, advocacy is a slippery slope for CRPs.

CENTRAL PURPOSE

Congress created CRPs to be the mechanisms for public participation, or community engagement, in child protection. CRPs are the only statutory mechanisms with that specific purpose. They are expected to facilitate robust and meaningful participation of citizens in diverse roles, to assist the state's child protection system in being more responsive to the needs of the families and communities of the state. Congressional record is clear that CRPs are to provide, and I quote, "regular citizens, not just child protection bureaucrats", end quote, an opportunity to set policy and suggest best practice.

Again, the central idea is, with input from citizens that are being served and the larger community, OCS's policies, procedures, and practices will be more responsive to citizens' needs.

OTHER WAYS TO LOOK AT IT

CRP is a forum, a stage, where stakeholders discuss the toughest challenges facing child protection service provision. CRP can

provide that neutral space. All its proceedings are public, or will be a matter of public record.

It can serve as a broker of relationships and facilitate collaboration. It may not do that directly, but through facilitating a public dialogue and raising questions that sometimes may be uncomfortable.

CRP has a responsibility to collect public opinion on CPS policies. But, as we discovered, for people to provide informed opinions, they need to have a clear understanding of the purpose and work of OCS. The panel can certainly claim that people are not informed enough and call it a day. That serves no purpose. So, it is in all our best interests to utilize the CRP's effort to not only collect input, but also disseminate information.

With constant flow of information and opinion back and forth, OCS will have the opportunity to be nimble on their feet, and respond quicker. It allows them to continuously improve their quality.

CRP exists in a neutral space. It does not support or oppose OCS actions. It is supposed to inform their actions, and evaluate them against the public opinion. Please note that public opinion may not always be right, or accurately captured. It is up to all stakeholders involved to make that judgment. This provides the CRP an opportunity to be critical, but also entrusts it with the responsibility to be constructive.

SPECIFICALLY FOR TSCG

CRP is no different in its functions.

It is a different story when we consider the actual stakes and operational details.

OCS invested a lot of effort in addition to money in TSCG's success. This is not a public forum – this is meant exclusively for Alaska Native tribal leaders/officers in child protection. I don't know if Tribes invest money in this operation. I also don't know how decisions are made, and the role of OCS here.

On the other hand, CRP is a statutory body, with roles and responsibilities for each identified player, including OCS. It is open to everyone to participate. It can, and should be held accountable for its work. It has the ability to act independently of the leadership of OCS and DHSS. But, it can only be effective if it collaborates with OCS.

With that said, let me be clear – this is not a wrong vs. right comparison. We have two mechanisms with substantial overlap.

Also, this is not a matter of tribe vs. non-tribe. CRP is open to, and should have tribal representation.

WHAT CRP DOES NOT DO

It is often easier to say what CRP does not do. So, here is a short list.

One important thing to note here is – CRP exists to assist OCS to improve, and be more responsive to community needs. CRP is not to find faults with OCS, or with anyone else.

CRP- A STATUTORY INSTITUTION

All that brings me to these basic points about CRP:

The CRP is an institution, with a statutory role and specific responsibilities.

It is an organization of the state.

It facilitates citizen participation.

It must cultivate a critical, but constructive lens.

It exists to help OCS by channeling critical but constructive input from families and communities to OCS.

Its success depends on its relationship with OCS, a relationship that ensures meaningful recommendations from CRP and carefully considered response from OCS.

This is a delicate relationship that needs clear structure, and continued nurturing.

Most of all, CRP is not just a watch dog agency, as many of us believed for the longest time. It is a mechanism for public participation, and is designed because meaningful public participation in policy and practice is, *good practice*. It allows for better policy and practice. Beyond the statutory requirements, we all should be invested in public participation, because it is *good practice*.

CONFERENCE

As most of you know by now, Alaska CRP is hosting the 16th National CRP Conference, next week! I hope you all are planning to be there, or at least send a representative from your agency.

I would like to thank both the Tribal Caucus, and OCS, for appointing a representative from your group to the conference organizing committee.

Registration, agenda, and other information is all available at www.crpalaska.org.

QUESTIONS