

**Oversight Commission on Children, Youths, and Families - Minutes**  
**Monday, April 17, 2023, 12:30 PM Meeting Minutes**

Location: Waterbury State Office Complex, Fox Conference Center, Cherry A, 280 State Drive Waterbury, VT 05671, with Virtual Option Via Microsoft Teams

Website: <https://aoa.vermont.gov/content/oversight-commission-children-youths-and-families>

Members Present: In person: Representative Dan Noyes, Laura Schaller, Lynn Messier, Stephen Dale, Nate Farnham, Amy Rose  
Virtually: Shela Linton and Xusana Davis (with Xusana stepping away at times)

Public Members: Matthew Bernstein (OCYFA, in person)  
Jim Hollaway (virtual)

Minutes By: Amy Rose

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Welcome – Representative Chair Noyes

12:44 PM - Motion to call to order - Amy (all present voted in favor)

12:45 PM – Representative Noyes called for a motion to approve the [minutes](#) from the 12/09/22 meeting. Motion made by Nate Farnham, second provided by Lynn Messier (all present voted in favor)

Representative Noyes asked for public comments - none

12:46 PM - Updates from Child, Youth, and Family Advocate Matthew Bernstein

Matthew provided an overview of the first month and a half on the job.

- Admin tasks - budget (House - \$414,000), supplies, set up. Data system. AoA is helpful, but the admin work is burdensome.
- Possible office space - 7 Kilburn St. (1 year lease) - \$850 including utilities.
- HOTLINE - phone number to call with complaints, inquiries/requests for assistance. Digital services will support the set up.

- Advisory Council - put out an application. 19 applications received, some are duplicates, some may be an intent to file a complaint. 15 are solid applications. Interviews have begun. Statute says nine members.
- Deputy Advocate - 30 applications received, closed on Friday. Have seen all of them, 10 in detail. Xusana, Shela, Shalini have offered help.
- Four or five complaints thus far.
  - Protocol is being developed (how to track and follow up, etc.)
    - Questions came up - what is the expectation for a response?
  - Follow-up from Matthew- it will be essential to be within the Department for Children and Families (DCF) data system, the Office will ask for access.
- Notifications of injury - 12-year-old youth out of state, broken nose. Was notified by DCF. Four hospitalizations. It needs to be determined what to follow up on or what to report to the Office. Amy recommended adding injuries from restraints. Death and restraints haven't been reported yet. Steve shared that the "I think you need to know" standard is troublesome. He recommended being aware of the volume of data coming in. This office is a tracking/counting office to an end, not just to keep records. DCF isn't currently tracking restraints, it isn't in their best interest to do so. Licensing can share what is required. DCF doesn't have a standard tracking form.
- Have spoken with many people. A fair number of DCF folks applied to be the deputy.
- Senate Confirmation - in progress.
- Met other advocates at a meeting,
- Spoke with the media, attended some boards.
- Matthew shared his support of S.6. OCYFA provided a letter to Senate Judiciary to keep the age 22 to disallow police lying.

#### Oversight Commission - how can this body be helpful?

- It would be helpful to have a plan for follow up on cases before we start introductions (even if it is interim). HHS requested a 6-month buffer for the Office to begin accepting calls. How can we maximize the productivity of the office? Response time, follow up, systems and structures.
- Knows who to go to at the top - Brenda, Aryka, Chris Winters, but it would be helpful to know the folks on the ground to go to.
- Court process - meeting with guardian ad litem. What is the role of the GAL, what type of oversight is there?
- Most impacted people have many questions. Website - as a tool for sharing information. Primary responsibilities, problem solving opportunities. How to access the office and what to expect.

- DCF should track data!!!
- Regional advisory councils would be very helpful!
- Statewide tour!

How can the Commission be helpful going forward?

- Reading through the 30 applications with a rubric, come together with the Office of Racial Equity and the Root.
- Amy, Laura, and Steve are willing to read all applications. Rep Noyes and Amy will follow up with Melissa to ensure that is allowable.

Big issues that were raised:

- Whose voice is in the data?
- Commenting on what is missing does not make it the priority, how to compel change?
- Hiring a deputy.
- Legislative context - 6 months.
- Hiring a Deputy Advocate will be critical.
- A protocol for complaints is needed (what do other states do?)

Next Oversight Commission meeting will be on June 12, 2023 (12:30 – 2:00 PM). The Commission is hoping the deputy will be announced by then. We will meet again in October to talk about a potential legislative ask.

2:10 PM - Motion to adjourn made by Laura Schaller, second provided by Nate Farnham (all present voted in favor).

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