

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

Location: Virtual Via Microsoft Teams

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

Members Present: Representative Dan Noyes, Laura Schaller, Stephen Dale, Nate Farnham, Amy Rose, Shela Linton and Xusana Davis

Members Absent: Senator Lyons, and Lynn Messier

Public Members: Matthew Bernstein, Lauren Higbee, Britaney Watson, Nate Hine, Isaac Owusu, and Mark Hughes

Minutes By: Amy Rose

Welcome Introductions, Review, and Approval of Minutes of [April 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes](#)

- Meeting called to order by Representative Noyes at 12:35 PM
- Steve Dale moved to accept minutes, Laura Schaller provided the second, and everyone present voted in favor

No Public Comment

Updates from the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate – Matthew Bernstein, Director of OCYFA

1. Introduce Deputy Advocate
 - Matthew introduced Lauren Higbee (present on the call) who starts on June 18, 2023.
 - Commissioners expressed excitement about Lauren joining the team.
2. Hotels Program Response And Introduction Of Contractors
 - Discussed the role of the Office with the current hotel program ending. It isn't the Office's role to duplicate services, but it is the job to elevate practice, create transparency about process, and advocate for children, youth, and families.
 - Asking for data is powerful and helps tell the story of the moment.
 - The Office has unspent funds from FY23 due to delays in hiring and resulting budget savings. The Office plans to hire two short-term contractors to help the Office be more responsive while it is creating a structure that will allow it to fulfill the statutory requirements.

- Britaney Watson and Amy Rose will fill two short-term, part-time contracts. See the scope of work below. The Commission discussed a conflict of interest for Amy (as a current Commissioner) and agreed that Amy should reach out to Speaker Jill Krowiski about options to step away from the Commission at this time. Matthew noted that there is not a conflict of interest based on the current statute because the OCYFA is not a “provider or facility delivering services to children, youths, and families.” However, Amy has the ability to make her own choices and the Commission has the ability to comment, guide, and discuss the contracts.
3. Advisory Council
 - The Office has chosen seven members of the Advisory Council. For geographic diversity, it would be helpful for the two additional members to be in Rutland and the Northeast Kingdom.
 4. New Office Location: 11 Kilburn St., Suite 212, Burlington, VT 05401
 - We have put the O in OCYFA! The address is: 11 Kilburn St., Suite 212, Burlington, VT 05401. (same building as the Kidsafe collaborative)
 5. New “Hotline” Number And Update On Complaints Process
 - (802) 828-2828
 - The Office does not have the capacity to respond to numerous calls at this moment.
 - The hotline will be advertised broadly once the Office’s policies and practices are in place.
 6. Statutory Data Reporting From DCF: Issues And Examples
 - The statute requires -
 - (a) *The Department shall notify the Office of:*
 - (1) *all incidents of actual physical injury to children or youths in the custody of the Commissioner or at significant risk of such harm; and*
The Office is receiving this information, but they need to clarify definitions of “significant risk” and the level of injury that needs to be reported.
 - (2) *instances of restraint or seclusion of any child or youth in custody of the Commissioner.*
Has not happened to date.
 - (b) *The Department shall notify the Office within 48 hours of any fatality of a child or youth in its custody.*
No reports, this is likely good news.
7. Juvenile Justice Facilities
 - The Office is engaged in conversations about secure youth facilities. There is a lot to discuss. The Office is excited to have the capacity to engage more deeply.
8. End Of Fiscal Year, Budget Veto Process
 - The budget has been passed and vetoed. If the budget is enacted as drafted, the Office will receive \$413,000 for FY24.

9. Assorted Business/Next Meeting

- There are many. The Commission would like to convene in September, in person, in a central location (Randolph?). Representative Noyes will explore dates and locations.

Scope of work for contractors

There are approximately 600 minor children in Vermont who will likely lose their shelter near the end of July 2023 due to the termination of pandemic-era support programs. It is anticipated that many of these children and their families will have ongoing needs in the areas of child welfare, juvenile justice, and Department for Children and Families (“DCF”)-administered public benefits. The Vermont Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate (“OCYFA”) has an obligation to support these children, youth, and families pursuant to 33 VSA Chapter 32 and related law. The OCYFA currently lacks the full-time staff necessary to properly respond to this emergent crisis and therefore seeks Contractors for a Project titled OCYFA 2023 Impacted Families Support Project (hereinafter “Project”).

The goals of this Project are to: (1) promote racial and social equity that recognizes and honors the growing diversity of Vermont’s children and families, including children, youth, and families who are Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color, as well as with regard to socioeconomic status, geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status, (2) increase the capacity of impacted children, youth, and families in the hotels programs (hereinafter “impacted families”) to self-advocate and improve their lives in the areas of child welfare, juvenile justice, public benefits, and related sectors, (3) improve systems for individuals and groups through advocacy, referrals, the provision of legal and other information (but not legal advice), and other support to impacted families, (4) collaborate, develop, measure, and track data outcomes and performance measures for the Project, and (5) offer other supports, as appropriate, to impacted families and the OCYFA.

Contractors shall: (1) develop a plan for connecting with as many impacted families in the hotels programs as possible, across a wide geographic region and with an emphasis on the elements of diversity described above, (2) meet with as many impacted families as possible, but no fewer than ten families, either in person (preferred) or via video or phone call, from the Contract initiation date through at least August 31, 2023, (3) develop and implement a simple, concise, and standardized system for categorizing and addressing the self-identified needs of the impacted people themselves rather than merely “what is available,” (4) create and implement a concise, understandable, and standardized set of explanations for impacted families so that they understand the services OCYFA offers, the data to be collected, and their rights and responsibilities more broadly, (5) support OCYFA in advocating with DCF, other state entities, private organizations, and other partners, on behalf of

impacted families and at their request, for improved outcomes on individual and systemic levels in the areas of child welfare, juvenile justice, public benefits, and related areas, (6) measure and maintain data, in an Excel spreadsheet or the equivalent, on interactions with impacted families and the other Project goals described herein, with a focus on generating clear and concise data categories and reports rather than on the quantity of variables tracked and data produced, (7) meet regularly, but no less than once a week, with OCYFA staff to ensure progress on Project goals and objectives and, as necessary, to reassess and revise Project goals, objectives, and outcomes, (8) collaborate with OCYFA staff to produce a written report at the end of the Contract that contains both quantitative and qualitative data about the effects on impacted families of the end of the hotels programs and the ongoing needs of these families, in light of the OCYFA mission and mandate, and (9) understand and recognize that it is a feature of this Contract, not a bug, that it will evolve as it progresses due to the multiple unknown variables inherent in the Project. Contractors and OCYFA may mutually agree to alter or otherwise revise the Contract Scope of Work at any time.

The work necessary to carry out this Contract may take place between June 1, 2023, and May 31, 2024. However, due to the timing of the end of the hotels programs, the most intensive and urgent part of the work will likely take place from approximately June 1, 2023, through August 31, 2023.

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