

**Advisory Council to the Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate
August 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Location: 1:00-3:00pm via Zoom and In-Person

Website: [Child, Youth, and Family Advisory Council | Agency of Administration \(vermont.gov\)](https://www.vermont.gov/child-youth-family-advisory-council)

Members Present: Ariel Beaulac, Council Member, Lyndon Center
Matthew Bernstein, Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate
Celine Davis, Council Member, Montpelier
Mike Farnham, Council Member, Winooski
Lauren Higbee, Office of the Child, Youth and Family Deputy Advocate
Melanie Hudson, Council Member, Brattleboro
Mercedes King, Council Member, Montpelier
Angel Mason, Council Member, Calais
Ashley Nutbrown, Council Member, Barre

Public Members: None

Minutes by: Laura Schaller, Vermont Judiciary/OCYFA Commission Member

Matthew opened the meeting by reviewing the council mission and community agreements.

Reviewed agenda for today's meeting – no additions or deletions were recommended.

Motion made by Matthew to approve the July 20, 2023, meeting minutes. Seconded by Angel. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Motion made by Matthew to table several agenda items and start with "discussion of issues to focus on and direction of the office." Seconded by Ashley. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

The following is a list of suggestions from the discussion of issues to focus on and direction of the office generated by members:

- Include a youth who is currently "in the system," on the council.

- Housing (and other) resources for parents involved with DCF.
- Recovery coaches for parents; kids remain in the home while DCF supports the family as a whole.
- Hire someone with lived experience to assess families along with DCF investigator to help determine what level of care is needed. This person would be trained, a state employee.
- Family treatment court model – family is wrapped but no court involvement.
- Lack of accountability for DCF workers – seemingly no consequences for providing false information, possibly committing perjury, etc. Lawsuit against Woodside included 22 DCF defendants – despite settlement, all 22 kept their jobs.
- DCF case timelines.
- Training for DCF workers – what is it now? What should it be?

Matthew asked if there were any questions about the continued development of the office (OCFYA). Member: “what are you doing with your time?” Lauren shared the following:

- Furniture arriving next week for physical office space.
- Reporting system has been developed for use of restraint/seclusion that is not filtered by DCF, but direct to the office.
- Visits made to hotels/unhoused (Lauren met with 45 people at two Rutland hotels).
- Looking into holding a youth homelessness forum.
- Addressing complaints/making referrals is taking up the bulk of their time (includes records requests, reviewing hearings, etc.).
- Matthew shared a printed 3x5 index card with information about the office that will be distributed widely.
- Planning to meet with the Vermont Child Welfare Training Partnership and will update council on results.

Matthew reviewed email communication among members, W9 forms for reimbursement (stipend, mileage).

Motion was made by Matthew to table certain agenda items until the next meeting, due to time constraints (Chair structure, term limits, responsibilities, removal process) but explained that he and Lauren are developing a handbook that will address these things. Seconded by Melanie. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Public comment offered. No public comments were requested or made.

Motion was made by Matthew for Ashley to provide an update on case decision by Vermont Supreme Court. Seconded by _____. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Ashley gave an update on a case decision by Vermont Supreme Court. She shared that her appeal to the Vermont Supreme Court was successful. The lower court's decision was reversed. This is a big deal as it is very rare. This decision will now be cited in future cases.

Motion was made by Angel to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Matthew. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 3:04pm.

Next meeting: Thursday, September 21 from 1:00pm-3:00pm. This meeting will be on zoom as well as in person with a location TBD.