

**Oversight Commission on Child, Youth, and Family Advocate  
Virtual Meeting - Minutes  
Friday, October 13, 2023, 1:00 PM**

**Members Present:** Representative Dan Noyes, Laura Schaller, Stephen Dale, Amy Rose, Shela Linton, Xusana Davis, and Lynn Messier

**Members Absent:** Nate Farnham and Senator Lyons

**Public Members:** Lauren Higbee & Matthew Bernstein

**Minutes By:** Amy Rose

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

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**Welcome Introductions, Review, and Approval of Minutes**

- Meeting called to order by Representative Noyes at 1:07 PM.
- Steve Dale moved to accept minutes, Laura Schaller provided the second, and everyone present voted in favor.
- No public comments or changes to the agenda.

**Updates, OCYFA.**

- Re-introduction of Lauren Higbee, Deputy Advocate as of Juneteeth. Excited to be in this role, hit the ground running.
- Matthew and Lauren went to the US Ombuds Association Conference in September.
- The Office held a youth homelessness forum in collaboration with young people and the global majority. Had over 100 attendees.
- Referrals to the office have been skyrocketing.
- The Office shared a couple of “successes” and some of the themes they are seeing.
- They received a call from FSD, which was celebrated.
- The Office is speaking with youth, particularly older youth.
- The Office is hearing from kids with contested custody cases and abuse.

- The Office acknowledged a lack of treatment options. Office has policy ideas, and it is difficult to support in the moment when services are not available.
- The Office has concerns about placements – licensed or unlicensed.
- The Office has heard from parents with disabilities, looking for assistance understanding expectations. We do not know how many children and/or families connected to our systems have disabilities.
- The Office is seeing people with active cases in multiple states.
- The Office would like to assist people in knowing their rights and is interested in peer support opportunities. The Commission discussed times when there are conflicting expectations.
- We are not significantly leveraging the Families First Act.

### **Current work**

- Office is proposing three full-time additional positions for 2025 budget in their upcoming year.
- Office has been invited to testify on the status of secure placements for juveniles at the Joint Justice meeting on October 26.
- Submitted a letter asking for access to data system. DCF agreed to work with the Office.
- The Office named changes in federal statute for kinship care.

### **Housing updates, OCYFA**

The Office is working with families and FSD on understanding and resolving the concerns of children in hotels, especially those with open chins cases. Some of the concerns identified include challenges for the reauthorization of vouchers, long wait times, different interpretations of rules and who qualifies. There are significant concerns related to the conditions of hotels - rodents, lack of access to water, sewage backing up. The governor has a plan coming out soon.

### **Juvenile Justice updates, OCYFA**

The Office has been connected to conversations about secure placements, which has been identified as a current crisis point. OCYFA will be going to Middlesex. All placements need to be youth centered and trauma informed. The Commissioners discussed their perspectives on what is needed. The goal is to build a system of care that is responsive and intentional. There are many yes/ands. Discretion creates the space for bias and is also needed for good practice.

### **Advisory Council updates, OCYFA**

The Advisory Council is going well and there is room for growth. There are currently 7 out of 9 members. Some interest in defining role. One option could be to expand the work around the state.

Shela shared that Families United lost one of its members to a tragedy recently.

The Commission discussed our meeting structure.

### **Additional business, Rep. Noyes**

Rep. Noyes will introduce a bill that would create baby bonds (a state investment in bonds for families 185% of poverty that mature when folks turn 18 for education purposes and at 21 for business purposes). Reach out to him to learn more and engage.

Amy Rose provided a motion to adjourn at 3:07, Shela Linton provided a second. Everyone voted in favor. Meeting adjourned.