

Oversight Commission on Children, Youths, and Families

Wednesday, June 26, 2024, 09:00 AM, Virtual via Microsoft Teams, Minutes

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

Present – Rep. Dan Noyes, Amy Rose, Lynn Messier, Laura Schaller, Shela Linton, Nate Farnham, Steve Dale

Absent – Senator Ginny Lyons, Xusana Davis

Guest – Nate Hine, Matthew Bernstein, Lauren Higbee

9:00 AM Welcome, introductions, review previous minutes Review agenda and public comment

- *Meeting called to order at 9:05am*
- *Motion to accept the [minutes](#) offered by Steve Dale, no changes offered*
- *All voted in favor*

9:10 AM Commission's Role (Commissioner terms, process after advocate's first term)

- *The legislation tasks us with guidance and recommendations to OCYFA – what does that mean?*
- *What is the impact of the group? Collective and individual connections were named as was the opportunity/expectation to share power and accountability.*
- *Commissioners should be empowered to bring concerns to the group and to the Office*
- *We can keep revisit this agenda item as time goes on*
- *How are we connecting with the advisory board? Can we build relationships with them?*
- *Could we have a joint meeting with the advisory council? Are we actively available to them?*
- *There was an interest in less reporting of activity – and focusing on the broad question - are we moving in the right direction?*
- *Public accountability!*

9:20 AM Agenda items from Commissioners (TPRs & child support)

- *The kinship network is getting many calls of kids being put back in dangerous environments, nearly lost a child. Inadequate responses from DCF calls to the hotline were named. What is put in place to support children? Why aren't we following up on unpaid child support? What is the process for child support when kids are in state care?*
- *Who do we bring concerns to when we feel policies aren't being addressed?*
- *How is our structure supporting children, youth, and families?*
- *Are our policies just? Is there a process when policies aren't followed?*
- *Is the state participating in the poverty trap? What are we doing in the name of accountability? Poverty hurts children.*

- *There is a larger conversation happening about how we fund DCF. We aren't drawing down all the federal dollars possible, we are taking federal benefits from kids.*
- *In zooming out – we throw out a huge topic, everyone has a view. How can we bring concerns to the OCYFA and how does the Commission engage?*
- *Lean in moment around the taxpayer narrative. We are all taxpayers. Even our youth pay taxes when they purchase things. We are all included in funding and feeling the outcomes of our systems - we are collectively paying for this!*

9:30 AM Advocate Update (what is coming to them, relationship with the state, top priorities, access to records, registry/substantiation, Raise the Age, secure facilities, restraint/seclusion, restructuring AHS conversation)

- *Request from the OCYFA - we need help from you – growing our Office!*
- *Matthew categorized the work the Office is doing :*
 1. *Internal governance, protocols, responsibility, paperwork, accountabilities, developing internal protocols, records, conflicts, ...*
 2. *Public information, communications, would like to have a newsletter, events, conference*
 3. *Direct service, visit facilities, connect with families, in Offices, interact with people directly who are seeking assistance*
 4. *Big policy and systemic initiatives – CWIS, leg activity, new juvenile facility, KIN rule, prevention work (FFPSA), IV-E legal supports,*
 5. *Coalition building*

Observations from the OCYFA:

- *Leg session was time intensive, the OCYFA would like to bring impacted voices forward when possible.*
- *It was striking when Chair Wood asked about the amount of individual work that was done. The number of referrals and the time required is untenable. There are significant referrals.*
- *Some of the calls that come to the Office are jarring and they all deserve attention. One additional intake coordinator would be extremely helpful.*
- *DCF is not sending restraint and seclusion data as it is in law. There is no teeth to the legislation. Is this statute the minimum? The parts of the statute that are unable to be completed within a small office is challenging. Deep concerns about [how to keep youth safe in Vergennes](#).*
- *H.644 was signed into law by the Governor giving [adults access to their records](#). The OCYFA testified 10 times, supported H.644, commented on H.661, opposed S.58 (passed with bipartisan support), got a letter of support for a million dollar project to support youth voice as a congressional earmark. The Office wrote a separate grant to host a youth centered*

conference on juvenile justice – will pay stipends to youth. The Office is working with Corey Best – who does racial justice consulting work. Making exciting progress on CWIS – pushing for agile software development. Office continues to push DCF to be its best version of itself.

- Lauren and Matthew are proud of their work and could use additional staff.
- It could be helpful to have a public hearing about restraint and seclusion. How can we remove barriers to getting raw data? People need to be prepared for the volume that restraints and seclusion are happening. There is an obligation for this data to be delivered. It is appropriate to convene a meeting to support this? What levers could be pulled? We have a legal obligation to mobilize. The Commission could send a letter to DCF and chairs of the Committees of jurisdiction.
- Vision is to hold accountability - including within the legislature. Can we make sure the legislature is aware of the Commission and our role? It could be helpful to name - who we are, what we do and why it matters – and invite the legislature to lean into us.
- Has the Office been given access to the data system? In progress...the Office is building trust and working with DCF and lawyers on a MOU.
- Some caution was shared about continuing to come back to the capacity of the Office. The OCYFA is the overseer, not the doer. What is (or is not) happening within DCF that requires so much oversight capacity?
- Where is the Office on LGBTQIA+ youth support? How does DCF support protective categories for other marginalized groups? As a state, we have an ability to reaffirm our values. DCF has not been as supportive or direct for youth of color. How can we stand up for kids who are at most risk?

10:30 AM OCYFA structure

- Is the current structure helpful?
- How does this Office connect with the Health Care Advocate, Economic Security advocacy, and others? What is missing? The same kids are experiencing barriers and harm in multiple systems.

Action item:

- Dan will draft a short letter to DCF regarding restraint and seclusion data.

11:18 AM Adjourn

- Motion to adjourn made by Amy

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