



# WEST VIRGINIA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Annual Summary Report

December 2017 to December 2018

For More Information:

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## Citizen Review Panel Focus Areas – 2018

Meeting dates;

April 5, 2018

June 7, 2018

August 9, 2018

December 5, 2018

### Continuity of the Panel, Recruitment and Retention, and Leadership

The Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is fortunate for the volunteer membership of several long-serving, devoted members who are optimistic for continuous improvements to West Virginia's child welfare system, for the capacity of the CRP to provide a unique perspective on the system's strengths and opportunities, and for the continuity of the CRP despite the challenges it may – and has - encountered from time to time. The CRP recently elected Elizabeth Shahan and Rachel Kinder as chair and co-chair respectively; they agreed to serve second one-year terms and the members appreciate their community-based experience and familiarity with children, families, and the many agencies and organizations that serve them.

In 2017, the Panel approved the distribution of a media release to all major newspapers and other outlets in West Virginia. Briefs throughout the year to each will follow, to better inform the public of the presence and purpose of the Panel and to encourage new membership as well. The goal is to incorporate members to the Panel representing additional and community-based points of view, including the faith community, parents, and former clients who may desire to “give back” through volunteer service.

Recognizing the increasing difficulty both current and prospective members have expressed with the time of travel for in person-meetings (members reside throughout the state), the Panel members decided in 2017 to meet several times throughout the year using conference call technology and one, possibly two times during the year in-person, going forward. This will reduce the burden of time and travel, reduce miles expenses, yet avail the members an opportunity for face time and for the completion of tasks that are difficult if not impossible remotely (i.e., child welfare case reviews).

Adding to the difficulty of the Citizen's Review Panel in 2018 was the resignation of both the Coordinator and the DHHR Liaison. These resignations contributed to a lack of coordination and development of the annual report.

Both Safe at Home and Centralized Intake were removed as standing agenda items to the meetings. Items which will continue to be reviewed at each meeting are listed below.

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### Foster Care Recruitment and Retention

All members agree that focusing attention on recruitment and retention of foster parents remains critical for the state. They would like to initiate a shared approach to learning and integrating foster care activities in each of their respective agencies.

### CPS Cases Not Involving the Court System

The Citizen Review Panel endorses the periodic review of individual cases and remains committed to reviewing those that are not subject to the oversight of the circuit courts. The Panel members do, however, recognize that productive case review must be supported by current knowledge of law and policy.

### Federal Review Process

The panel believes that they will need additional training on the Child and Family Services Review, Child and Family Services Plan, Annual Progress Services Report and Program Improvement Plan. Since the panel has a few new members and will need to recruit many more, training on this process is needed. The CRP requests the following to aid in this process;

- That a copy of the completed PIP be provided to the Citizen Review Panel at the earliest opportunity.
- That a designee of the WV DHHR updates the CRP at regular intervals regarding the progress, accomplishments, and challenges of work groups that are created to address areas targeted for improvement in the PIP.

By far the biggest focus of the Panel in the last year was the need to develop integrated services both in the community and within the Department of Health and Human Resources to address the substance abuse issue. This issue touches every member of the panel and a very large percentage of the state's population.

The CRP recommends:

1. Services should be integrated between the Bureau for Behavioral Health and the Bureau of Children and Families for foster children, grandparents as caregivers, and substance abuse treatment and prevention. To the panel's knowledge, this is currently a topic of interest between both bureaus. The Bureau of Children and Families has a great deal of movement to make.
2. Cross Bureau collaboration also needs to occur to encourage and develop best practice training for all entities and partners involved in child welfare cases (i.e. evidence-based practices and therapies for SUD, trauma informed care, medication assisted treatment, and mental health first aid). Our courts, especially, are ruling in ways that conflict with current best practices and their current practices continue to traumatize youth and are harmful to the reunification and permanency of children with their families.

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3. Stigma training should be provided to all entities involved in the child welfare continuum.
4. Current child care policies restrict a family's ability to be successful and should be considered as part of the child welfare continuum of care, specifically when substance use disorder is identified in a family assessment
5. Stigma training would also be helpful when addressing or managing cases involving drug exposed infants. This would ensure foster families and respite homes would be adequately trained, supported, and prepared for the needs of these children without the color of stigma that may exist when these children are referred to a family.
6. A new CRP coordinator be hired.