



WEST VIRGINIA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Annual Summary Report

October 2016 to December 2017

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Citizen Review Panel Focus Areas – 2017

Foster Care, Recruitment and Retention

The Citizen Review Panel shares the WV Department of Health and Human Resources' (DHHR) concern for the number of children coming into care and the perpetual shortfall of local foster homes within which to place them. The Panel has selected foster care recruitment and retention as a specific focus issue in 2018, consistent with its CAPTA federal mandate to “review the extent to which the State child protective services system is coordinated with foster care and adoption programs.” In 2017, the members were updated regarding the ongoing role of Mission West Virginia and the activities of organizations including the Family Resource Network to facilitate collaboration between foster care agencies. The Panel has been informed that West Virginia's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) following the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) will include a work group or focus area on recruitment and retention of foster homes. The CRP recommends:

- That one or more representatives of the CRP be permitted to participate in the work group focusing on foster homes. The CRP desires to learn about the many and varied efforts of the WV DHHR and its agents on this important issue – and to bring its unique perspective to improvement effort.
- That the CRP be updated on the progress of a tiered foster care program. Requests in 2017 for an update on this topic seemed to indicate that it had not yet progressed beyond the concept phase.
- That CRP review the statewide recruitment plan once it is developed and finalized.

Centralized Intake

The Panel members recognize the progress of the Centralized Intake unit since its inception and the challenges confronting it today. The CRP has maintained this topic as a standing agenda item and management from Centralized Intake has presented to the CRP on many occasions, providing informative data, reports, and the context to help the members understand them accurately. Not surprisingly, Centralized Intake appears vulnerable to the many of the general challenges confronting CPS including lack of supervisory and front-line staffing and apparent worker burnout/turnover. The CRP recommends:

- That the DHHR monitor the feasibility/applicability of predictive data analytics and its potential fit to intake process, toward improving the consistency, accuracy, and speed of screen-in/screen-out decision making.
- That Centralized Intake maintain a regular process of surveying all caller groups (law enforcement, mandated reporters, the general public, etc.) to incorporate the experience of its users into front-facing changes, updates, and improvements.

- That one or more representatives of the CRP be permitted to participate in the work group focusing on CPS worker retention.
- Going forward, the Panel has discontinued Centralized Intake as a standing agenda topic and will request updates from the DHHR from time to time.

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. The CRP recommends:

- That information be provided to the Panel regarding
 - The number of non-court cases that are open,
 - The proportion of all CPS cases that non-court cases represent,
 - The differences along DHHR key performance indicators between cases involving the court and cases not involving the court, and
 - Whether non-court cases involve family problems and deficiencies that differ substantially from court-involved cases.
 - With this information, the Panel will make more specifically targeted requests for cases to review.
 - With this information, the Panel will request that designees of the DHHR provide general education to the members to facilitate productive case review. The CRP requests that the DHHR provide education from time to time to the Panel regarding updates to law and policy. For example, policies regarding safety planning for drug exposed infants was recently updated and the CRP requests continuing education regarding this change.

Children and Family Services Review Performance Improvement Plan

The 2017 federal review provided reliable data-supported information regarding the degree to which West Virginia's child welfare efforts and outcomes conform to federal requirements. The coordinator of the Citizen Review Panel had the invaluable experience of working closely with the Division of Planning and Quality Improvement (DPQI) during statewide case reviews in the third round of the CFSR. The Panel commends the DHHR for achieving the capacity to perform State Conducted Case Reviews. A work product associated with the federal review process is the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) which addresses areas needing improvement. In 2017, the Panel affirmed its intent to a) be educated by the DHHR regarding the results of the CFSR as soon as that information became available and b) to choose areas of focus mirroring those in the subsequent PIP. The CRP recommends:

- 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 update 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.

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. Pamela Kaehler will continue in the coordinator role for the Panel.

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).

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. Our 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.

The CRP recommends:

- That the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) support independent work of the Panel toward its federal mandate, by providing access without undue administrative or political barriers to reports, information, data, a selection of redacted cases, and the opportunity to participate from time to time in meetings, work groups, or other venues as appropriate. The Panel recognizes the complexity of the child welfare system; the Panel's insights and recommendations are strengthened and more feasible by members' knowledge and understanding of this system.

- That the DHHR provide access without undue barriers to funding as needed from time to time for meeting support, attendance at the National Citizen Review Panel conference, or access to professional/consulting assistance that may come at a nominal cost.

Other

The Citizen Review Panel appreciates the work of the state team devoted to the review of child fatalities. A member of the Child Fatality Review Team serves also as a member of the CRP. The two entities will collaborate to ensure a healthy sharing of knowledge, resources, and findings.

The CRP must understand changes in state laws affecting child welfare. The CRP recommends that an appropriate designee of the DHHR provide an annual update to the Panel regarding pending and passed legislation, including its expected impact on the West Virginia's child welfare system.

The CRP has no recommendations regarding the Safe at Home (SAH) program. The Panel has discontinued SAH as a standing agenda topic and will request updates from the DHHR from time to time.