

**Child Welfare Advisory Committee**  
**February 19, 2021 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM**  
**MINUTES**

**Attendees**

**Members:** Beverly Jones, Zach Schrantz, Andi Durbin, Audrey Anewshki Pennington, Charles Montoria-Archer, Christopher Cox, Dan Kotowski, Elizabeth Richmond, Harriet Kersh, Jackie Sharp, Jason Keeler, Jere Murry, Jessica Bullard, Kara Teeple, Kathy Grzelak, LaTasha Roberson-Guifarro, Malia Arnett, Melissa Riddle, Monica Badiano, Patricia Ege, Prestina Singleton, Rich Bobby, Rick Velasquez, Tanya Gassenheimer, Toleda Hart, Viviane Ngwa

**DCFS:** Director Marc Smith, Ashley Deckert, Dagenè Brown, Daniel Fitzgerald, Darryl Johnson, Deborah Kennedy, Derek Hobson, James Daugherty, Jassen Strokosch, Kara Hamilton, Kevin Walsh, Kimberly Mann, Lori Welcher-Evans, Michelle Jackson, Monico Whittington-Eskridge, Robert Blackwell, Royce Kirkpatrick, Sylvia Fonseca, Timothy Snowden, Alicia Ozier, Angela Harris, Chevelle Bailey, Douglas Washington, Gaylon Alcaez, Jason House, Jennifer Marett, Juliana Harms, Julie Barbosa, Kim Bates, Lynda Petrick, Maria Miller, Michelle Grove, Norman Machay, Tierney Stutz, Yesenia Perez

**Public:** Elke Hansen, Margaret Vimont, Nancy Dorfman-Schwartz, Sean McGinnis, Aisha Davis, Cameron Zelaya, Carrie Muehlbauer, Cindy Noguera, Curt Holderfield, Desi Silva, Elaine Smith, Jennifer Woods, Kacy Anderson, Ken Taylor, Marci White, Mary Savage, Michelle Churchey-Mims, Molly Dull, Raul Garza, Sarah Daniels, Trish Fox, WICS News Channel 20

**Co-Chair Welcome and Report (Zach Schrantz, Beverly Jones)**

- Formal Member Role Call – Completed.
- New Member Introductions
  - Thanked the Nominating Committee for efforts in diversity. Welcomed ten new members, including new co-chair Beverly Jones. All new members introduced themselves.
  - Q. Will the birth parent rep vacancy be filled? Someone was appointed but couldn't remain on the council. Another recommendation will be made to the Director.
- CWAC Strategic Planning Retreat and Priorities Updates
  - The retreat will be virtual due to the pandemic and will focus on four priorities: 1) equity, with an emphasize on racial equity, 2) building resources, 3) workforce development, and 4) Family First prevention services and support. Currently working to solidify dates. Further messaging with updates to follow.
  - A concern was voiced about the CWAC structure for recommendations. A more efficient process needs to be identified to ensure timely review and responses. Zach replied this is still a priority for CWAC and part of ongoing conversations with DCFS.

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- Q. Have there been conversations re: subcommittee structure and aligning responsibilities? This concern was noted and will be included in the ongoing retreat planning discussions.
- Approval of November Minutes – Chris Cox motioned for approval, Dan Kotowski seconded, no objections. Motion passed.

### **Director's Report**

- Thanked Beverly and Zach for their work and commitment, as well as the new and current members. Appreciates all efforts toward being inclusive in addition to being racially diverse. Noted that it's important to have CWAC as a partner and have their voice and recommendations at the table with leadership during the decision-making process.
- The Department's current priorities include advocating for vaccinations in the community and child welfare staff. Working with the Governor's Office and court system to ensure staff in the child welfare system have access to vaccines. Also prioritizing permanency. Working on increasing fast but safe reunifications and taking an aggressive stance on using subsidized guardianship. More information on legislation and court efforts re: sub-guar to follow.

### **COVID-19 Updates (Derek Hobson, Jassen Strokosch)**

- The AT 2020.11 re: visitation, which was issued 11/16/20 and reissued 12/16/20, expires today. It will be extended another 30 days and reviewed for any necessary changes. Can be found on the D-Net and public website.
- A few reminders re: safety and testing – Safety precautions are still in effect regardless of vaccination status. Testing kits have been requested by 20 congregate care settings, for a total of 4,000 tests delivered. These kits are still available and in supply. If anyone's interested in rapid on-site testing, please reach out.
- Thanked Aunt Martha's for partnership in vaccine roll-out to child welfare staff (*over 4,000 DCFS and POS statewide*) eligible for vaccination. Started with three weeks of appointments and extended for another two weeks. If interest continues, more extensions will follow. Coming up on 1,000 vaccines administered. The Department understands people's trepidations about the vaccines, but all are encouraged to take it. Also advise not to wait for a vaccine with the Department; should vaccinate whenever/wherever it's available. More information on impact re: decisions made with IDPH to follow.
- Q. Have there been discussions re: giving parents access to vaccines? The Department has discussed this but find it difficult. Whatever qualifications parents have that make them currently eligible, the Department is not set up to know about them. Their best option is to go through the established IDPH distribution network. Can explore this idea when vaccines are made available to more groups.
- Q. What response has IDPH provided re: including permanency and intact staff in the 1A/1B groups? The Department understands the risks of doing the job and appreciates their commitment, but guidelines come from CDC. There are a lot of nuances that affect decisions and delivery, like work settings. It's not all about frequency of contact.
- Q. Are there updates on the 1C group timetables and definitions re: including additional stakeholders, especially youth over 16? The Department has no updates but will share guidance once it's received.

### **DCFS Budget Updates (Royce Kirkpatrick)**

- FY22 Budget Report – See the FY22 Budget Proposal Overview attached to the invite.
  - Budget increase from \$1.43B to \$1.55B.
  - Some line item details – The majority is the \$42M line item for foster care, which includes money for caseload growth and increased HMR licensure. Licensing of HMR is one of three financial priorities,

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along with the CFS458B eligibility form and intact candidacy. The \$30M line item for institutions and group homes includes a rate increase for entry-level staff. The increase will roll out on January 1<sup>st</sup>. The \$17M line item for family preservation was increased due to caseloads and to align appropriations with intact family services expenditures. The \$15M line item for CCWIS is critical in upgrading IT for casework, claiming and reporting. The \$11M line item for personal services has no headcount reductions. The \$5M line item for day care increased due to seen growth.

- Q. Re: increase in caseloads over the past few years, have there been discussions on why this is happening? Work is being done to revamp the way the Department makes safety decisions. A lot of families have also been reaching out to the Department for help, but the way the Department responds still needs work. Also seeing an increase in poverty level. Chapin Hall is currently assisting with identifying correlations. Working to increase reunifications and community supports. Can further discuss in a different forum.
- Q. Re: family preservation, what about tangible supports for those experiencing poverty? This is included in the comprehensive rate for intact. The flex funds added to intact contracts can be used for this. The council requested a breakdown of the modifications for review. Royce will share.
- Q. Re: DCFS staff projections, what's the current staff level? The information was not readily available.
  - Several discussions and comments re: need to address discrepancies between public vs private sector salaries, including this being a contributing factor to POS direct service employee turnover; many leave POS to work for DCFS; the Department's continued advocacy to rectify through recruitment and retention efforts and processes. The council and Department agree this is a critical issue that requires further in-depth discussions and collaboration. The council will also be reaching out to ICOY for assistance.
- Q. To assist POS plan their FY22 budgets, what is the vision for the salary/minimum wage increase? Budget numbers will be offered re: money flowing to child welfare worker contracts at next FAS meeting for review.
- Comments via WebEx Chat function – When thinking about high-end youth, we need to shift our thinking and determine how we can prepare bio parents to care for their children vs thinking spec foster care is the answer. Perhaps by pouring services into the home of parent when they are safe to return home.
- FY21 Budget Updates – No update provided.

#### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report (Daniel Fitzgerald)**

- Currently in phase I. The Office of Affirmative Action is being renamed and restructured to become the Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Includes regrouping several aspects of the division.
- A needs assessment via survey will be conducted to help understand how stakeholders have experienced or witnessed inequities in practice and/or the workplace, and their ideas to address them. Will be working with Casey Family Programs to roll this out. Responses from this survey will be analyzed to move forward with recommendations.
- Working with Communications for an awareness campaign, which will include a training video. Working with OLPD so that all new and current workforce go through mandatory DEI training. Includes partnering with Ohio State and Kirwan Institute. Hope to start by late March. Will be partnering with Jane Addams School of Social Work on a proposal re: race-informed curriculum and engagement practices to integrate with the Department's current trainings.

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- To continue and strengthen the Department's work in LGBTQI+, will be bringing on a chief to oversee this population's services and training. A training for DCFS and POS staff and foster parents re: LGBTQI+ inclusion will be rolling out via virtual platform by late March. Also working on a protocol to ensure safe and secure collection and use of related data.
- Q. Are there established dates and timeframes? Yes, Daniel will share.
- Q. Is there anything CWAC can do to help advance this? Yes, especially to expand to POS agencies since they hold 85% of all child welfare cases. They would each need to create similar programs. Can start by including DEI in POS leadership meetings.
- Q. Do stakeholders participate in analyzing feedback and creating metrics? What would CWAC's role be re: needs assessments? DEI will be creating a planning workgroup for needs assessment. To include existing CWAC groups since this needs requires input from their various perspectives.
- Comments from ICOY – Will be rerunning rate methodology bill for a financial model that supports services to reduce disparate outcomes. Also need to build an early intervention system outside DCFS with sister agencies so families don't come to the Department's attention. Will also be running a bill re: training. Implicit bias training to be incorporated into mandated reporter training. A vast majority of calls from mandated reporters are unfounded. Will also be asking community-based agencies to offer implicit bias training to staff. ICOY can help with any efforts if needed. Daniel will reach out.

### Committee reports

- Education Task Force (Chevelle Bailey, Monico Whittington-Eskridge)
  - Revamped – Added Chevelle Bailey to team. Determined that intervention should be done before youth are in academic trouble. Therefore, the contract with NIU is being restructured so they can help any youth that's struggling. Will also be increasing support, messaging and training to caregivers. Will also be revising data sharing agreement with ISBE.
  - If interested in joining, contact Monico or Chevelle.
- Workforce Credentials Update (Monico Whittington-Eskridge)
  - About six pieces under Licensing series need amendments re: language. In last steps of finetuning before sending to OCFP.
  - Items in review: degree requirements for supervisors; degree and credit hour requirements for residential staff, includes CILA exemptions; waiver process.
- Additional Chafee Funds (Chevelle Bailey, Monico Whittington-Eskridge)
  - Funds will be used to expand YouthCare and improve services to traditional older youth, like housing and college. Several proposals are being reviewed on best way to leverage these funds.
  - Instructions were also received from the federal government re: supports and providing a re-entry program. Depending on age-out date, youth are eligible for enhanced services.
  - Q. How can funds support alumni former YIC? There is a proposal that gives special consideration to alumni. Currently with Budget and Policy for review.
- Other
  - Bob announced that he will be retiring and his last day with the Department is 3/31/21. Thanked colleagues for their commitment and encouraged everyone to continue their work.
  - LaTasha will be stepping into Beverly's previous role in the Workforce Development workgroup.

**Public Comments** – None

**Next meeting:** May 13, 2021 1:00 PM-3:30 PM. Location TBD.

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