



**ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL
2024-2025 Annual Work Plan**



ABOUT THE PANEL

AUTHORITY

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel can be referenced as the “CRP” or the “Panel.” The CRP is federally mandated through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), Keeping Children, and the Families Safe Act of 2003. The CRP is also mandated through Alaska Statute Sec. 47.14.205.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership on the Panel is voluntary and expected to represent the diversity of the state. The Panel selects its own members through a formal recruitment and application process. Members elect a Chair and Vice Chair from the membership. Terms for members are for three years, with a limit of two consecutive terms. Terms for CRP officers are for two years, with a limit of two consecutive officer terms.

MISSION

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel will review the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) practices, procedures, and policies and evaluate them for compliance with federal and state laws and the State Plan. Based on its findings, the Panel will make recommendations to ensure the safety and well-being of Alaska’s children.

PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS OF THE PANEL

The Panel has three principal functions: evaluation, public outreach, and advocacy.

EVALUATION

The Panel will evaluate OCS compliance with federal and state laws, examining policies and procedures for consistent state-wide implementation while still being responsive to the diversity of needs across the state. The CRP shall evaluate the extent to which OCS effectively fulfills its child protection responsibilities under The State Plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under 42 U.S.C. 5106a(b); Child Protection Standards under federal and state laws. The Panel may identify other criteria important to ensuring the protection of children, including the level and efficiency of coordination of foster care and adoption programs in the state. The Panel focuses on systemic issues. Unique situations will not be reviewed as individual cases by the Panel but may be reviewed to identify and address systemic issues.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Panel will identify and implement means to gather feedback on procedures and practices for delivering child protection services in Alaska. As specified above, the information thus collected will be utilized in its evaluation function.

ADVOCACY

The Panel will conduct appropriate actions to help improve Alaska’s child protection services system.

2024-2025 PANEL MEMBERS

- Retchenda George-Bettisworth (Chair) - Fairbanks
- Colin Underwood (Vice-Chair) - Anchorage
- Lucinda Alexie - Bethel
- Abram Goodstein - Anchorage
- Kimberlee Saunders - Kodiak
- Desiré Shepler - Palmer
- Trevor Storrs - Anchorage





APPROACH

The Citizen Review Panel is dedicated to enhancing the child welfare system in Alaska by adopting a structured and strategic approach through a two-year work plan that will be updated annually. Each year, the Panel will prioritize focus areas critical to improving child welfare services in Alaska.

This systematic approach ensures that the Panel’s work is

informed and impactful, fostering continuous improvement in the child welfare system to better serve Alaska’s children and families. Starting this year, the Citizen Review Panel’s work plan cycle will span two years and is designed to improve key aspects of child welfare in Alaska. Each priority will be organized into two phases—Education and Knowledge Building (Phase 1) and Action and

Implementation (Phase 2)—that align with the selected focus areas and may occur concurrently depending on the needs and progress of each focus area. As progress advances, previous years may be built upon, or other priorities may be identified. Each year, the Citizen Review Panel will provide recommendations to the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) in its Annual Report.

PHASE 1: EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

FOCUS AREA SELECTION

In this phase, the emphasis is on deepening the Panel’s understanding of the selected child welfare topics. The cycle begins with the Panel selecting key focus areas that will guide its efforts over the next two years.

EXPERT ENGAGEMENT

The Panel identifies subject matter experts in the focus areas and requests data and presentations at monthly CRP meetings.

KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

The Panel dedicates time to in-depth discussions and expert consultations specific to each focus area. This engagement helps build the Panel’s understanding of each focus area.

SYNTHESIS & PLANNING

As each focus area progresses through Phase 1, the Panel reviews and synthesizes the gathered information to inform action planning for Phase 2.

PHASE 2: ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

TRANSLATE KNOWLEDGE

Building on the understanding gained in Phase 1, this phase focuses on translating knowledge into actionable strategies and initiatives to address identified issues within the focus areas. This phase may overlap with Phase 1 activities as the Panel moves forward with specific actions to improve child welfare practices.



FOCUS AREA ONE

MANDATORY REPORTING

Mandatory reporting, established under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, has been a central method for addressing child abuse and neglect in the U.S. for fifty years. In Alaska, where child abuse and neglect rates are among the highest per capita in the nation¹, many reports come from mandatory reporters. These individuals,

defined by state statutes, are legally required to report suspected child maltreatment to the Office of Children’s Services.

In Alaska, nine categories of professionals are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect within 24 hours (Alaska Statute Sec. 47.17.020), with failure to report punishable as a Class A misdemeanor. These

mandated reporters, especially those employed by the state or school districts, are also required to receive training on recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect². These reporters include educators, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, and other key roles that come into contact with children.

CRP WORK PLAN FOR MANDATORY REPORTING

PHASE 1: EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

DATA COLLECTION

The Panel will collaborate with OCS to gather data on the efficacy and compliance rates of mandatory reporting in Alaska, focusing on the current state of reporting volumes and outcomes.

EXPERT CONSULTATION

The Panel will engage with child welfare experts, particularly those who train and oversee mandatory reporters, to better understand the existing system, its challenges, and areas for improvement.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The Panel will seek insights from the broader public and child welfare professionals to gather experiences regarding mandatory reporting processes.

PHASE 2: ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

ADVOCACY

The Panel will work in collaboration with key stakeholders to advocate for changes in the mandatory reporting laws.

TRAINING ENHANCEMENTS

A review of mandatory reporting training programs, focusing on accessibility, frequency, and content updates to ensure reporters are well-prepared.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Collaborating with community organizations to better support families at risk by recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect, potentially expanding beyond mandated reporters.

¹ <https://health.alaska.gov/Commissioner/Documents/MentalHealth/scorecard/Goal-6.pdf>

² https://dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/childrensjustice/reporting/references_law.aspx#47.17.020



OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

Out-of-home placements refer to the temporary care arrangements made for children who cannot safely remain in their homes due to abuse, neglect, or other safety concerns. Out-of-home placements in Alaska’s Office of Children’s Services (OCS) encompass several options.

- Kinship placements, where children are placed with relatives or close family friends, are prioritized to maintain family bonds and cultural connections.
- Therapeutic homes provide specialized care for children with emotional, behavioral, or medical needs.
- Licensed foster homes for children needing temporary care.
- Residential services, including group homes and treatment facilities, serve those requiring more structured environments.

Alaska state law guides OCS to make the best efforts to place children in the following order of placement preferences:

1. An adult family member
2. A family friend who meets the foster care licensing requirements established by the department
3. A licensed foster home that is not an adult family member or family friend
4. Or, an institution for children that has a program suitable to meet the child’s needs³.

These placements aim to ensure the safety and stability of children while addressing their unique needs in alignment with federal standards for child welfare.

CRP WORK PLAN FOR OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

PHASE 1: EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SYSTEMS

The Panel will analyze existing data on out-of-home placements, focusing on placement stability, timeliness of placements, and long-term outcomes for children in care.

COLLABORATION WITH OCS AND PROVIDERS

The Panel will collaborate with OCS and service providers to understand the different placement types, including kinship care, therapeutic homes, and foster care, identifying strengths and gaps in the current system.

CULTURAL & COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS

Given Alaska’s diverse population, the Panel will prioritize understanding the role of cultural and community connections in out-of-home placements.

PHASE 2: ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Action and implementation will begin development in Quarter 3.

³<https://dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/relativeGuide.pdf>



RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FY25

In spring 2025, the Panel will develop a set of recommendations based on findings from its focus areas to be included in an annual report. This will include actionable steps for the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) to consider, such as:

- Enhancing the mandatory reporting process to ensure timely, accurate reporting and effective use of resources.
 - Expanding kinship care and foster care supports to improve placement stability and outcomes for children.
 - Advocating for ongoing training and education for mandatory reporters and caregivers.
 - Other follow-up on out-of-home placement processes.
- The Panel will hear from key subject matter experts during its regular meetings during the winter of 2024-2025, leading up to agreement on recommendations in its annual report.



ACRONYM LIST

CAPTA - Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

CRP - Citizen Review Panel

FY - Fiscal Year

OCS - Office of Children’s Services





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