

ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT

2016



Alaska Citizen Review Panel evaluates the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies for effectiveness in discharging their child protection responsibilities. The Panel is mandated through CAPTA 1997 (P.L. 104-235), and enacted through AS 47.14.205.

212 Front Street, Suite 100, Fairbanks, AK 99701

www.crpalaska.org

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Alaska CRP's annual report is released on June 30th each year, and covers the Panel's activities through the period beginning July 1st of the previous year. The Office of Children's Services is required to respond to this report and its recommendations within six months of its release.

This report is distributed to all state legislators, Alaska's congressional delegation, the Children's Bureau, and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. It is also available for any interested party and the general public on the Panel's website at www.crp.alaska.org.

ABOUT THE PANEL

AUTHORITY: The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is federally mandated through the 1996, 2003, and 2010 amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and authorized through Alaska Statute Sec. 47.14.205. The Panel operates under a set of operating guidelines, available on the Panel's website.

FUNCTIONS: The primary purpose of Citizen Review Panels is to assist state and local child protection systems to be more responsive to community needs and opportunities in providing child protection services through evaluation and public outreach. In Alaska, the designated child protection agency is the Office of Children's Services (OCS). Therefore, the Alaska CRP:

Evaluates the extent to which OCS is effectively discharging 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; and
- Any other criteria that the CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children

Conducts public outreach and gathers public comment on current OCS procedures and practices involving children and family services.

Advocate for relevant actions that would help improve the child protection services system in Alaska.

The Panel is not a grievance redress mechanism, and thus is not equipped to address any concerns on individual cases.

STRUCTURE AND 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 process. Members elect a Chair and Vice Chair from among the membership. While members are expected to serve for at least two years, there are no stipulated term limits. The Panel membership during 2015-2016 included the following (* indicates the member resigned during this work year, and + indicates the member joined the Panel during this year):

Chair	Diwakar Vadapalli	Anchorage
Vice Chair	Dana W. Hallett	Haines
Members	Bettyann Steciw	Anchor Point
	Jen Burkmire*	Wasilla
	Joshua Stein+	Barrow
	Margaret McWilliams	Juneau
	Donna M. Aguiniga+	Anchorage
	Rebecca Vale	Anchorage

STAFF SUPPORT: Information Insights, Inc. provided staff support under a contract with the State of Alaska.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel expresses its gratitude to all the staff and leadership of the Office of Children's Services for their dedicated work keeping Alaska's children safe, and being available to us through the year. The Panel recognizes the difficult jobs they have, filled with painful decisions, and greatly appreciates their willingness to continue to serve some of the most vulnerable children and families of Alaska.

The Panel also thanks all the partner agencies and their staff for being available for consultation, their thoughtful reflections, and helpful suggestions.

The Panel is thankful to all the individuals that served as resource persons to the Panel.

The Panel thanks Rep. Paul Seaton, Chairman of the House Committee on Health and Social Services, and all the Committee members for encouraging the Panel and providing a forum for meaningful and constructive dialogue.

NOTE

The Citizen Review Panel is tasked with reviewing the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protective services in Alaska. In that capacity, this report notes the Panel's observations on various components of the system in Alaska. The Panel's review is intended to provide constructive feedback to inform OCS' policy and practice. No observation should be construed as critical of any individual OCS employee.

Acronyms

ARO	Anchorage Regional Office
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
CAPTA	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
CB	Children's Bureau
CCTHITA	Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
CFSP	Child and Family Services Plan
CFSR	Child and Family Services Review
CIP	Court Improvement Project
CJA	Children's Justice Act
CPS	Child Protective Services
CRP	Citizen Review Panel
DFYS	Division of Family and Youth Services
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Services
HSS	Health and Social Services
IA	Initial Assessment
ICWA	Indian Child Welfare Act
NRO	Northern Regional Office
OCS	Office of Children's Services
QA	Quality Assurance
SKILS	Standards, Knowledge, & Insight Leading to Success
SRO	Southeast Regional Office
TCC	Tanana Chiefs Conference
TSCG	Tribal State Collaboration Group
UAA	University of Alaska Anchorage
WRO	Western Regional Office



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel has been focused on critically examining its own purpose, structure, and processes; and made much progress towards better understanding its mandate, and identifying its roles and responsibilities. Out of the four goals identified in this year's work plan, meaningful progress was made on only two. On OCS-Tribal relationships, the Panel found there is reason to be optimistic. Multiple positive developments in recent months, building on more than two decades of persistent advocacy and efforts, augur well for the future of OCS-Tribal relationships. On the Panel's own structure and process, many gaps and areas to improve were found despite the much progress made in the last several years.

While unable to accomplish all it set out to do for the year, the Panel expanded the site visit calendar, conducted the 2016 Annual OCS Staff Survey, and completed the five-part public awareness tool explaining the OCS practice model. The Panel visited four OCS regional offices this year, as opposed to an average of three in the past, each site visit generating a separate site visit report. The 2016 OCS Annual Staff Survey was a semester-long collaboration between OCS, CRP, and a graduate class at UAA, resulting in an extensive report focusing on OCS' frontline workers. The draft five-part public awareness tool explaining the complex OCS practice model is complete. The Panel hopes to develop it into an online interactive tool for children and families served by OCS. The aim is for them to not only understand the process, but also provide feedback to OCS and CRP on both the tool and the quality of engagement with the child protection services system.

2015-2016 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Consider assigning the CRP a significant role in implementing various priority areas of "Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children: Strategic Plan 2016-2020". With its statutory authority, CRP will be an asset for OCS in implementing this strategic plan.

Recommendation 2: Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) should consider a dialogue with the leaders of Alaska Native for-profit corporations to garner their support and any resources they may be able to leverage to enhance child protection services.

Recommendation 3: The enterprise of CRP should be evaluated by an external entity to assess its effectiveness, with particular attention to:

- A. Internal structure and process of CRP in order to improve efficiency.
- B. CRP-OCS statutory relationship in order to ensure clear roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 4: OCS build on CRP's survey effort by:

- A. Viewing training of frontline workers as a longer enterprise that extends beyond SKILS, and evaluate the entire enterprise for effectiveness.
- B. Including special sections in the annual staff survey, focusing on a topic of interest, and repeating this periodically every two or three years.
- C. Identifying other similar survey efforts that OCS conducts, and leveraging resources from external entities such as CRP to conduct them.

Recommendation 5: OCS should work with CRP to strengthen CRP's ability as a robust mechanism for public participation, and rely on it to improve public awareness of the nature and content of OCS work.



ANNUAL ACTIVITIES

The Panel's 2015-2016 annual calendar included the following activities. Reports on all major activities are available on the Panel's website at www.crp.alaska.org.

QUARTERLY PANEL MEETINGS: In order to improve efficiency, the Panel scaled back its monthly meeting schedule to a quarterly meeting schedule this year. The Panel met on the first Tuesday of every three months. Owing to the geographic dispersion of the Panel members, all meetings by default are held over the telephone. All quarterly Panel meetings are open to public. The meeting agenda, date, time, location, and call-in number are announced a week prior to the meeting, and posted both on the Panel's website and on State of Alaska online public notices website. Summary minutes are posted on the Panel's website. Agency representatives or others with experience and expertise on a specific practice or policy are often invited to present to the Panel at quarterly meetings.

MONTHLY MEETINGS WITH OCS: In order to maintain a healthy working relationship, and stay informed of the latest developments in practice and policy, the Director and the Division Operations Manager of OCS meet with the Panel every month to share mutual progress, discuss latest developments, and respond to mutual queries.

SITE VISITS: The Panel conducts visits to various OCS regional and field offices to gather information on practice and assess working relationships between OCS and its local partners. The Panel's observations and recommendations are documented in a report and are subsequently discussed with the OCS' state and the regional leadership. All site visit reports are available on the CRP website. The Panel conducted four site visits during 2015-2016.

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE: Each February, the Panel attempts to present a summary of the previous year's work and an update on the current year's work to the Alaska House Health and Social Services (HSS) Committee. The Panel has been unsuccessful in securing a hearing with the Senate HSS Committee for the last four years. Due to the state budget crisis, the Panel presented to the House HSS Committee over the phone, and did not travel to

2015-2016 CALENDAR

Panel Quarterly Meetings	Meetings with OCS	Site visits	Other
Sep 26-27, 2015			
Oct 6, 2015		Oct 28-30, 2015 NRO	
	Nov 10, 2015		
Dec 1, 2015	Dec 8, 2015		
	Jan 12, 2016	Jan 11-15, 2016 ARO	
	Feb 9, 2016	Feb 24-27, 2016 SRO	
Mar 1, 2016	Mar 8, 2016		
	April 12, 2016		Apr 2, 2016 Presentation to the legislature
	May 10, 2016	May 12-13, 2016 WRO	Jun 6-9, 2016 CRP National Conference
Jun 7, 2016			
Jun 11-12, 2015			

2015-2016 PRESENTATIONS TO THE PANEL

Month	Person	Title
Dec 2015	Tammie Wilson	Alaska House Representative, District 3, North Pole



Juneau. Thus, the Panel was not able to meet with other legislators, legislative staff, the Governor's office, or the leadership of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). The Chair of the Panel met with DHSS Commissioner Valerie Davidson in September 2015, and updated her on current concerns.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES: The Panel reaches out to the public and various stakeholder groups to collect public comment. The Panel maintains an active website www.crp.alaska.org that hosts all Panel documents and serves as a means for the public to reach the Panel. The Panel also meets with, or participates in meetings of, various other groups, Panels, and commissions to inform them of the Panel's activities. Such activities included:

- Nov 25, 2015 Anchorage Meeting with Tammy Sandoval, Director, Child Welfare Academy
- Nov 25, 2015 Anchorage Meeting with Aileen McInnis, Director, Alaska Center for Resource Families
- Dec 2, 2015 Anchorage Presentation to the ICWA representatives at the BIA Providers Conference
- Dec 17, 2015 Anchorage Presentation to the Court Improvement Project
- Apr 27, 2016 Anchorage Attended 'Community in Unity: Fostering our Future', a public forum sponsored by Alaska Public Media

CRP NATIONAL CONFERENCE: For the second year in a row, the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Panel attended the CRP National Conference. The 2016 conference was in Phoenix AZ, on June 6-9, 2016. This was the 15th annual conference. A detailed report of observations and recommendations, from the Conference, is available on the CRP website. Alaska CRP will be hosting the 16th annual conference in 2017, in Anchorage.

CHANGES TO PANEL OPERATIONS: On average, the Panel conducted three site visits each year in the past, with no particular prioritization plan. To get a comprehensive view of the practice in the field, and to adequately meet its mandate, the Panel decided to pursue five site visits, one to each of the five regions of OCS, each year. However, the Panel only completed four visits, missing a visit to the South Central Regional Office (SCRO). In the process, the Panel discovered some inefficiencies that should be addressed next year, in order to complete all five site visits.

The Panel conducted the 2016 Annual OCS Staff Survey. This is in addition to the annual survey of attendees of the Indian Child Welfare Act workshops, at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Annual Providers' Conference. The results of both surveys are documented in separate reports, and posted on the CRP website. For the third year in a row, the Panel failed to build capacity to conduct case reviews. This remains a challenge.

PRIMARY FUNCTIONS OF THE ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Evaluates the extent to which OCS is effectively discharging 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; and
- Any other criteria that the CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children

Conducts public outreach and gathers public comment to inform its review.

Advocate for relevant actions that would help improve the child protection services system in Alaska.



WORK PLAN

The Panel's annual work plan contains three components: (1) **specific goals** as part of the Panel's mandate of review and outreach; (2) associated **travel schedule** including site visits; and (3) specific **activities to change or improve its operations**. The Panel's travel and operational improvements are reported in the previous section of this report. Work plan goals evolve in the course of the Panel's activities.

GOAL 1: Explore the evolving relationships between Tribal organizations and Office of Children's Services (OCS).

Over the years, the Panel has consistently noted that the relationships between OCS and the 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska, and several Alaska Native regional organizations have been weak or haphazard. Despite a two-decade long history of organized collaboration efforts, relations continue to be challenging. However, recent developments have been very encouraging. Multiple Title IV-E Maintenance Agreements in recent years signify accelerated positive movement. In addition, a DHSS/OCS strategic planning effort to improve these relationships began in May 2015. This goal was identified to systematically examine this evolving relationship.

GOAL 2: Strengthen Panel's skills and organizational policies and capacities.

The Alaska CRP has been functioning since 2002, with increasing autonomy and financial resources. As the Panel assumed more responsibility over the last few years, several structural and procedural challenges became apparent. Further, lack of clarity in the purpose of the Panel, mutual roles and responsibilities of the Panel and OCS, and the role of the Panel Coordinator compounded the challenges. Although the Panel adopted changes as needed, a self-evaluation was necessary. While the Panel did not have the resources to complete a meaningful evaluation, it examined its own purpose and functions.

GOAL 3: Determine whether current and former foster parents' and agency partners' experiences align with OCS' foster care policies.

During last year's exploration of foster care recruitment policies, the Panel noticed several challenges foster parents face in their interactions with OCS. This goal was identified to document and better understand these challenges. The Panel tried to identify a meaningful sample of foster parents from across the state, but were unsuccessful in adequately documenting the challenges in a systematic way. The Panel only partially reviewed OCS foster care policies. Much work remains.

GOAL 4: Evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of the new administrative review process.

OCS changed its administrative review process in early 2015 from an extended multi-hour review involving all associated parties to a case to a shorter review that met the federal minimum standards. This significant change has substantial implications. The Panel could not accomplish this goal due to lack of resources.

Each goal relates to one or more components of OCS' Practice Model or operations. Where possible, both the stated policy and actual practice of that component are examined under each goal. Recommendations from the Panel are expected to address this gap, and help the child protection system be more responsive to the needs of the children and families it serves.



FINDINGS

GOAL 1: Explore the evolving relationships between Tribal organizations and Office of Children's Services (OCS).

Alaska's 229 federally recognized Alaska Native tribes are a diverse group of entities, with a variety of governmental structures and processes. Many of these tribes are small and isolated communities that have limited economic resources and high cost-of-living expenses. Alaska Native tribes lack territorial jurisdiction (with the exception of Metlakatla) and suffer historic trauma from centuries of oppressive relationships with non-Alaska Native population. Maintaining cultural continuity is extremely important for Alaska Native communities, and children are their greatest assets. Approximately 56% of all children in out-of-home care in the state are Alaska Native while their proportion in the general population is approximately 20%. Most of the remote Alaska Native tribes have minimal capacity to provide any child protection services.

OCS is the designated entity with responsibility to provide child protection services across the state. Regardless of tribal membership, OCS is responsible for responding to allegations of maltreatment, intervening in families, and providing the needed services to ensure safety of children and health of families. Service provision in Alaska is generally very challenging and expensive. These challenges are exacerbated for OCS; due to high turnover among its frontline workers. Therefore, providing culturally sensitive child protection services that are responsive to community needs has been considerably challenging.

CRP has long recognized this challenge and has been focused on examining various components of this relationship. This goal was framed to provide a meaningful framework for such an examination. Discussions of OCS-Tribal relationships are often focused on compliance with the provisions of Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). While that is important, the Panel felt the need to focus on relationships at various levels in practice. The Panel meets with tribal leaders and other members of tribal communities during site visits each year. Attendees at the Annual Providers Conference organized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Social Services Division have been surveyed each year for the last three years. Attendees at this conference include tribal child protection workers, tribal judges, tribal council members, and other elected and appointed officials from tribal communities across the state. In addition, the Panel obtained several documents from OCS that informed our review. This review is preliminary, and the Panel hopes to continue its examination of this relationship over the years.

Collaboration over the last two decades: In order to further constructive partnerships and improve services, OCS collaborated with several Title IV-B Tribes and Children's Bureau (CB) Region X to form the Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) in 1994. TSCG was created to evaluate the child welfare delivery system; enhance or modify services to better fit the needs of families in their communities; and advocate for a continuum of services that are culturally relevant, coordinated, integrated, and family focused. While TSCG is not statutory, it has a mission remarkably similar to the Citizen Review Panel. It was created two years prior to the 1996 CAPTA amendments that mandated CRP, and speaks to the foresight of Alaska's child protection leaders at the time. For more than 20 years, TSCG has been the forum to discuss and collaborate over various difficult issues in providing child protection services to tribal families and children. The TSCG has an impressive set of accomplishments over the years, and many more planned collaborative efforts ahead. TSCG is led by a set of Co-Chairs from both OCS one of the five regional tribal organizations.

Despite this significant and consistent effort through TSCG, perspectives we gained from site visits identify areas for improvements. Many tribes combine their resources and are served by regional non-profit organizations in each of the five regions of the state. These large tribal non-profits enable economies of scale and have the capacity to intervene in cases on behalf of the tribe and advocate for services. They often have a strong voice and participate in several



statewide partnership efforts, primarily through TSCG, in designing and implementing services. Relations between these large tribal non-profits and OCS tend to be more structured compared to other tribes that are not part of a compact. All large tribal non-profit organizations are located in major hub communities that also have an OCS regional or field office. Frequent interactions between OCS staff and staff from these organizations help in structuring these relationships. Smaller tribes, with fewer staff in remote locations and no OCS presence report less frequent interactions and uncertain relationships.

Results of the 2015 annual survey of tribal personnel at the BIA Providers Conference indicate that almost 40% of the respondents were unaware of TSCG. It is not clear if TSCG claims to be representative, but certainly is diverse geographically, with representatives from each OCS region. Moreover, discussions of the TSCG are relevant to, and seem to have significant impact across the state. Therefore, it is concerning that, TSCG is not as visible as one would expect. Regardless, TSCG as an instrumental and historically successful forum should be structurally integrated into a tribe's child protection organization. Immense diversity across tribes may be a considerable challenge for such an integration. To partially address this concern, and allow TSCG to address more tangible and specific challenges in each OCS region, TSCG is decentralized to a regional level, with a regional TSCG for each OCS region. This strategy was implemented in 2015, and the Panel did not gather any information on its implementation.

Structured relationships: More recent developments are cause for much celebration. OCS entered into a Title IV-E Maintenance Agreement with the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), a regional Alaska Native non-profit organization with 37 tribes under its compact. This agreement allows TCC to assess Title IV-E eligibility of tribal children in custody within their region, and provide payments received from OCS. The terms of this agreement are expansive, and the entire agreement is available on OCS website. This agreement is a significant step towards improved tribal participation in administering child protection services. Implementing the terms of the agreement requires TCC to maintain substantial organizational capacity, and both parties to communicate frequently and seamlessly. Another similar agreement with the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA), the regional tribal non-profit organization in southeast Alaska, is currently taking shape and is likely to be implemented in late 2016.

This is an example of a structured relationship, for which CRP has been advocating for some years now, between OCS and all tribes in general. While a Title IV-E Maintenance agreement is substantial, and requires significant organizational capacity to implement, other relationships can be more structured. One area for improvement, consistently identified by tribal personnel on the frontlines, is their relationship with OCS frontline workers. Survey results from both 2014 and 2015 indicate that some frontline relationships, where both workers are often in direct contact with families and are very knowledgeable of the context of each family, are haphazard. Interactions between frontline workers is more frequent and less contentious on matters related to initial assessment, case planning, relative search, placement decisions, administrative reviews, and adoption decisions. Close to 30% of all those responding to the survey indicated that they rarely or never collaborate with OCS frontline workers and their interactions are more contentious than collaborative on these matters. Interactions are less frequent and more contentious on matters related to independent living decisions and termination of parental rights. The group of respondents to this survey is not homogenous and includes frontline ICWA workers, tribal judges, and other personnel.

Towards a better future: Perhaps the most significant development in tribal-OCS relationships is the most recent effort on a strategic plan to reorient the relationship. Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and OCS began a strategic planning effort in May 2015, involving various state and tribal agencies to craft a vision for the future of OCS-tribal relationships. A smaller group came together over the next few months and developed a strategic plan "Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children: Strategic Plan 2016-2020". The vision statement, "Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe" directly addresses the importance of culture and dispels any mythical challenges to child safety stemming from cultural differences.



It is a direct challenge to policy makers and administrators to work in partnership with the Alaska Native cultural stewards and identify culturally sensitive policy options and service modalities. This is well overdue.

The strategic plan document identifies six priority areas:

1. Respectful Government-to- Government Collaboration & Partnership. Achieve formal, friendly and forever recognition of Tribes by the state.
2. Self-Governance. Tribes self-govern the welfare of their children, and have the resources to do so.
3. Embrace and implement the spirit of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Embrace the spirit and values of ICWA to ensure Alaska Native children are with their families and community.
4. State Government Alignment. Ensure State government systems are aligned and provide services based on the values and spirit of ICWA.
5. Community Engagement. Alaska's child welfare system operates as a partnership among the community, tribal, state and federal governments to keep Alaska Native children with their family and culture.
6. Culturally Specific Services and Supports. Provide a continuum of culturally specific supports that ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of Alaska Native children.

Designated OCS representatives, in collaboration with tribal representatives, are leading six workgroups, each focusing on one priority area identified above. Workgroups are charged with the responsibility to implement the strategic plan priorities. More importantly, the plan initiated discussions on several longstanding and desired goals including compacting options between OCS and individual tribes for child protection services. This can result in several structured agreements between individual tribes and OCS, and significantly improve local capacity in providing services.

The Panel congratulates OCS, several other state agencies, TSCG, and many leaders of all the tribes involved in this successful collaboration, and look forward to its results. Actions resulting from this strategic plan are likely to address many of the challenges CRP continues to identify in this realm. Relations on the frontlines between ICWA workers and OCS workers are not structured, resulting in gaps in service provision. Multiple priority areas of the strategic plan can potentially address this. TSCG does not appear to have any statutory authority. This strategic plan certainly speaks to the sustained contribution of TSCG, and will likely improve its visibility and instrumentality among tribal communities and families.

Steps for implementation included in the plan document suggested that priority area groups should identify timeline, tactics, and resources to implement various ideas within each priority area. For example, the Court Improvement Project (CIP) was identified as a natural home for several projects that involve judicial review. The CRP was neither informed nor invited to participate during the planning phase. Since CRP is a statutory mechanism to enable public participation in child protection, CRP would be a valuable asset to at least one priority area – community engagement. The Panel was invited to participate in each priority group as a stake holder.

Resources: Resources required to provide services to communities and families in the far corners of this vast state are always in short supply. With the current fiscal situation in the state, budgetary resources are vulnerable to cuts. In addition, OCS, as most child protection agencies in other states, struggles with a 25% - 30% turnover rate among its frontline workers. Regardless of the increased scope of prevention services, there will be significant need for child protection services in the near future. While the strategic plan above addresses many longstanding difficult challenges, it does not address the resource issue.



While many partner agencies, tribal leaders, and others involved in child protection were either directly involved or will likely find a meaningful role in implementing the strategic plan, the Panel felt that the for-profit Alaska Native corporations may have been an advantageous addition to the discourse. All Alaska Native adults and children involved with child protection services in the state are either shareholders or likely eligible to be shareholders of one or more of the for-profit corporations. Alaska Native for-profit corporations are likely sensitive to the disproportional representation of Alaska Natives in child protection services. Health and wellness of their shareholders is important to the corporations, and they are likely to invest in service provision.

Recommendation 1: Consider assigning the CRP a significant role in implementing various priority areas of “Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children: Strategic Plan 2016-2020”. With its statutory authority, CRP will be an asset for OCS in implementing this strategic plan.

Recommendation 2: Tribal State Collaboration Group (TSCG) should consider a dialogue with the leaders of Alaska Native for-profit corporations to garner their support and any resources they may be able to leverage to enhance child protection services.

GOAL 2: Strengthen Panel’s skills and organizational policies and capacities.

Over the last several years, Alaska CRP has been focused on clearly identifying its roles and responsibilities, restructuring its operations, and improving its relevance and visibility. Established in response to the 1996 amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), Alaska CRP produced its first annual report in 2002. OCS directly provided staff support in the early years. However, since 2005, OCS provides staff support through a contract. The Panel’s statutory mandate clearly identifies two core functions:

1. Evaluate the extent to which OCS is effectively discharging 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; and
 - Any other criteria that the CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children
2. Conduct public outreach and gather public comment to inform its review.

Although advocacy was not clearly identified in the mandate, the Panel always maintained a strong advocacy voice.

CRPs are designed as mechanisms for public participation in child protection policy and practice in order to assist child protective services (CPS) agencies be more responsive to community needs. Alaska CRP’s role is to organize and facilitate such participation by reviewing OCS’ policy and practice to evaluate the agency’s performance against three specific criteria; conduct public outreach to inform such a review; and advocate for actions that the Panel sees as relevant and meaningful to improve child protection services. CRPs are composed of volunteers, and CPS agencies are to provide staff support and any required data and information desired by a CRP.

With an expansive mandate, volunteer membership, and small budget (\$82,000 in FY 16), the Panel recognizes the need for more consistent, structured, and responsive operations. The Panel began to take a critical look at its own operations in 2012 and implemented a series of basic changes to improve its effectiveness. Changes include adopting an annual calendar for its operation that begins with a work plan in August and ends with the annual report in June, being intentional in its relationships through scheduled regular meetings with OCS, streamlining its operations through standardized templates for



workflow, and maintaining an active website. Despite all these changes, several challenges remain. Short of an evaluation, the Panel attempted a critical self-examination and identified several areas of its operation that need further clarification or improvement. Two critical gaps are identified below:

Many changes are required in the operational guidelines to ensure efficient operations. The Panel operated without any policies or procedures for more than a decade. Despite this, the Panel strived to be highly functional, with extensive output to inform the public discourse on child protection in Alaska. The Panel produces three to five site visit reports with observations and recommendations regarding the status of child protection practice in each OCS region throughout the year. In addition, the Panel produces the annual report with details of activities of the Panel throughout the year, and specific recommendations for OCS. As part of the Panel's public outreach mandate, members of the Panel present at various public fora and conduct surveys. The Panel informs the Alaska legislature every year, and actively participates in the national CRP community.

For more effective and efficient operations, and seamless transition in leadership, the Panel recognized the need for a clear set of policies and procedures. A set of "Operational Guidelines" were adopted in December 2014, approximately 12 years since its inception. As the Panel tried to operate according to the guidelines, many gaps surfaced. For example, the guidelines call for a probation term for new members that ends with an assessment to determine if continued membership is in the best interests of the Panel. However, "best interests" are not adequately defined. Moreover, CRP members are volunteers and are vetted through a reasonably structured and meaningful recruitment process. Consequently, the probationary period should be focused on orienting the new member and enabling required supports to integrate. The Panel's new member orientation process is not systematic and needs more structure. Another example is the purpose and process of establishing quorum and conducting a vote. CRP is not a decision-making or legislative body. It is more of a task force. The Panel does not vote on anything and Robert Rules of Order are not applicable to its meetings. Therefore, provisions on quorum and voting are confusing and need to be critically examined for their relevance and meaning in the context of a CRP. Other examples include a lack of structure for leadership succession, conducting outreach, new member orientation, and volunteer management.

CRP-OCS relationship should be structured better with adequate protocols to improve efficiency. In order for a group of volunteers to evaluate a complex and large public agency with a difficult mandate, constructive relationships and efficient protocols are extremely important. Both CRP and OCS invest considerable amounts of time in nurturing a constructive relationship. The Director and the Division Operations Manager of OCS meet with the Panel every month to share mutual progress, discuss latest developments, and respond to mutual queries. A large majority of the OCS' staff in each OCS regional and field office always manage to find time to meet with the Panel during site visits. Many senior staff respond to frequent requests from the Panel. While all this has helped in establishing trust and sharing information, there are large inefficiencies.

Despite its active role and presence over 14 years, the Panel is not recognized either on the DHSS or OCS organization charts. Beyond the state and federal statutes, there is no existing policy or regulation clarifying mutual roles and responsibilities of CRP and OCS. CRPs in some states have a memorandum of understanding that defines the relationship. However, such instruments may not be applicable in Alaska CRP's case because the Panel does not have a legal identity and thus cannot be a signatory to any agreement or contract. State statute enacted in 2005 directs the DHSS Commissioner to institute regulations to guide CRP operations. Such regulations have yet to be created. Entire budget for the Panel operations is routed through a consulting contract for coordination services, leaving room for a number of conflicts of interest. The Panel's budget for FY 2016 was cut by 18% midyear, and the Panel was informed that the Commissioner of DHSS decided not to extend any contracts or grants. This implies that the Panel is treated as a grantee or a contractor rather than a statutorily required public entity. CRP is rarely invited to or informed of an initiative in the planning stages. For meaningful public



participation as envisioned by Congress, CRP should be invited to participate in planning stages of relevant initiatives, not just be provided information after the fact.

Equipped with statutory authority but no regulations, OCS-CRP relations were irregular over the years. Given that evaluation can often be a contentious affair, relations have sometimes been difficult. While both entities strive to maintain constructive relations, the absence of regulation meant that mutual roles were often defined by opportunities and constraints of context rather than statute. For an effective Panel as envisioned by Congress and enacted through federal law, this statutory relationship between OCS and CRP should be better structured.

Recommendation 3: *The enterprise of CRP should be evaluated by an external entity to assess its effectiveness, with particular attention to:*

- A. Internal structure and process of CRP in order to improve efficiency*
- B. CRP-OCS statutory relationship in order to ensure clear roles and responsibilities*

GOAL 3: Determine whether current and former foster parents' and agency partners' experiences align with OCS foster care policies.

CRP began efforts to understand the foster care system; and recruitment and licensing of foster homes during the Panel's 2014-2015 work year. The Panel examined the recruitment efforts of OCS, and suggested a few changes. This year, the Panel set out to examine the experiences of foster parents and agency partners, and their alignment with the stated policies of OCS. The Panel met with several foster parents over the year during site visits. However, the Panel found itself unequipped to successfully reach out to as many foster parents as would have been ideal. In addition, methods of eliciting information and the type of information obtained through interviews have not been consistent. Therefore, this information could only be used to complete site visit reports. It was not consistent or complete enough to draw any conclusions about either foster parents' or agency partners' experience with the foster care system.

The Panel made some progress in trying to understand the foster care policies. The CRP recruited an undergraduate intern to prepare a series of flowcharts to enable CRP members to quickly examine the foster care licensing manual and other foster care policies. These flowcharts are similar to the flow charts CRP prepared for public consumption to assist with community understanding of the OCS practice model. The foster care policies flowcharts are not included with this report.

GOAL 4: Evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of the new administrative review process

Administrative reviews are reviews of all cases where children are placed out-of-home. The 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (P.L. 96-272) mandated all states to institute reviews of all out-of-home care cases once every six months. At least one of these reviews each year should be in court. States were given the option of either instituting a Citizen Review, Administrative Review, or a Judicial Review of each case for the other 6-month review of each case every year. Alaska had a citizen review in place from 1991 through 1996, involving citizens from across the state. This citizen-led foster care review board was called the "Citizen Review Panel", not to be confused with the current Citizen Review Panel that issued this report. The early 1990s' Citizen Review Panel reviews were unsuccessful, producing only three reports in six years. That Panel was repealed in 1996, and a new Administrative Review was instituted. This process was led by the then Division of Family and Youth Services (DFYS) staff. Overtime, these reviews grew in scope and



included many aspects that were beyond the scope intended by congress in P.L. 96-272. Most parties to a case were invited, and the review process evolved into a comprehensive review and discussion of all aspects of the case. While this was helpful to most parties, review meetings lasted longer and consumed more resources than expected. By 2014, nine positions (ICWA Specialists and Permanency Planning Specialists) were constantly engaged in conducting administrative reviews.

In August 2015, OCS announced a restructuring of the Administrative Review process in a bid to streamline the process and free up staff resources to improve compliance with ICWA provisions. This restructuring primarily focused on sharply reducing the scope of administrative reviews to meet the minimum standards required by P.L. 96-272 outlined below:

1. Continuing necessity for and appropriateness of the placement;
2. Extent of compliance with the case plan;
3. Extent of progress which has been made toward alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating placement in foster care; and
4. To project a likely date by which the child may be returned to the home or placed for adoption or legal guardianship

The streamlined reviews are to be conducted by the Quality Assurance (QA) section within OCS, and two new positions were added to the QA section for this purpose. In effect, the work being accomplished by 9 individuals will now be completed by 2 individuals. OCS did not have any plans to evaluate the impact of this planned transition. The Panel decided to examine the new process in comparison to the old process.

Examining the whole administrative review process is an involved exercise. The Panel, with limited resources, could only make limited progress this year. The Panel did not review the past review process. Beyond what is outlined above, the Panel did not review the current review process. However, the Panel asked community stakeholders and OCS' partner agencies for their impressions of the change during our site visits, (the Panel visited four out of the five OCS regions). Below is the summary of responses:

- The change was appreciated by OCS regional management. They clarified that many aspects of a case reviewed and discussed during the past version of Administrative Review process were covered during other meetings and reviews, and did not need to be part of the Administrative Reviews. They were appreciative of the availability of regional ICWA specialists to focus on ICWA compliance instead of conducting Administrative Reviews.
- Community stakeholders, specifically tribal partners, were skeptical of the change. Most importantly, they felt that Administrative Reviews gave them the opportunity to get to know other parties to the case, and check on the status of various aspects of the case being reviewed. Although the review consumed more time, they appreciated the opportunity to conduct an expansive review. They reported that the new process is often very short (approximately half hour as opposed to more than two hours in the past), and limited to the four items identified above. Besides losing the opportunity to cover all different aspects of the review, there were no clear objections to the new process.

Changing a major review process will likely cause concerns. OCS informed the CRP of this change in August 2015, immediately after implementing it. Presumably, all concerned parties were informed at that time or prior to that. Perhaps informing the parties of OCS' intentions while in the planning stages might have helped assuage any concerns. However, OCS senior management, including the regional managers, all reported that the additional aspects that are now removed from administrative review process are covered as part of various other processes. While this change is significant, it does not appear to alter the totality of OCS functions concerning out-of-home case reviews. It appears to be a simple restructuring to realize some efficiency.



OTHER IMPORTANT WORK THIS YEAR

Every year, during the course of its work, the Panel comes across various issues of importance to the delivery of child protection services in Alaska. Many of these issues are interconnected, and overlap with the goals for that year. Below are issues the Panel considered during 2015-2016. These are reported here to give the readers a more complete account of the Panel's work, and also to help readers understand the depth and scope of the Panel's work. While its mandate is broad and covers everything that the state and local child protection system does in Alaska, the Panel is limited by the available resources. Thus, this list does not include several other issues that could have been considered during this year.

2016 OCS Annual Staff Survey

In response to the 2015 CRP recommendations to improve OCS survey instruments and reporting of results on various surveys that the OCS internal QA unit conducts, OCS asked CRP to lead the effort on conducting the 2016 annual OCS staff survey. This survey solicits employees' opinions on a variety of topics, and data is used to understand various opportunities and challenges employees have in their jobs. This is a significant survey to inform the decision-making of OCS senior leadership on topics such as worker training, safety, workload, recruitment, retention, communication, etc.

CRP accepted the task as a collaborative effort between CRP and OCS and not a CRP project *for* OCS. However, since CRP does not have capacity to review the survey instrument, conduct the survey, and report the results, the Panel recruited the help of a graduate research methods class in the Public Administration program at the College of Business and Public Policy, UAA. Fifteen graduate students under the supervision of the instructor (who is also the Chair of the CRP) reviewed the survey instrument, and reorganized it. In addition, several questions were clarified. The OCS Director distributed the online survey link to all staff, and sent three reminders and a couple of clarification emails in response to concerns. The survey received 54.4% response rate. A complete report of the survey results, after substantial review by OCS senior management, was submitted to CRP and OCS. This has been a very constructive partnership, and was successful in generating some actionable information for both OCS and CRP. Three major findings from the report are:

- Supervisor-frontline worker relationship is the most positive factor among all factors that influence retention at OCS. Frontline workers overwhelmingly reported that they value their supervisors highly, and rely on them for advice and support.
- Training of frontline workers is not adequately addressed in the survey. Questions were limited to the perceptions of frontline workers on the effectiveness of SKILS, the two- or three-week mandatory training for all frontline workers upon hire. Future versions of the survey should address training as a longer enterprise, comprising orientation of new workers prior to attending SKILS, the actual SKILS training sessions, and any subsequent on-the-job training available to workers. Prior research indicates that less than 20% of what is learned in a training session is retained, and structured on-the-job training opportunities are critical for workers to retain what was learned during training.
- Workers believe that the community at large has minimal understanding of the OCS' Practice Model. This is a major concern that CRP addressed in the past. Community awareness of the nature and purpose of the work OCS does is extremely important for the agency's effectiveness. While OCS invested in multiple award-winning public service announcements, public awareness of the basic purpose and nature of OCS' work remains an area for improvement. Moreover, a frontline worker's perception that the community may not understand the purpose or nature of their visit to a family or a child in a community would be detrimental to the quality of their work.



Community awareness of OCS' work is also of direct concern for CRP. The Panel is a statutory mechanism for public participation in child protection policy and practice. The Panel's mandate implies that it is responsible for improving community's awareness around the nature and content of OCS' work. The Panel is expected to enable a common ground for constructive dialogue to address issues of concern. Therefore, the workers' perception that the community at large is not aware of the OCS' Practice Model is a direct challenge for CRP. The Panel recognized this challenge and has been developing tools and reaching out to the community in various ways to improve general awareness. Last year, the Panel developed a flowchart to explain the workflow of the OCS' Intake Process. The flowchart was reviewed by OCS, and is available on the CRP website. The Panel continued that work this year, developing flowcharts for all components of OCS' Practice Model. These additional flowcharts are awaiting OCS' review. Much work remains.

The survey instrument does not cover many critical aspects of OCS' employees work and context. Issues such as secondary trauma, staff development plan, and many on-the-job training opportunities were addressed only peripherally. It is common for surveys of this nature to focus on special topics during certain years.

The survey effort was a major undertaking for the Panel, and demonstrates the resources that the Panel can leverage. In addition, the entire process is a demonstration of constructive partnerships that can benefit OCS' efforts in providing services. The Panel sincerely hope that OCS considers using this model of collaboration with the university, CRP, or both in strengthening its various research and evaluation efforts.

Recommendation 4: OCS should consider building on CRP's survey effort by:

- A. Viewing training of frontline workers as a longer enterprise that includes SKILS, and evaluating the entire enterprise for effectiveness.*
- B. Including special sections in the annual staff survey, focusing on a topic of interest, and repeating this periodically every two or three years.*
- C. Identifying other similar survey efforts that OCS conducts, and leveraging resources from external entities such as CRP or UAA to conduct them.*

CRP's community engagement

The Panel's mandate requires CRP to not only understand the child protection services system in the state, but also conduct public outreach to raise awareness in the community at large about the nature and content of child protection policy and practice. In other words, CRP is a mechanism for informed public participation in child protection and practice, with a goal to help OCS be more community focused. To ensure that CRP meets its public outreach mandate, CRP needs to be visible, relevant, and connected to OCS' efforts in community engagement. All concerned should be aware of CRP's roles and responsibilities and be willing and prepared to leverage this statutory role.

The Panel schedules several outreach activities during the year. Site visits allow the Panel to not only collect public comment on policy and practice, but also an opportunity to disseminate information about various issues. Panel members present to multiple gatherings through the year, sharing the work of the Panel and raising awareness in the process. CRP reaches out to other review bodies such as the CIP and the Children Justice Act (CJA) Task Force each year. The Panel presents to Alaska's House HSS Committee each year. These activities improved the Panel's visibility over the years. Similarly, the Panel stays relevant to the challenges and opportunities of child protection in Alaska by providing opportunities for public participation through its survey of all ICWA workers each year, public meetings each quarter, and an active website that provides space for public input. The Panel is available through email.



In May 2015, the Panel received an invitation to participate in a day-long gathering facilitated by the First Alaskans Institute in Anchorage. “Alaska conversations that matter – The wellbeing of our children” was a gathering of approximately a hundred leaders from multiple state agencies and tribal entities. The Commissioner of the DHSS addressed the gathering and challenged the group to re-envision child protection in Alaska. Much was discussed throughout the day. Despite multiple attempts over the next several months, the Panel did not receive an update on the progress beyond this gathering in Anchorage. The Director of OCS updated the Panel in April 2016 that a draft strategic plan is almost complete and will be shared shortly. “Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children Strategic Plan 2016-2020” is the product of several discussions of a smaller group representing multiple state agencies and tribal entities. The plan identifies six priority areas, with ‘community engagement’ being one of them. The Panel is now invited to join any of the six priority area working groups to implement the strategic plan. The Panel was specifically legislated to enable and foster community engagement in child protection and practice. Despite community engagement being a strategic priority area of the plan that intends to fundamentally change child protection enterprise in Alaska, there was no identified role for the Panel. OCS confirmed that this was not simple oversight.

Similarly, the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) (third round is underway in Alaska) is a missed opportunity to engage the Panel. CFSR is an extensive review of a state’s child protection services, and has substantial room for community engagement. The Panel has been requesting information from OCS on the status of the process for some time. While OCS senior management shares the status, the Panel is not assigned any specific role in the process. With a specific mandate to facilitate public participation, the Panel can be an asset to meet the extensive requirements of CFSR for collecting stakeholder input.

Despite these lost opportunities, the Panel recognizes its role and continues to add value to public discourse on child protection. A consistent finding across multiple surveys and interviews over the years is the community’s lack of a clear understanding of the OCS’ Practice Model. Multiple stakeholders report a lack of understanding of OCS’ roles and responsibilities. The Panel realizes that child protection is not the responsibility of just one agency. In an attempt to raise awareness and improve public involvement, the Panel began efforts last year to prepare flowcharts to explain the OCS practice model. This year, drafts of all five components of the practice model are completed. OCS is currently reviewing them. Static versions of these flowcharts will be available on the Panel’s websites. The Panel hopes to make them interactive and accessible to the community at large, particularly the families served by OCS. These flowcharts can help readers easily understand the steps in an investigation or foster home licensing or other similar processes of OCS. The Panel is not aware of any other similar tools available to the public.

These efforts by the Panel are vindicated by the results of the 2016 OCS Annual Staff Survey. An overwhelming majority (96%) of the frontline workers feel that the community does not have a clear understanding of the OCS’ Practice Model. This perception is a significant impediment to frontline worker’s own perceptions of their safety in the field, their ability to collaborate with other service providers and community at large, and their quality of work.

The Panel can be instrumental in engaging the community in a constructive conversation on child protection. It is in the best interests of OCS to find ways to use a statutorily mandated mechanism for public participation in promoting its own community engagement purposes. While CRP has an independent role to review OCS, that does not prohibit a collaborative relationship with OCS on community engagement.

Recommendation 5: OCS should work with CRP to strengthen CRP’s ability as a robust mechanism for public participation, rely on it to improve public awareness of the nature and content of OCS work.



PROGRESS ON 2015 RECOMMENDATIONS

The CRP had six recommendations in the June 2015 Annual Report. OCS responded to each recommendation and identified specific action steps by December 31, 2015. Many of the recommendations address longstanding challenges, and will continue to be relevant over the next few years. Therefore, the Panel asked OCS to provide progress updates on the recommendations. Below is the update the Panel received. OCS is a complex agency with many moving parts. Several initiatives have multiple impacts that may not always be intentional and will likely impact one or more areas of practice. Therefore, this update is not comprehensive.

Recommendation 1: OCS continues to implement the Panel's 2013-2014 recommendations on the intake policy

Update: A new statewide intake manager was hired on June 1, 2016. This is a significant event because OCS anticipates that having a single manager over this program area will help increase accuracy, consistency, and help the agency move faster on improvements.

Recommendation 2: OCS constitutes an internal taskforce to specifically focus on the in-home service model. This task force should be tasked with operationalizing Strategy 2.A.2 of the 2015- 2019 CFSP.

Update: OCS is currently exploring the possibility of contracting in-home services out to community providers. The initial assessment (IA) will still be conducted by OCS. This strategy is different from a Differential Response strategy where cases are screened out prior to an IA to private contractors.

Recommendation 3: OCS should address the root cause of the Initial Assessment (IA) backlog.

Update: There were 2,897 incomplete IAs in June 2015. By June 2016, OCS had 3,560 open IAs, of which 1833 have been open longer than 90 days. The root cause of the backlog is the excessive workload. Many related challenges such as turnover and supervision contribute to this. However, excessive workload is the primary driver. Since this is not a new challenge, OCS has been continuing efforts to stay current with new reports, and has increased attention on high risk infants as a special population within IA. Although OCS is seeing some success with this effort, it is early to judge. In addition, OCS implemented Eckerd Rapid Safety Feedback in May 2016 to help focus on the children most at risk of repeat maltreatment. Despite these initiatives to focus on high priority children, the IA backlog continues to be a challenge.

Recommendation 4: Improve efforts to recruit and retain resource families across the state.

Update: OCS is working with Beacon Hill to renew the Heart Gallery. This will be modeled after the Colorado Heart Gallery and is scheduled to open in September 2016.

Recommendation 5: Improve the survey instruments and reporting of results on various surveys that the OCS QA unit conducts to assess important components of OCS operations.

Update: OCS collaborated with CRP to restructure and conduct the employee staff survey. The report is available on the CRP website.

Recommendation 6: Adopt a method to identify, measure, and assess various components of workload of frontline workers.

Update: OCS is currently evaluating a workload management tool discovered through the Public Children Services Association of Ohio.



2017 NATIONAL CRP CONFERENCE

Alaska CRP will be hosting the 2017 National CRP Conference in Anchorage in May 2017. The national conference is a gathering of Panel coordinators, members, CPS personnel, and other leaders in public participation in child protection from across the country to discuss and deliberate various opportunities and challenges facing the CRP enterprise. Alaska CRP attended the last two conferences and gained much information that helped improve the Panel's process and structure. Moreover, Alaska CRP is considered among the leaders in the field, and is often consulted for best practices.

Organizing a conference is a considerable challenge. Despite being volunteers, Panel members are excited to welcome the national community to Alaska. The Panel will need help and support from many individuals and organizations across the state. There will be many opportunities for sponsorships and volunteering. The Panel hopes to recruit robust help and invites any encouragement. So far, the following organizations have pledged support for the conference:

The Alaska Children's Trust

UAA College of Business and Public Policy

UAA College of Health

UAA Center for Community Engagement and Learning

Please contact the Panel with any questions or to join in hosting the conference. Brief reports with agendas of conferences in 2015 and 2016 are available on the Panel's website.



2017 National CRP Conference

Anchorage, AK

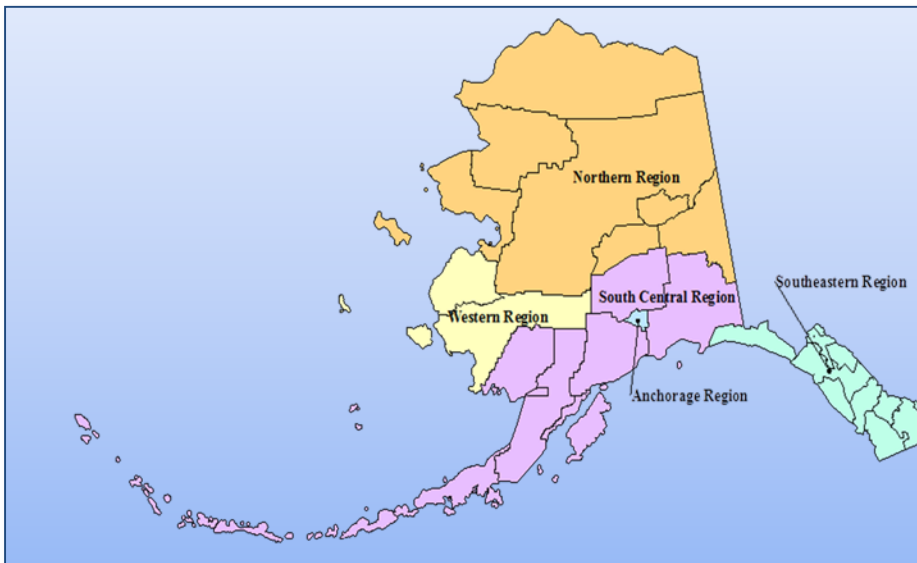
May 10-12, 2017



APPENDIX

Appendices are not included with this report. They are available on the CRP website at www.crpalaska.edu. Please refer to them for further information.

1. Northern Region Site Visit Report
2. Anchorage Region Site Visit Report
3. Southeast Region Site Visit Report
4. Western Region Site Visit Report
5. BIA Providers Conference Survey Results Report
6. 2016 OCS Annual Staff Survey Report
7. Update to the Alaska House HSS Committee
8. CRP National Conference Report



CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES IN ALASKA are administered through a complex network of various government, non-government, tribal, for-profit, non-profit, and private agencies and organizations. A majority of these entities are located in Anchorage, or other major urban centers or hub communities across the state. The Office of Children’s Services (OCS) is a state-designated agency, primarily responsible for responding to and addressing reports of child maltreatment and providing child protective services in Alaska. It is situated within the Department of Health and Social Services. OCS operates through 5 regional offices and 25 field offices. In addition, OCS provides a number of its services through contracts and grants to numerous organizations located across the state.