



FY2025-2026

ANNUAL WORK PLAN

ALASKA CITIZEN
REVIEW PANEL



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ABOUT US

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. Learn more or apply to join **HERE**.

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.

2025-2026 MEMBERS

- Retchenda George-Bettisworth (Chair) - Fairbanks
- Colin Underwood (Vice-Chair) - Anchorage
- Abram Goodstein - Anchorage
- Desiré Shepler - Palmer
- Trevor Storrs - Anchorage

PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS

The Panel has three functions: evaluation, public outreach, and advocacy. The 2025-26 work plan includes activities in each of these function areas in addition to activities to support three focus areas topics.

EVALUATION

The Panel will evaluate OCS compliance with federal and state laws, examining policies and procedures for consistent statewide 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.

In 2025-26, the Panel will seek information from OCS to support its focus areas and anticipates requesting data into the future to support the CRP's evaluation activities. For this reason, the Panel will continue to work with OCS to improve its data dictionary and identify ways to make data more accessible to outside partners. Further, CRP will work with OCS on ways to improve data quality and validation in the Online Resource for Children of Alaska (ORCA) database, including more automation, validation and incremental modernization of the system. Internally, the CRP will evaluate its policies and procedures.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Panel will identify and implement means to gather feedback on procedures and practices for delivering child protection services in Alaska. The information collected will be utilized in its evaluation function. Outreach activities during the previous work plan period resulted in important consultation with the Alaska Children's Trust (ACT), the Alaska Impact Alliance (AIA), State of Alaska Public Health, All Alaska Pediatric Partnership (A2P2), and the OCS Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). The Panel will continue to use its "phased" approach as detailed below to inform evaluation through partnerships and stakeholder engagement activities.

ADVOCACY

The Panel will conduct appropriate actions to help improve Alaska's child protection services system. The Panel annually presents to the legislature on their work, and this will continue into the next year. The Panel will development a clear policy for how advocacy priorities are identified and the role of Panel members in advocacy. As it has done in the past, the Panel will advocate to assure its activities are fully funded.



WORK PLAN CYCLE

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

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, most 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. Mandated reporters who are employed by the state of Alaska or school districts are also required to receive training on recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect².

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





PHASE 1: EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING - STATUS ONGOING

DATA COLLECTION

The Panel continues to 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 continue to engage with child welfare experts, particularly those who train and oversee mandatory reporters, to better understand existing system, challenges, and areas for improvement as it transitions into phase two. Education and knowledge building will be a continuous feedback loop.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The Panel will continue to seek insights from the broader public and child welfare professionals to gather experiences regarding mandatory reporting processes. This input will be considered to inform future policy recommendations which may evolve.

PHASE 2: ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION - STATUS ENGAGED

ADVOCACY

The Panel is working in collaboration with key stakeholders to inform and develop advocacy strategies for changes in the mandatory reporting laws.

TRAINING ENHANCEMENTS

The Panel conducted an initial review of mandatory reporting training programs, focusing on accessibility, frequency, and content updates to ensure reporters are well-prepared. This was a first step to a process the Panel will continue to support with broader participation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Panel will continue to collaborate with community organizations to identify ways to involve the public in recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect, potentially expanding beyond mandated reporters.

WORK PLAN



RECOMMENDATIONS

Published in the 2024-2025 CRP Annual Report

STANDARDIZED TRAINING FOR ALASKA

Alaska’s Mandatory Reporter training should be standardized into one curriculum for Alaska that is open sourced and accessible to organizations and trainers.

UPDATES INFORMED BY USERS

This process should include Mandatory Reporters across the various professions, OCS staff across various levels and individuals with lived experience being reported to OCS, who can provide input on updates, additions, or identified shortcomings.

LONG-TERM OWNERSHIP OF TRAINING

Ownership of the design and maintenance of the curriculum and implementation of it, as well as how and when it is evaluated, should be clearly defined. Consider an independent, funded process separate from OCS to ensure objectivity and dedicated oversight.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

For FY 2025-2026

PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Join efforts with partner entities working to improve mandated reporting, specifically joining activities with the Alaska Children’s Justice Act Task Force.

Cohost a Mandatory Reporting Summit with the Alaska Children’s Trust.

Align internal advocacy activities with other partners to ensure a unified approach to improving mandatory reporting training in Alaska.

UPDATE CURRICULUM

Participate in efforts to redesign the mandated reporting curriculum to better meet the needs as identified by mandatory reporters and best practices utilized by other states.

RAISE AWARENESS

Engage with external organizations such as American College of Executives (Alaska chapter) to raise awareness about mandatory reporting and Panel work.



Under the diversion focus area, the Panel identified the following activities aimed at building knowledge, identifying barriers, and developing strategies to advance diversion to connect families to support without unnecessary child welfare system involvement.

PHASE 1: EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING - STATUS ENGAGED

DATA COLLECTION

The Panel will continue to collaborate with OCS to gather data to better understand diversion opportunities and potential partnerships to carry these out.

EXPERT CONSULTATION

The Panel will engage with child welfare experts to better understand the existing system, its challenges, and areas for improvement.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The Panel will continue to seek insights from the broader public and child welfare professionals to gather experiences and missed opportunities for diversion from the child welfare system. This input will be considered to inform future policy recommendations which may evolve.

PHASE 1: WORK PLAN ACTION ITEMS

Gather information from policymakers and legislators who are interested in diversion to understand better their perspectives and what levers could help move this work forward.

Meet with the OCS legal team and others to discuss legal barriers and confidentiality issues related to diversion.

Learn from other states' experiences with diversion and how they have addressed legal and policy challenges.

Conduct outreach to the children's caucus and other legislative groups to build support and awareness for diversion efforts.

Consider diversion as a policy priority and adopt the term "diversion" as a universal term with an agreed upon definition.

Participate in or host meetings with legislators, legal experts, and stakeholders to coordinate efforts and share information.

FOCUS AREA

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

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.

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

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.

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

STATUS - ENGAGED

The Panel is in the initial stages of its work on out-of-home placements, which involved developing a data request to be submitted to OCS. This data request was included in the 2024-2025 CRP Annual Report. The request focused on placement stability, timeliness, and long-term outcomes.

OCS staff joined the Fall 2025 CRP Retreat to discuss the response. Through this process, and in collaboration with OCS and service providers, the Panel will identify strengths and gaps in the system, paying close attention to the role of cultural and community connections.



WORK PLAN



PHASE 1: EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING - STATUS ENGAGED

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 & 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 1: WORK PLAN ACTION ITEMS

- Review data received from OCS.
- Seek input from individuals with lived experience, including the OCS Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and youth advocates through Facing Foster Care in Alaska.
- Invite subject matter experts on tribal compacting and out-of-home-placement.
- Understanding the ICWA act and out of home placements decisions.
- With the goals of reunification and permanency, better understand how out of home placement processes can vary depending on the age of the child. Specifically, what are differences between needs of infants versus teens and other ages.

WORK PLAN



PHASE 2: ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION - STATUS ENGAGED

DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS

Action and implementation will begin development once the Panel completes Phase 1: Education and Knowledge Building.

The Panel will begin to 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.

The Panel will hear from key subject matter experts during its regular meetings leading up to agreement on recommendations in its 2025-2026 annual report.



ACRONYM LIST	
CAPTA	Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
CRP	Citizen Review Panel
FY	Fiscal Year
OCS	Office of Children’s Services
ORCA	Online Resources for the Children of Alaska (OCS's main database)



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