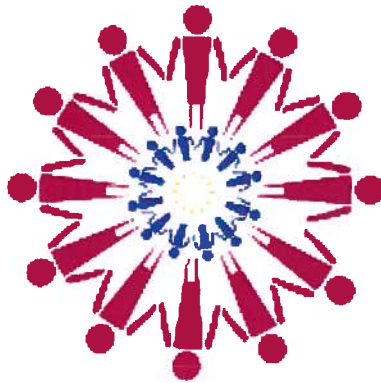


# Alaska Citizen Review Panel

## Operating Guidelines



Adopted on

**January 6, 2015**

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## **I. Enabling legislation**

The Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is federally mandated through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA); Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003. The CRP is also mandated through Alaska Statute Sec. 47.14.205.

## **II. Mission**

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

## **III. Principal duties of the Panel**

The Panel has two principal duties – evaluation and public outreach.

### ***1. 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 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

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. Individual cases or particular unique situations will not be reviewed by the Panel.

### ***2. Conduct public outreach:***

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

The Panel will also identify and implement means to disseminate its work and findings to the general public and collect comment on the same.

#### **IV. Work calendar**

The Panel's work year will be from July 1 to June 30 of the following year. The Panel will conduct its activities in a timely manner. Tentative dates are identified below:

Task	Month of the year
<b>Finalize the work plan</b>	August 31 <sup>st</sup> .
<b>First site visit</b>	October
<b>Second site visit</b>	January
<b>Debriefing the Legislature</b>	February
<b>Third site visit</b>	May
<b>National Conference</b>	May
<b>Annual retreat</b>	June
<b>Annual Report Due</b>	June 30 <sup>th</sup>

#### **V. Membership**

##### ***1. Composition of the Panel***

Any citizen of the state of Alaska, residing in the state, with considerable and relevant experience is eligible to be a member of the Panel. The Panel will have at least seven members, representing Alaska's diversity in geography, race, ethnicity, gender, professional background, and life experience with respect to child protection in Alaska.

OCS staff may not be Panel members due to the inherent conflict of interest. Panel membership may include but is not limited to the following:

- Concerned community members
- Community leaders/activists
- Parent/consumer representatives

- Clergy and representatives from communities of faith
- Business/corporate representatives
- Children's/parents' attorneys
- Child advocates/guardians ad litem
- Health, substance abuse and mental health professionals
- Indian Child Welfare Act advocates
- Foster parents
- Law enforcement representatives
- Teacher and school administrators
- Mentally or physically disabled person representatives or advocates

## ***2. Term limits***

There are no term limits on membership, but members are expected to serve a minimum of two years.

## ***3. Recruitment***

The Panel will accept an application from any prospective member. In addition, the Panel and its staff will actively recruit potential members and invite applications.

## ***4. Appointment***

The Panel appoints its own members. Prospective members may apply to join the panel by submitting a completed application form, with required and supportive documents, to the coordinator. All such applications will be reviewed as follows:

- i. An application for membership should be reviewed by at least three current Panel members who then recommend further action – reject the application, or invite for an interview. The Panel may request the applicant to submit additional information.
- ii. If the applicant is invited for an interview, the interview will be conducted by at least three current Panel members, and their decision conveyed to the Panel
- iii. The coordinator will check the references supplied by the applicant in the application, and report the findings to the Panel.
- iv. The Panel will make the final determination and the same will be conveyed to the applicant through a written letter or email.

## **5. *Officers***

- i. **Chair:** The Panel shall elect a Chair from among themselves. The Chair will serve a two year term; there are no term limits. The Chair will preside over all meetings, work closely with and direct the coordinator and other Panel staff in accomplishing the annual tasks of the Panel, be the chief spokesperson and representative for the Panel, and provide strategic leadership to the Panel. The Chair will oversee the preparation of, and make available on an annual basis, a report containing a summary of the activities of the Panel, along with recommendations for improvements in Alaska's child protection system.
- ii. **Vice Chair:** The Panel shall elect a Vice Chair from among themselves. The Vice Chair will serve a two year term; there are no term limits. The Vice Chair will preside over meetings in the Chair's absence, and conducts all Panel business as required in the absence of the Chair, or as assigned by the Panel.
- iii. **Replacing Officers:** An election shall be held at the next scheduled meeting after either the Chair or Vice Chair step down from their role. In the event that both the positions are unfilled, the most senior member of the Panel by tenure will serve as the Chair until the next scheduled meeting when an election can be held for these positions.

## **6. *Code of Conduct***

Members are required to sign and adhere to the Panel's Code of Conduct calling for professional, respectful behavior at all times when representing the Panel. See appendix for the Code of Conduct.

## **7. *Remuneration and reimbursement of expenses***

Members of the Panel serve voluntarily and will not be compensated for any time or effort. Panel members will be reimbursed for expenses reasonably incurred in the performance of their duties for the Panel. Receipts are required for all expenses except per diem. Any receipts submitted after the end of the fiscal year (June 30<sup>th</sup>) for the previous year will not be reimbursed.

**8. *End of member's tenure:***

- i. **Removal:** Members may be removed and their tenure terminated due to non-compliance with the Panel's Code of Conduct (see appendix). Breaches of the Code of Conduct may be brought to the notice of the Chair by other members of the Panel or the coordinator. The Chair will consult with the rest of the Panel, substantiate such a breach, identify appropriate action, and convey the same to the coordinator. The Panel, by a majority vote, may decide to terminate the tenure of a member who is found noncompliant. If the Chair is suspected of such a breach, the actions described in this subsection will be conducted by the Vice Chair.
- ii. **Resignation:** A member may resign by submitting a notice (letter or email) of resignation to the Chair (with a copy to the contract coordinator). Resignations will be noted in the annual report. Members thus resigning may return to join the Panel at a later time.
- iii. **Leave of absence:** A member may request a leave of absence for a maximum of six months.

**9. *Immunity***

"A member of the state panel and a person who furnishes services to or advises the state panel is not liable for damages or other relief in an action involving the performance or failure to perform a duty or other activity of the state panel." (AS 47.14.275)

**VI. Meetings**

Panel meetings will be conducted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act (AS 44.62.310). The Panel may go into executive session to discuss matters that are confidential by law (such as all facts related to specific CINA cases). The Panel may not make decisions while in executive session.

"A person attending a meeting of the state panel or a member or staff of the state panel may not make any disclosure related to information obtained during a review by the state panel unless authorized under AS 47.10.092 or 47.10.093." (AS 47.14.235)

### ***1. Frequency of Meetings***

The Panel will meet at least once every three months, unless determined otherwise.

Electronic notice of the place, date and time of all scheduled meetings will be posted on the Panel's website, and other prescribed sites according to Alaska's Open Meetings Law. A copy of the agenda, along with all necessary supporting materials will be made available to Panel members prior to the meeting.

The Panel may have special meetings to address specific concerns related to operations of CRP, decisions involving confidential information, special training sessions or informational meetings.

### ***2. Notice of Meetings***

Announcement of all scheduled Panel meetings will be posted on the Panel's website and on the Alaska Online Public Notice System as required by AS 44.62.175 (a). The notice will include time, place, and date, along with the teleconference information for participation over the phone.

### ***3. Quorum and voting***

A quorum shall constitute a majority of the Panel members in attendance at the meeting. Each member will have one vote. Without quorum, no vote can take place. All votes, unless otherwise specified, will be decided by a simple majority of the members present and voting. A tie in votes must be resolved through a revote. Votes on teleconferences shall be taken by roll call in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

### ***4. Minutes***

Summary minutes will be documented for all meetings of the Panel and a copy of the same shall be provided to the Panel members prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting where they will be considered for approval. Once approved, minutes shall be signed by the Chair and posted on the Panel's website. Where necessary, members of the Panel may request verbatim minutes be kept.



## **VII. Products**

### ***1. Products***

The Panel will produce several products through the year. This will include but not limited to:

- i. Annual Work Plan: By August 31<sup>st</sup> each year the Panel will complete an annual Work Plan for that work year. The annual work plan details the major goals for the year, with sub tasks and expected products from each goal. Each goal stems from an issue or concern with the child protection system, and will address one or more components of the child protective system associated with the issue or concern. The work plan will also include the locations for site visits planned for the year.
- ii. Site Visit Reports: Observations and findings from each site visit are compiled into a Site Visit Report, within 10 working days following the visit. Site Visit Reports will be posted on the CRP website.
- iii. Ad hoc Reports: The Panel may, from time to time, commission or compile reports on specific topics relevant to its work.
- iv. Annual Report: The Panel will produce an annual report detailing its annual work, identifying the goals for the year, sites visited, evaluation methods, and findings. The report will have clear recommendations for changes in the child protection system based on the reported findings. Such recommendations will be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.
- v. Meeting Minutes: Proceedings of every meeting will be summarized and such minutes will be archived. Minutes of each meeting will be approved at the beginning of the next month's meeting.

### ***2. Dissemination***

All reports and public documents of the Panel will be posted on the Panel website. In addition, a copy of the annual report will be sent to the state legislature, Governor's Office, Commission of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Director of

the Office of Children's Services, Alaska congressional delegation, and the Children's Bureau. The Panel shall send out a press release with the annual report each year.

### ***3. Archives and confidentiality***

All CRP reports that are released for public consumption will be posted on the Panel website. This will include the Work Plan, Site Visit Reports, Annual Report, and an ad hoc reports produced under the authority of the Panel. Meeting Minutes of the Panel are public except when the Panel meets in executive session.

All CRP documents will be archived electronically.

## **VIII. Methods and means**

To efficiently and effectively conduct its business, the Panel will identify and use methods and means as appropriate. They may include:

1. Site Visits: The Panel may visit two or more field or regional offices of the OCS each year to observe and evaluate the functioning of the local child protection service provision.
2. Data sharing agreements: The Panel will institute data sharing agreements with OCS and other relevant agencies to obtain periodic data updates to inform its work.
3. Surveys: Periodic surveys of key stakeholders in child protection may be conducted to collect information on relevant issues.
4. Case Reviews: Randomly identified individual cases may be reviewed by the Panel to identify systemic issues or to review practice.
5. Public hearings: An open hearing for members of the public to express opinions on issues concerning policies and practices related to child protection in Alaska.
6. Comments from general public: All communication (calls, emails, etc.) will be logged into a secure space on the Panel website for exclusive access by the Panel members. Members of the public may also directly post their concerns to this part of the Panel's website. The central repository of public comments may be utilized

to accumulate evidence of a systemic concern with the child protective services in Alaska.

**IX. Media contacts**

Any requests for comments or inquiries shall be forwarded to the Chair. The Chair shall accurately represent the Panel's opinion. If desired, the Chair may consult with the Panel before responding to such a request. No Panel member, if representing herself as a Panel member, shall comment publically on issues being considered by the Panel without prior Panel approval of the message to be delivered.

**X. Amendments**

These operational guidelines may be amended by a majority vote of Panel members. Any such amendment must be in compliance with all applicable state and federal statutes.

Adopted by the Panel on January 6, 2015