



ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

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Chair, Alaska Citizen Review Panel

House Health and Social Services Committee

April 30th, 2019



PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- Introduction to the role and purpose of the Citizen Review Panel
- Goals and recommendations from 2017-2018
- Goals for 2018-2019
- Improvements in CRP-OCS collaboration
- Way forward



CENTRAL PURPOSE

- Congress created CRPs to help child protection systems be more responsive to community needs.
- A CRP is a mechanism for public participation in child protection.
- It should facilitate robust and meaningful participation by citizens
 1. In diverse roles in child and family welfare
 2. Representing all five regions
 3. With a shared interest in promoting a healthy and collaborative CPS system



FUNCTIONS - MANDATES

Federal Mandate (42 U.S.C. § 5106a.(c)):

- Examine the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies and evaluate the extent to which these agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities
- Conduct public outreach both to assess the impact of current policies and procedures, and to solicit public comment on the panel's recommendations.

State Mandate (AS 47.14.205):

“The CRP shall examine the policies, procedures, and practices of State and local agencies and where appropriate, specific cases, to evaluate the extent to which State and local child protection system agencies are effectively discharging their protection responsibilities.”



PRIMARY FUNCTIONS

Review/Evaluate (from statute):

- States' CAPTA Plan
- Child protection standards
- And any other criteria that the Panel considers important

Conduct public outreach (from statute):

- Assess the impact of OCS policies, procedures, and practices on children and families
- This assessment should inform its review function

Advocate for (from congressional record):

- Relevant changes based on its review

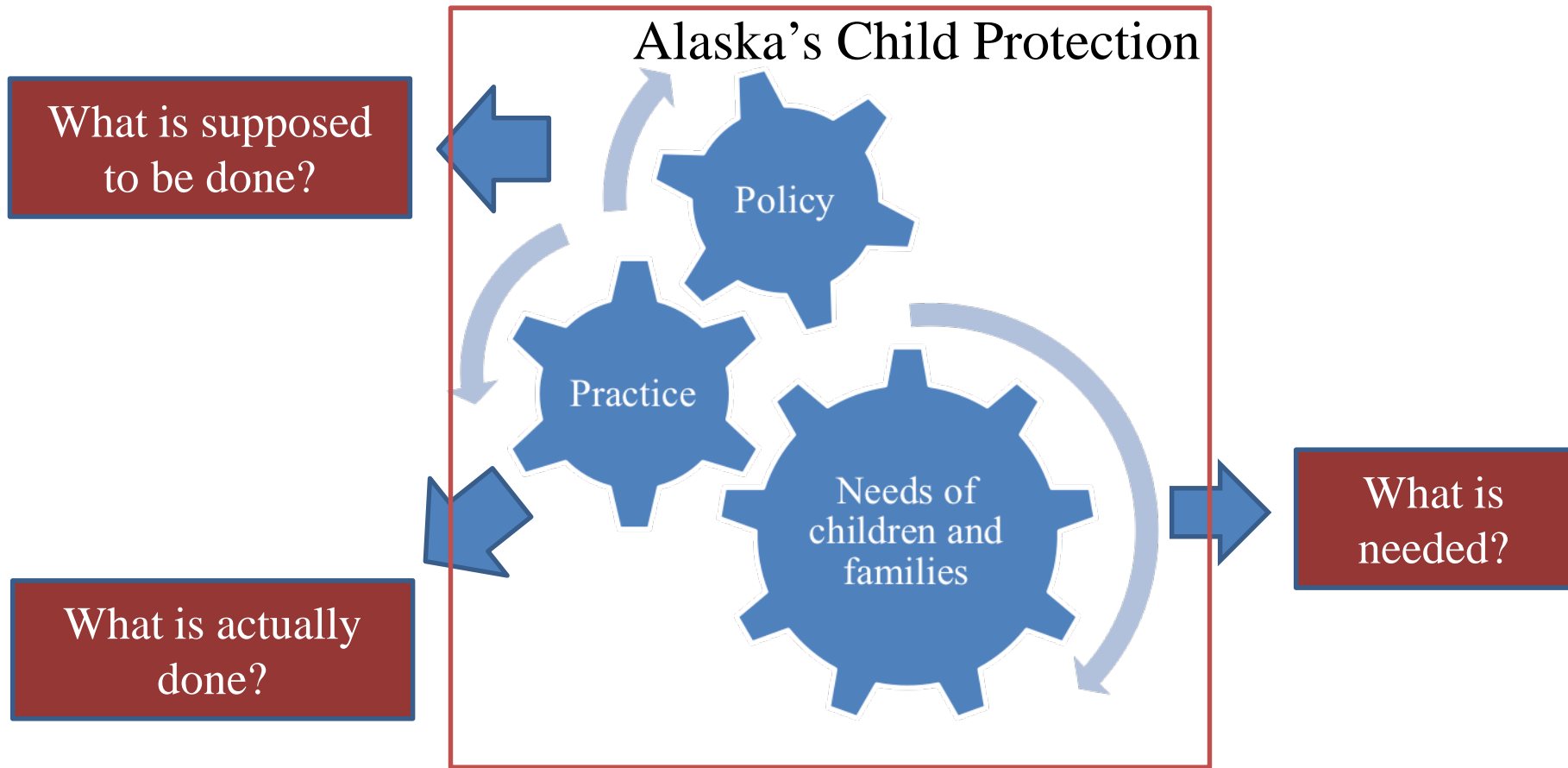


FUNCTIONS – WHAT CRP DOES NOT DO

- Comment on proposed or pending legislation
- Get involved in individual cases, contract, or situations
- Micromanage OCS operations
- Program evaluation
- Lobby



THIS IS HOW IT WORKS...



CRP tries to know the answers to these *questions*.



CHANGES IN CRP OPERATION

- Reorientation of CRP as a public participation mechanism
 - Discussions began early fall 2017
 - A tentative three-year timeline
 - Elements will include
 - Participatory evaluation
 - A systems focus
 - Robust recruitment and retention strategy
 - Data-driven review and outreach
 - Collaborative and constructive



GOALS 2017-2018

- **GOAL 1:** Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process and whether the changes made in 2015 have improved the system.
- **GOAL 2:** Examine if ‘family reunification’ is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home care placement, and OCS’ efforts in pursuit of ‘family reunification’.
- **GOAL 3:** Examine OCS’ efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.



GOALS 2017-2018

- **GOAL 4:** Expand public outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.
- **GOAL 5:** Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Overall, CRP recommendations fall into five categories:

- Quality Assurance
- Management
- Practice
- Public participation
- CRP's role and functions



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Improve Administrative Review Process

Recommendation 1: The Panel recommends that OCS not transition to a judicial review process as was proposed but fine-tune the current administrative process to make it more comprehensive.

- **ACTION:** Ensure that case workers are present during review; and maintain flexibility in scheduling so that there is maximum participation from interested parties.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Improve Administrative Review Process

- **ACTION:** Evaluate the case-continuum for opportunities to build rapport and collaboration among *all* stakeholders if this (unintended, but crucial) objective is no longer being met during the Administrative Review (AR)
- **ACTION:** Ensure case workers are provided with constructive and supportive feedback in how to better achieve compliance.
- **ACTION:** Develop and implement a training on the AR process be developed and delivered for case workers and families to better understand the scope and goals for AR and what should be the anticipated outcomes that follow from an AR.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Improve Outcomes for Family Reunification:

Recommendation 2: The Panel recommends that OCS take the following measures:

- **ACTION:** OCS should target recruiting efforts to workers with life experience in or near the regions they will be serving.
- **ACTION:** OCS should provide orientation and training that explains the often overlooked cycle of trauma children endure when separated from their families, and the reason family reunification is a priority. OCS supervisors and trainers should encourage a strengths-based approach to working with parents.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Improve Outcomes for Family Reunification:

- **ACTION:** OCS should support and train workers to practice early intervention / in-home efforts to prevent removal. We suggest drawing from the experience of more seasoned workers who do this very well in their regions to provide mentorship opportunities.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Strengthened Cultural Competency

Recommendation 3: The Panel recommends that OCS leadership look in to identifying the cultural differences that can contribute to bias among OCS workers and minorities, then find ways to improve their cultural competency.

- **ACTION:** This can be done through more observation, listening, and engagement, as well as targeted and evidence-based trainings like “Healthy Families” and “Knowing Who You Are.”



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Strengthened Cultural Competency

- **ACTION:** Cultural competency training from local village councils or other tribal training partners to build from a collaborative foundation between OCS and the tribes and give caseworkers an opportunity to engage with tribal representatives establishing better lines of communication for achieving ICWA objectives.
- **ACTION:** Collaborate with tribes to ascertain if and where the ICWA specialist could leverage relationships with local elders and community leaders to help case workers develop effective strategies for community engagement and interaction with Tribal resources.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Increased Community Engagement

Recommendation 4: CRP to facilitate the constructive exchange of vital information between stakeholders increasing collaboration.

- **ACTION:** Encourage local/regional OCS leadership to help arrange and facilitate townhall or “talking circle” type meetings during each site visit that the CRP conducts in 2018-2019.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Worker Burnout and Vacancies

Recommendation 5: Recruiting, supporting, and retaining workers that have the skills, character, community investment, and resilience to serve the needs of Alaskan families is key.

- **ACTION:** Tighten OCS hiring policies in the following ways:
 - Acquire or develop a tool that screens job applicants for resiliency.
 - Require applicants have field-related experience and/or education.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Worker Burnout and Vacancies

- **ACTION:** OCS should provide wellness support for staff including on-site counseling, education and training in secondary traumatic stress at least annually, and mandatory self-care including supportive check-ins with supervisors, breaks, and walks/exercise.



RECOMMENDATIONS 2017-2018

Improve Centralized Intake

Recommendation 6: While regions are adapting to what may be an irreversible change, there are still significant concerns about the efficacy of the current intake process. Stakeholders across the regions shared frustration over the inconsistency of the process and the intake worker's inability to facilitate necessary actions in a region they are unfamiliar with in a timely manner.

- **ACTION:** Equip centralized intake workers with region-specific resources and a concise standardized assessment tool for prioritizing calls based on already existing OCS policies and procedures.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Progress on 2017-2018 Goals

- 2017 was, we hope, the pinnacle of a tumultuous period for OCS involving much public scrutiny, incredibly high worker turnover, lack of (though growing) collaboration and communication between OCS and CRP, and internal frustration with statewide changes such as admin review and centralized intake.
- Many of the recommendations went unaddressed and appear under new headings for 2018-2019 as the CRP reimagined its role moving from “watchdog” to broker and facilitator of effective communication while remaining critically objective.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving into 2018-2019

- Acknowledging the crisis OCS was facing, the CRP adapted our approach to site visits looking deeper into core contributing factors leading to burnout, turnover, backlogged IA's, and less-than-optimal results for children and families.
- We developed this year's goals to address the relationship between worker wellness, community collaboration and best efforts toward family reunification.
- We began pre-site-visit teleconferences to collaborate with leadership toward a fruitful site visit.



GOALS FOR 2018-2019

- **GOAL 1: Assess Family Reunification Efforts & Best Practices**
 - What are practices that are working well in the regions to promote family reunification and how can we replicate that in other regions?
 - What are barriers workers and families face to moving toward reunification?
 - What needs to be done to eliminate those barriers?
- **GOAL 2: Evaluate OCS Staff Wellness Efforts and Community Engagement**
 - What efforts are in place to promote wellness, safety, healthy office culture, and community engagement (particularly in remote regions)?
 - How can the CRP help promote wellness among staff?



GOALS FOR 2018-2019

- **GOAL 3: Region-Specific/Culturally-Appropriate Training for OCS Staff**
 - What are current requirements for staff?
 - What offerings available through tribal partners?
 - How can the CRP facilitate better communication and collaboration with tribal partners in this area?
- **GOAL 4: Awareness of Tribal-State Strategic Plan**
 - At what levels do different staff engage with the Plan?
 - Are the efforts coming from the Plan tangible to stakeholders?
- **GOAL 5: Coordinate Panel Activities & Improve Panel Participation**
 - Streamline regular schedule for panel activities.
 - Focus recruitment efforts on regions outside of Anchorage.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Progress on 2018-2019 Goals

- Our change in approach has
 - Highlighted the strengths and improvements in each region and given honor where due:
 - Recognized to state leadership where regional and local leadership has played a significant role in improving outcomes for families
 - Recognized supervisors who model effective and supportive leadership



RECOMMENDATIONS

Progress on 2018-2019 Goals

- Our change in approach has
 - Acknowledged the challenges faced by all stakeholders and contributed to building unity among OCS and its partners.
 - Naming and normalizing the stress incurred by those who work directly with families in their greatest time of need
 - Providing empathetic and positive feedback from the community to OCS workers
 - Communicated to all stakeholders the common goals of OCS and community partners



RECOMMENDATIONS

Progress on 2018-2019 Goals

- Our change in approach has
 - Tailored recommendations for success by collaborating with leadership and seeking out sources of support from community partners.
 - Worked with stakeholders to provide tangible solutions to challenges in communication, collaboration, and cultural competency
 - Provided OCS leadership with ideas from staff and contact information for support available in the community
 - Resulted in a positive and collaborative relationship between CRP and OCS leading to unprecedented responsiveness, and successful implementation of CRP recommendations.



CRP – A STATUTORY INSTITUTION

The CRP is an institution, with a statutory role and responsibility.

It is an organization of the state.

It facilitates citizen participation.

It must cultivate a critical, but constructive lens.

It exists to help OCS.

Its success depends on its relationship with OCS.



Thank you!

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