

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE
HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE
February 14, 2023
3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator David Wilson, Chair
Senator Löki Tobin
Senator Forrest Dunbar

HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Mike Prax, Chair
Representative Justin Ruffridge, Vice Chair
Representative CJ McCormick
Representative Dan Saddler
Representative Jesse Sumner
Representative Zack Fields
Representative Genevieve Mina

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator James Kaufman, Vice Chair
Senator Cathy Giessel

HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

All Members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ALASKA'S CITIZENS REVIEW PANEL REPORT

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CAMERON ADAMS, Chair

Alaska Citizen Review Panel

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the 2021-2022 Alaska Citizen Review Panel annual report.

KIM GUAY, Director

Office of Children's Services

Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS)

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented a response to the 2021-2022 Alaska Citizens Review Panel annual report.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:54 PM](#)

CHAIR MIKE PRAX called the joint meeting of the Senate and House Health and Social Services Standing Committees to order at 3:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Tobin, Wilson, and Dunbar. Present from the house were Representatives Ruffridge, McCormick, Saddler, Sumner, Fields, Mina and Chair Prax.

ALASKA CITIZENS REVIEW PANEL 2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT

[3:34:03 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX announced the consideration of the Alaska Citizen Review Panel 2021-2022 Annual Report.

[3:34:29 PM](#)

CAMERON ADAMS, Chair, Alaska Citizen Review Panel Anchorage, Alaska, said she is a licensed clinical social worker at Denali Family Services and has served on the Citizen Review Panel since 2017. She stated her presentation would cover the following points:

[Original Punctuation Provided.]

- Purpose & Mandates
- CRP Structure
- Primary Functions
- What the CRP does NOT do
- CRP 2020-2025 Long Range Plan
- Annual Activities
- Retention Project
- Next Steps

[3:35:36 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS said states created citizen review panels (CRPs) as part of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). CRPs facilitate robust and meaningful participation by citizens to promote a healthy and collaborative child protection system.

[3:36:01 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS turned to slide 4 and spoke to the mandates governing CRP:

[Original punctuation provided.]

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 state panel shall evaluate the extent to which the department is effectively carrying out its child protection responsibilities under (1) the state plan submitted to the United States Department of Health and Human Services under 42 U.S.C. 5106a(b); (2) child protection standards under federal and state laws; and (3) any other criteria that the panel considers important to ensuring the protection of children.

[3:36:44 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS moved to slide 5 and spoke to the following points regarding the structure of the CRP:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- The Alaska Citizen Review Panel was formed in 2002.
- Per Alaska State Regulation (7 AAC 58), the CRP seats between 5 and 9 members.
- Membership on the Panel is voluntary and is expected to reflect the diversity of the state.
- OCS created a Coordinator contract in 2006 to assist the Panel with coordination and administrative functions.

[3:37:14 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS turned to slide 6 and 7. She stated the three primary functions of the CRP and what it does not do:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Primary Functions of the CRP

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.

Public Outreach

The Panel will identify and implement means to gather feedback on procedures and practices in delivering child protection services in Alaska.

Advocacy

The Panel will conduct appropriate actions that will help improve the child protection services system in Alaska.

What the CRP does NOT do

The CRP does not intervene in individual cases.

The CRP does not have authority over OCS.

The CRP does not lobby.

3:38:23 PM

MS. ADAMS said that in 2019 CRP created a long-term plan to address fluctuation in membership. It established a list of enduring priorities that guide the development of its annual work plan. The enduring priorities are reciprocal engagement, public outreach, collaborative relationship with OCS, CRP education and development, and a healthy child protective services (CPS) system. Individuals can find the work plan on the CRP website.

3:39:06 PM

MS. ADAMS said CRP has annual activities. She noted that members identified priorities and developed a work plan at the retreat. Leaders from OCS were in attendance. CRP also visits regional sites and holds round tables. The information gathered is put into the annual report. Other CRP activities are quarterly meetings, monthly collaborative meetings with OCS, a legislative hearing, and attendance at a national conference.

3:41:21 PM

MS. ADAMS said that in 2021 OCS's most significant challenge was turnover. The turnover rate of frontline staff was 60 percent. CRP worked to understand the root causes of turnover by looking at the current retention-related research. CRP hosted round table discussions in each region to hear from workers directly. CRP let the lived experiences of the frontline workers inform their recommendations to OCS.

3:42:33 PM

MS. ADAMS moved to slide 11 and discussed the round table findings. She noted that round table participants were self-selected; while this makes broad generalizations difficult, it should not distract from the experiences of the employees interviewed. The following were the findings:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- 27 frontline workers, 5 round table discussions, 1 in each region of Alaska
- Lack of transparency during hiring process

- Organizational culture at OCS described as one that encourages people to overwork themselves
- Most unaware of wellness tools offered by OCS or the wellness tools offered are inaccessible or ineffective
- Participants did not feel valued by OCS
- Unreliable technology leads to inefficiencies, increased workload, and decreased wellness
- Lack of support or mistreatment from management results in workers leaving

[3:44:30 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS turned to slide 12, Broad Overview of Recommendations 2021-2022 CRP Round Table Discussions with Frontline Workers. She mentioned the following recommendations are particularly important:

- Prioritization of workers physical and psychological safety
- Improved access to mental health treatment
- Developing a culture of transparency and a formal wellness plan
- Change in compensation structure for overtime, travel, and on-call duties
- Training should be reflective of the people served.
- Update the annual review process to reflect the challenges workers face in achieving federally mandated timelines for essential services in Alaska
- Improvement to the hardware and software
- Create a centralized electronic record
- Reevaluate recruitment efforts

MS. ADAMS acknowledged that OCS leadership recognizes the issues but struggles to make changes due to policies outside of OCS's control.

[3:46:01 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS said OCS responded to CRP's recommendations. From their response, the panel could tell that the OCS leadership team cares about the organization, workers, and families and improving the system. However, their efforts are not always felt and seen by the staff. The intent and effort are there but could

be more effective. Follow-up discussions with workers, supervisors, and managers made it clear that leadership needs to do more about culture, wellness, benefits, and training.

3:46:30 PM

MS. ADAMS moved to slide 13 and said employees complained that groups come in to evaluate OCS but do not share findings, and they do not see any results. To correct this, CRP shared reports with employees and invited all 2021 - 2022 round table workers to participate in a follow-up discussion in 2022 - 2023. Eight frontline workers participated. CRP's preliminary findings indicated little improvement. The discussion revealed the following:

- Workers continue to report not feeling valued.
- Wellness time is not given, or is worker driven and often worker funded.
- Vacancies force workers to work outside their scope and training.
- Employee access to mental health services is greatly needed due to the nature of the work.
- Discrepancies in reporting exist around how critical incident debriefings are handled.
- Employees perceived a lack of follow through on promised changes such as the PSS III position, bonuses, a mental health clinician, and on-call changes.

3:48:41 PM

CHAIR PRAX asked for a definition of PSS.

MS. ADAMS said a PSS is a Protective Services Specialist.

3:49:04 PM

MS. ADAMS turned to slide 14 and stated three management meetings divided by job titles were held with regional managers, staff managers, and rural and urban supervisors. She said the annual report would contain the key differences between the positions and locations. She spoke to the following issues in general terms:

- Lack of staff was reported as their biggest challenge.
- HR delays prevent them from hiring qualified applicants.
- Managers and supervisors need to be considered when thinking about worker wellness and retention.
- Unreliable technology and a lack of resources add to an already heavy workload.
- Participants feel like decisions are made without input from the people they impact.

[3:54:50 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS turned to slide 15 and said the opportunities for leadership improvement were preliminary. she spoke to the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Improve HR at the state level to prevent OCS from losing qualified applicants
- Improve technology at OCS
- Prioritize safety in rural Alaska
- Address travel barriers in rural Alaska in order to achieve federally mandated timelines for essential services
- Prioritize and protect worker wellness

[3:56:56 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS moved to slide 16 and stated CRP is working on future opportunities for collaboration with other agencies, such as the Children's Justice Act Taskforce and Facing Foster Care Alaska. Also, the governor's Parent and Foster Parent Collaborative Council has a caseworker support subcommittee on retention. She said there is a lot of shared attention to addressing the issues OCS is facing. Child welfare workforce and retention issues do not belong only to OCS. It is a statewide, multi-system issue

that requires collaboration at all levels. CRP is looking forward to collaboration opportunities that support the well-being of Alaska's children and families.

[3:58:12 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked Ms. Adams to expound on human resource (HR) delays.

[3:58:24 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS said HR would recruit, interview, and issue approval for hires only to have applicants obtain other employment before background checks were completed.

[3:58:55 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE said the federal mandate on slide 4 is about protecting children. He opined that the CRP report focused on OCS workers, not children. He asked Ms. Adams if she could address how effectively the department protects children.

[4:00:16 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS replied that an enduring priority of CRP is a healthy child protection system (CPS). CRP realized that OCS could not achieve a healthy protection system for children when turnover was at 60 percent.

[4:01:09 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE asked Ms. Adams if she could rate how well Alaska's children are protected.

MS. ADAMS replied Alaska is a unique state, and providing all areas with services can be difficult. There are a lot of things preventing Alaska from doing a better job protecting its children.

[4:02:02 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE asked Ms. Adams if the workforce is the only barrier to providing better-than-okay services to Alaska's children.

[4:02:12 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS answered no.

[4:02:25 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked Ms. Adams to discuss OCS's lack of follow-through regarding bonuses, the PSS positions, and mental health clinicians.

[4:02:46 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS replied the changes appeared to have been mentioned too soon by management as there were delays in implementation. This in turn led to employee frustration.

[4:03:54 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS stated that the issues and problems CRP has pointed out are in the legislature's wheelhouse to correct.

[4:04:21 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked if the 60 percent turnover rate in 2021 has decreased.

[4:04:47 PM](#)

MS. ADAMS replied the turnover rate reported by OCS was 55 percent, which is not very significant. She stated that children who develop relationships with social workers usually do better because they do not have to repeat their history.

[4:05:57 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked how Alaska's turnover rate compares to other states.

MS. ADAMS opined that Alaska's turnover is dramatic, although all states are experiencing turnover in child protective services and mental health.

[4:07:45 PM](#)

At ease.

**PRESENTATION: RESPONSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES, OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

[4:08:26 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of the presentation Response from the Department of Family and community services, Office of children's Services.

[4:08:38 PM](#)

KIM GUAY, Director, Office of Children's Services, Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS), Anchorage, Alaska, said she would present a response to the Alaska Citizens Review Panel Report on behalf of the Department of Family and Community Services. She said the department's year-end turnover rate was 56 percent for protection service specialists I and II. In 2019

the turnover rate was 43 percent, which is also high. OCS has partnered with other agencies to discover ways to improve. The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute estimates that each worker leaving the agency costs \$54,000. This amount is because training and onboarding are extensive. OCS has 615 position control numbers (PCNs), with 500 filled positions. The department does an annual survey to learn from staff ways to improve. It also does exit surveys and learns from the interviews done by CRP. She said the outcomes for children and families would be better with stable personnel. OCS's two priorities are recruitment and retention and delivering essential services.

[4:12:19 PM](#)

MS. GUAY turned to slide 3 and said OCS updated its workforce development plan and aligned it with the U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Wellness, published in 2022. She said resolving retention is a multifaceted problem. The framework focuses on five essential areas: protection from harm, opportunity growth, mattering at work, work-life harmony, and connection and community.

[4:14:27 PM](#)

MS. GUAY moved to slide 4 and discussed three areas of the retention plan:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Protection from Harm

- Safety and security Office
- Wellness and Resiliency Officer
- Incident Desktop Reporting
- Creating a generative safety culture

Connection and Community

- Employee Engagement Sessions
- Court Improvement Project
- Facilitating Attuned Interactions (FAN)
- Frontline
- Social Media

Work-Life Harmony

- Lateral transfers
- Flexible work schedules

- Week-on / week off LOA Positions
- Long-term Non-Perm supervisors
- On-call workgroup

[4:18:39 PM](#)

MS. GUAY moved to slide 5 and discussed the remaining two components of the framework:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Opportunity for Growth

- Expansion of Protective Services Specialist 3 positions
- UAA partnership - Certificate in Child Welfare
- Practicum Coordinator
- Training opportunities

Mattering at Work

- Sharp incentive contracts
- Supervisor/Manager fieldwork challenge
- Staff Advisory Board
- Supervisory Leadership Council
- Retention incentives for field staff

[4:22:20 PM](#)

MS. GUAY advanced to slide 6 and stated that as the director of OCS, she has influence over some areas but no control over compensation and benefits as follows:

Compensation and Benefits

(Collective Bargaining Agreement)

Salary Schedules
Merit Anniversary Date
Overtime
Hours-of-work
On-call Pay
Moving Expenses
Flexible Time Plan framework
Leave Accrual
Shift Differential

(Agency has flexibility)

Initial and Ongoing Training

Work Schedules
On-call structure
Position Classification submissions
Educational Supports
Supervisory support and employee evaluations

MS. GUAY stated the department has been working hard to build up the areas it controls, such as professional development and employee training. She spoke to several of the projects in progress:

Professional Development

Certificate in Child Welfare
Protective Services Specialist 1/2/3 job series
Internship Placements
Monthly Supervisor and Mentor Development meetings

Employee Training

University of Alaska - Child Welfare Academy Partnership

- Protective Services Specialist Initial Training (SKILS 161, 162, and 163)
- Social Service Associate Initial Training
- Child First Alaska - Forensic Interviewing
- ICWA I /II
- Supervisor Training
- Strengthening Families

Department of Administration

- AspireAlaska
- Supervisor Academy

Office of Children's Services

- Regional and Statewide ICWA Training
- Employee Safety Training
- Permanency
- Medical/Mental Health Unit Training
- Mentorship Program

[4:24:13 PM](#)

MS. GUAY moved to slide 7 and discussed workflow, support, and technology. She said OCS has outdated technology. An outside contractor estimated it would take 5 - 7 years to update the

system. The federal government will reimburse 50 percent of the build-out costs. She said Online Resources for the Children of Alaska (ORCA) is the case management system for OCS. She stated that while she can try to influence technological changes, she does not have authority in that area.

[4:25:37 PM](#)

MS. GUAY turned to slide 8, and stated OCS has also focused on recruitment. In the last six months OCS has seen an increase in the number of people entering the division without degrees. In 2022 there were 15 staff without degrees, in 2023 there are 30. The division is competency-based and tailors its training accordingly, which is why OCS has formed partnerships with the University of Alaska and others. She noted methods utilized for recruitment include:

- Targeted recruitment through UAA
- Expanded social media presence
- Realistic Job Preview Videos
- Employee Referral Program
- Social Work Internships

[4:27:13 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if there is a way for non-college applicants to attain a degree in social work while working full- or part-time for OCS.

[4:27:39 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied OCS is in the process of paying for staff to receive an occupational endorsement in child welfare. OCS also does six weeks of training at the Child Welfare Academy and is working with UAA to have that training credited towards a degree program.

[4:28:26 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if employees would receive a pay increase for obtaining a certificate in social work through a union letter of agreement (ULA).

[4:28:38 PM](#)

MS. GUAY answered no. Level of education does not influence pay if an employee is a PSS I, II, or IV.

[4:28:50 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS opined that the department could increase pay for employees who complete certifications and said it is done at the Alaska Pioneer Homes.

MS. GUAY replied that OCS had not explored it.

4:29:09 PM

SENATOR WILSON stated House Bill 151 provided millions of dollars for retention and recruitment efforts. However, five years later, that spending resulted in an additional 13 percent loss in retention and recruitment. He asked how OCS can create a culture shift that does away with the employees' ideas that have been with the division for 30 - 40 years and lasted through four administrations.

4:30:37 PM

MS. GUAY replied no employee has worked at OCS for 30 - 40 years. Creating change in recruitment and retention requires multiple strategies, not just money or more positions. The department wants to hire people that want to work with families and make an impact. It is a difficult job, and salaries must be commensurate with the work performed. A starting worker makes \$25 per hour, but their work requires overtime and tough decisions, such as terminating parental rights. OCS is looking at what needs to change internally to create improvements. She likened OCS to creating a recipe and adjusting the ingredients to make it the best formula possible.

4:32:51 PM

SENATOR DUNBAR stated that the survey data from the CRP presentation mentioned vacancies and on-call problems. He opined that one way to reduce on-call duties is to have a larger staff. He asked Ms. Guay whether she had asked for more PCNs to address turnover issues.

4:33:34 PM

MS. GUAY replied that overstaffing could provide a buffer when vacancies occur; however, OCS cannot find people to hire. There are positions available, but not enough applicants to fill them. The legislature approved several administrative positions last year. OCS is trying to create efficiency by taking duties from fieldworkers that can be centralized and transfer them to administrators. She said an example would be the foster parent hotline. Foster parents express frustration at not having calls returned promptly. The delay occurs because frontline workers are in the field. She opined that OCS cannot resolve its

problems by adding more positions because it cannot fill the positions it has. She stated she canceled this month's training because only one person was hired.

[4:34:51 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN stated that she is also interested in hearing more about what the department is doing to normalize mental health. She asked what tools OCS plans to implement soon that demonstrate supervisory support and employee evaluations.

[4:35:51 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied that one strategy OCS is implementing is facilitated attunement. It will help leaders deal with emotional intelligence. The state is also embarking on a new evaluation system, which includes reciprocal conversations with staff. The department has been looking for a company to provide 360 assessments.

[4:37:11 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked if OCS staff are part of the collective bargaining agreement.

[4:37:19 PM](#)

MS. GUAY responded yes; they are part of the union.

[4:37:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA said she appreciated the response to CRP's feedback, but she was saddened by OCS staff expressing disappointment concerning promised benefits. She said she would like to hear more about overtime pay for PSS positions and the extra \$30 payment for supervisors.

[4:38:37 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied frontline staff do fieldwork, and supervisors decide on courses of action and track the safe return of field workers. Supervisors work a lot of on-call hours. The collective bargaining unit decides a supervisor's salary.

[4:39:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MINA asked about the difference between the hours a fieldworker puts in versus a supervisor.

[4:39:47 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied frontline workers receive more overtime than supervisors. Supervisors are required to be on-call a week at a

time. Supervisors do not track their time because they receive no extra pay.

4:40:30 PM

REPRESENTATIVE RUFFRIDGE said he knows people that have worked for OCS. Many people work for OCS because they care about and want to help children. He opined that many staff leave the profession because they feel ineffective. He stated he would like to hear about the issues made public, the department's difficulties, and the statutes and requirements the state forces staff to implement that put them in difficult situations. He opined that counseling does not erase some experiences, so staff members leave.

4:43:01 PM

MS. GUAY replied that is correct. People work for OCS because they want to make a difference. They leave because they do not feel like they can. The primary reason they cannot make a difference is because workloads are too high. When an OCS position becomes vacant, other staff assume the cases. Staff do not feel effective when they move from crisis to crisis and have no time to work with a family. She said OCS is heavily regulated and has a lot of data that she is willing to share.

4:44:46 PM

SENATOR WILSON stated his understanding that the work at OCS is taxing, and employees should be adequately compensated. He asked Ms. Guay to speak to tribal compacts and whether OCS will use compacting to address issues presented in various CRP reports.

4:45:31 PM

MS. GUAY said the Alaska Child Welfare Compact is in its sixth year. One hundred seventy tribes are active in the compact. It is a significant avenue for having tribes join OCS in addressing child welfare. Tribes work on prevention and scopes of work, which are pieces of the foster care system such as relative searches, family contact, and safety walk-throughs. The compact added a tribe this year. OCS needs to make and involve partners to be successful.

4:47:07 PM

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked what the aggregate cost is for employee turnover at OCS if the turnover cost for one employee is \$54,000.

4:47:31 PM

MS. GUAY replied she would provide the committee with that figure.

[4:47:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked how much OCS pays employees and whether the Department of Administration (DOA) is in the process of reclassifying the positions.

[4:47:50 PM](#)

MS. GUAY responded that a starting PSS I is paid \$25.50 per hour without a geographic pay differential. The hiring of PSS I's has increased since a degree is no longer required.

[4:48:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if DOA is reclassifying any positions.

MS. GUAY replied OCS is expanding PSS IIIs, so it has been working with DOA. A PSS III must have expert knowledge and skill, or the work must be complex.

[4:48:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked what the hourly wage is for a PSS III.

MS. GUAY said she would provide the committee with the amount.

[4:49:04 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked about the cost of replacing the ORCA system and the best time to begin upgrading.

MS. GUAY replied the initial price is \$50 million and the federal government would reimburse 50 percent.

[4:49:28 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if a PSS III position would earn more than a supervisor or manager.

[4:49:40 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied yes, and some OCS employees choose not to be supervisors because it means taking a pay cut.

[4:50:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked if there is a cap on the number of PSS III positions available to OCS.

[4:50:14 PM](#)

MS. GUAY responded that all rural Alaska was classified as complex work. Therefore, all rural positions could be classified as PSS I, II, or III. In urban Alaska, only some positions can have expert knowledge. She added it is a complicated formula.

[4:50:39 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked whether most supervisors advanced internally or were hired from outside the agency.

[4:50:57 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied most advance internally. However, a few PSS IIIs have yet to accept promotion as it would result in a pay decrease.

[4:51:09 PM](#)

SENATOR WILSON asked if OCS considers DOA's decentralization of human resources beneficial and how soon DOA would return hiring responsibilities to OCS.

[4:51:48 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied that DOA would return recruitment responsibilities to OCS on February 20th. She opined that recruitment from within OCS will be beneficial.

[4:52:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER asked philosophically what the one preventative thing Alaska could do to reduce the number of people needing OCS services.

[4:52:38 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied it could foster communities coming together to create belonging. People need connections so that problems are solved before the state needs to be involved. A community can mean organizations such as a person's tribe or church. She opined that communities have been dissolving, especially during the pandemic.

[4:53:26 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked for clarification about the hiring of a resiliency officer.

[4:54:02 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied OCS had not hired a person for the position. However, it has submitted an approval request. OCS will offer the job to the applicant once approval is received.

[4:54:15 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked if the applicant is waiting for a response from OCS.

[4:54:28 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied that is correct.

[4:54:35 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked what the timeframe is for hiring.

[4:54:43 PM](#)

MS. GUAY said the legislature approved the resiliency officer position last year. It took time to classify the position. DOA posted the job in January, interviews took place two weeks ago, and hiring approval is pending. She opined that a notice of approval would likely happen in one to two weeks. The candidate will then have to give notice to their employer. She stated it takes approximately four to six weeks to offer a position once posted.

[4:55:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked where conversations occur when discussing with parents the need to remove children from their homes and what the safety concerns are for the caseworkers.

[4:56:06 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied that law enforcement is usually present when a caseworker believes they might need to remove a child from parental custody. An Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) worker or a community elder often accompany caseworkers if law enforcement is unavailable.

[4:56:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked if it is a requirement to have a second person present.

[4:56:41 PM](#)

MS. GUAY answered caseworkers take a second person if they can. Criminal background checks are run on family members before going to their houses. She stated almost all the removals she has done were with the participation of law enforcement.

[4:57:02 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked about the rate of supervisory turnover.

[4:57:36 PM](#)

MS. GUAY replied that the supervisor retention rate is higher than frontline workers primarily because of schedule flexibility. She noted that many supervisors carry caseloads due to the high turnover of staff. The absence of frontline workers due to vacancies or leave of absence is especially burdensome for supervisors in rural areas.

[4:58:37 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked if two employees work with a child when the weekly work schedule is one-on-one-off.

MS. GUAY answered that is generally the case. There are times, such as court hearings and illness, when supervisors cover for frontline workers that are off duty.

[4:59:11 PM](#)

CHAIR PRAX asked if OCS could create a timeline that would help legislators see what implementations the department has tried and how well they worked.

MS. GUAY responded that OCS could provide the committee with the U.S. Surgeon General's Work Plan, which would be more detailed. It is what OCS uses to track its progress and contains information on why some employees have spent ten or more years working for OCS.

[5:00:59 PM](#)

MS. GUAY thanked the committees for hearing the report.

CHAIR PRAX expressed appreciation for OCS's efforts and stated more work was needed.

[5:01:47 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committees, Chair Prax adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee and House Education Standing Committee meeting at 5:01 p.m.