



# RECORDS CERTIFICATION



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Date

**3/13/07**

**PRESENTA-**

**TION:**

**CITIZEN**

**REVIEW**

**PANEL**



2002

**Alaska Citizen Review Panel  
Annual Report**

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## Mission and Mandate

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### MISSION

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is committed to reviewing and evaluating the practices and procedures of the Office of Children's Services (OCS) and in making recommendations relative to its findings to insure the safety and the well-being of the children of Alaska.

The CRP will achieve this commitment by examining the policies and procedures of the Office of Children's Services and collaborating agencies; examining, where appropriate, specific cases; evaluating the extent to which agencies are carrying out their child protection responsibilities; and preparing and making available to the public an annual report.

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### MANDATE FOR THE GROUP

The Citizens' 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.

"By allowing the Panels to have complete access to child protection cases, by requiring Panels to publicize their findings, and by requiring states to respond to criticisms and recommendations of the Panels, the Committee intends to subject states to public criticism and political repercussion if they fail to protect children." (United States Congress, House Report 104-081, 1995, p 1)

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### DUTIES ASSIGNED TO THE GROUP

**Summary of duties** 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 child protection responsibilities.

## CRP duties

- Evaluate OCS compliance with federal and state laws, examine policies and procedures for consistent statewide implementation, review cases with fatalities or near fatalities. The CRP shall evaluate the extent to which OCS is effectively discharging its child protection responsibilities under:
  1. the State Plan submitted to the U.S. 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 CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children, including the level and efficiency of coordination of foster care and adoption programs in the state and a review of child fatalities and near fatalities.

In carrying out the responsibilities listed above, the CRP shall examine the policies, procedures, and practices of OCS, and, where appropriate, evaluate specific cases of child abuse or neglect.
- Maintain confidentiality. A person attending a CRP meeting or a CRP member or CRP staff may not make any disclosure related to information obtained during a review by the CRP. A violation is subject to a civil penalty of up to \$2,500 for each violation.
- Conduct public outreach. The CRP shall conduct public outreach and gather public comment on current OCS procedures and practices involving children and family services.
- Produce an annual report. The CRP shall prepare and make available to the governor, the legislature, and the public an annual report containing a summary of its activities and recommendations for the improvement of child protection services in the state.
- Meet at least every three months. The CRP is required by law to meet every three months. Additional meetings and/or teleconferences are scheduled as needed.

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### DUTIES ASSIGNED TO OCS RELATED TO THE CRP

HSS support. The Commissioner shall, by regulation, establish policies and procedures necessary to carrying out the duties of the CRP.

- Cooperation with state panel. OCS shall provide the panel access to information on child abuse or neglect cases that is necessary for the CRP to carry out its duties.
- Report response. Not later than six months after the date on which the report is released, OCS shall submit a written response that describes whether or how OCS will incorporate the recommendations of the CRP (where appropriate) to make *measurable* progress in improving the child protection system.

## Membership and Staff Support

**Required membership** The panel shall be composed of volunteer members who are broadly representative of the state, including members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

### Current membership

Fred Van Wallinga, Chair, Willow  
Carol Olson, Vice Chair, Anchorage  
Pamela Dupras, Kodiak  
Dana W. Hallett, Soldotna  
Arthur S. Harsen, Fairbanks  
Susan Heuer, Anchorage  
Esperanza Redelfs, Ketchikan  
Ralph Taylor, Nome

### Former members who left the group during this reporting period

Shelis R. Jorgensen, Talkeetna

**Desired membership** The CRP would like to meet its requirement to be broadly representative of the state by widening the geographic and racial and ethnic diversity of the membership. The group is working to recruit new members from unrepresented areas of the state such as Barrow and Bethel.

**OCS liaison** Richard Nault, Field Administrator, is the current liaison between OCS and the CRP.

**Staff support** Staff support is provided by Sylvan Robb and Nancy Lowe of Information Insights.

## Meetings and Activities

### Group meetings

August 22, 2006	Teleconference
September 18-19, 2006	In person — Wasilla
October 4, 2006	Teleconference
December 6, 2006	In person — Anchorage
February 7, 2007	Teleconference
March 14, 2007	In person — Juneau
April 18, 2007	Teleconference
May 14-15, 2007	In person — Anchorage
June 5-6, 2007	In person — Kodiak

### Other activities

June 27, 2006	Anchorage: Fred Van Wallinga, Dana Hallett, Carol Olson, and Sylvan Robb met with Deputy Commissioner Bill Hogan and Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval
September 18, 2006	Mat-Su: town hall meeting
September 19, 2006	Wasilla: CAPTA training from Lois Ward, Region 10, Children's Bureau
September 20, 2006	Anchorage: participated in focus group with ACTION for Child Protection
November 29, 2006	Wasilla: Fred Van Wallinga, Dana Hallett, and Carol Olson met with Senator Lyda Green
November 29, 2006	Anchorage: presented at Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare (Bureau of Indian Affairs) Conference
December 4, 2006	Juneau: Fred Van Wallinga and Carol Olson attended Senior Leadership Team meeting and met with Joanne Gibbens, Program Administrator
December 7, 2006	Anchorage: Dana Hallett, Carol Olson and Sylvan Robb presented at Alaska Center for Resource Families foster parent training
January 30, 2007	Anchorage: Susan Heuer presented at Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare board meeting
February 5, 2007	Fairbanks: Fred Van Wallinga and Art Hansen met with concerned citizens
March 12, 2007	Juneau: met with Representative John Coghill and Rynnieva Moss (of Rep. John Coghill's staff)

March 12, 2007	Juneau: met with Commissioner Karleen Jackson, Deputy Commissioner Bill Hogan, and Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval
March 13, 2007	Juneau: testified before House HESS Committee
March 13, 2007	Juneau: met with Attorney General Talis Colberg
March 13, 2007	Juneau: attended Tribal-State Caucus
March 22, 2007	Barrow: Art Hansen and Sylvan Robb attended Arctic Slope Native Association training and met with OCS staff
March 23, 2007	Bethel: Susan Heuer accompanied Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval to staff meeting and meetings with community partners
April 11, 2007	Wasilla: Fred Van Wallinga met with James Steele
April 20, 2007	Wasilla: Fred Van Wallinga met with Richard Nault and James Steele
April 30, 2007	Fairbanks: Sylvan Robb attended Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval's safety assessment training
May 3-4, 2007	Anchorage: Pamela Dupras, Carol Olson, and Sylvan Robb attended OCS five-year planning meeting
May 23-25, 2007	Lexington, Kentucky: National Citizen Review Panel conference

### Annual activities

Although the CRP was formed in May 2002, the core of its current membership has been in place for approximately three years. The group meets approximately monthly, with every third meeting being in-person. Panel membership has remained steady this year with eight members, although one member left and another joined providing us better rural representation.

The CRP decided to focus its efforts on two areas this year. The first was facilitating an improved relationship between OCS and tribal agencies. The second was facilitating an improved relationship between OCS and foster parents. A large part of this effort was beginning the process of educating people about the existence and role of the CRP. To this end, the group continued to maintain a public website at [www.crpalaska.org](http://www.crpalaska.org) to provide information on Alaska's CRP, as well as citizen review panels in general. The group also developed a brochure and a Power Point presentation for use in educating more people about the CRP and its mission.

We were able to include an introductory article in the January foster parent newsletter published by the Alaska Center for Resource Families. In the past year, as part of our

requirement to conduct community outreach, the CRP held a town hall meeting in Wasilla.

We worked with OCS and the Ombudsman's Office to finalize our procedures for responding to individuals with issues on a specific case. We have a letter and form to send to these individuals to inform them about their option to file a grievance with OCS or open a case with the Ombudsman's Office. We also worked with the Ombudsman's Office to obtain their data on OCS related cases they encounter.

## Recommendations

We believe this year has marked a turning point for OCS. Some people might argue that the biggest event for OCS this year was that Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner Karleen Jackson hired an outside firm, ACTION for Child Protection, to conduct a sweeping audit of OCS. We would posit instead that the reaction of OCS to that audit was by far the biggest event of the year for the agency. The only reason the audit will have the impact we anticipate is that OCS has chosen to publicly share the report and all the areas it finds that OCS needs to improve as well as those areas in which OCS is performing well. The CRP finds this an incredibly positive step. By acknowledging that the system does need substantial improvement and fully and publically sharing the audit results, OCS has already taken the hardest of the steps needed in order to become the agency we believe Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval desires it to be.

Additionally, we have been very pleased by the positive change in the relationship between the CRP and OCS. Both sides have worked hard to improve the relationship and we believe the CRP and OCS are now working as a team to achieve our mutually desired result of a strong child welfare system that protects all of Alaska's children. We appreciate Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval's continued willingness to work closely with the CRP.

In past years the CRP has made recommendations to OCS based on its findings through its activities. This year we elected not to include any additional recommendations of our own, but to reiterate the comprehensive set of the recommendations produced by ACTION for Child Protection as a result of their audit of OCS. Our primary reason for including all the recommendation is to support OCS in its efforts to make changes suggested by a neutral party. An additional reason is to give the people an opportunity to review all the recommendations made by ACTION for Child Protection. The full text of the four ACTION for Child Protection reports is available on the OCS website at <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/>.

We support the findings in the audit reports and find them to be very consistent with what we have seen and heard during our activities around the state. While we truly believe OCS desires to make these changes, we would be derelict in our duties if we did not monitor their progress. In that vein we recognize the fact that OCS cannot possibly implement all the recommendations included below in the upcoming year. Therefore we request that OCS create a list of priorities for implementing these recommendation and provide it to us. If priorities of the recommendations have not yet been established among the recommendations, we recommend including community partners in the decision-making process regarding priorities. Additionally, we would like to obtain the implementation plan and timeline for implementing these changes. Finally, we would

like to see documentation on how the ACTION for Child Protection recommendations will be integrated with OCS's five-year plan.

**Recommendations contained in the report *An Expert Review of Community Relationships* by ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., released by OCS March 28, 2007.**

- By all accounts, OCS has dedicated and competent staff at all levels. The challenge is in retaining good staff in direct service positions and having sufficient resources to achieve manageable workloads. Without addressing these two issues, it will be very difficult for OCS to provide quality services on a consistent basis and to carry out its child protection responsibilities in a highly effective manner.
- In addition to the issues of staff retention and workload, there are other steps OCS can take to improve community relations and to increase its effectiveness. One of the most frequently cited complaints about OCS was lack of responsiveness on the part of line workers. Failure of staff to return phone calls in a timely manner impacts their ability to work effectively with other professionals on individual cases and also impacts the agency's ability to establish positive working relationships with other agencies. Without discounting the impact that heavy workloads have on the ability of workers to return calls in a timely manner, it should be made clear to staff that it is unacceptable for phone calls not to be returned. One small step that could reap significant benefits in terms of public relations is to improve responsiveness at the line level. Establishing clear expectations and standards for the return of phone calls and sending a strong message to staff about the importance of returning calls in a timely manner would be a good first step.
- The need to improve the public image of OCS was one of the top recommendations that emerged from the focus groups and key informant interviews. A concerted effort to educate the public about the work of OCS and to share information on high profile cases are two important components of a public relations campaign. Public awareness efforts should include media outlets, e.g. newspaper, television, radio, as well as community presentations.
- Support and encourage local offices to conduct community outreach activities to educate professionals about their role and responsibilities and the legal constraints they are working under. Regular brown bag lunches and other forums where an open dialogue can occur between OCS staff and community professionals can go a long way in improving working relationships. These forums could be organized in a way that provides an opportunity for OCS staff to present on a particular topic or "hot issue" as well as for informal discussion.
- Develop a system to gather feedback from key organizations and professionals on a regular basis. This could be done most efficiently at the Regional Office level using both in-person and telephonic conversations. A list of questions/issues to be addressed could be generated similar to the process used for key informant

interviews in this study. A process such as this will help to identify areas that are working well as well as hot issues that need to be addressed. It could also help to highlight inconsistencies between local offices.

- Develop a system to gather feedback from families that have been served by OCS. Gathering feedback from families served will accomplish the dual purpose of helping to create a culture of customer service in offices and to identify areas needing improvement.
- Another stakeholder group that it is important to gather feedback from on a regular basis is foster parents. Given the critical role that foster parents play in the child protection system, it is important to get their input on what is working well and areas needing improvement. Foster parents could also be some of the best ambassadors for the agency if they feel their work is valued and that they are part of the team working on behalf of the children in their care.
- Supervisors are the key to ensuring good practice and decision making. They also set the tone for interactions with community professionals and how collaboratively staff works with other agencies. To a large extent, supervisors establish the culture in a unit and office which can promote positive relations with community professionals or work against the development of positive relationships. And, perhaps most importantly, supervisors influence the attitudes of workers towards the families they serve. Attitudes can range from a belief that all families need support and the potential for child maltreatment exists in every family to parents who maltreat their children are "bad" people and no amount of services are going to turn them into "good" parents. Efforts should be made to focus on the supervisory level for staff development and training.
- Given the high percentage of children in care coming from Alaska Native homes, it is important to continue efforts to improve coordination and communication with the tribes. Cultural sensitivity training for workers and supervisors is also critical to OCS's ability to serve Alaska Native families effectively.
- Develop clear expectations and guidelines on the sharing of information on cases. A common complaint that emerged from focus groups and interviews was the unwillingness or failure on the part of some OCS staff to share information on cases. Areas where breakdowns in communication or disagreements are most likely to occur regarding the sharing of information are multi-disciplinary teams, schools and foster parents.
- Encourage local and regional offices to work in an open and transparent manner with other community agencies. Of particular importance is for OCS offices to keep community agencies informed about constraints they are working under. Community agencies want to work in partnership with OCS and to share the responsibility for serving families and keeping children safe. To feel like full partners, community agencies want to be kept informed about barriers to quality service, e.g. workload, legal constraints and to work with OCS to address those barriers. Many of the professionals who participated in the study said that they would be more accepting of decisions that are made or action taken by OCS that they might not agree with if they understood the basis for that action.

**Recommendations contained in the report *An Expert Review of Curriculum In Support of Practice and Decision Making During Investigation* by ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., released by OCS March 28, 2007.**

- Consider being more selective about what is discussed related to the history of CPS. In terms of the audience, perhaps more attention should be given to how past and present legislation and regulation affect workers directly in doing their job. It may be worthwhile to spend more time focusing on how current legislation has implications for practice and decision-making. Balance must be considered about teaching content that does not obviously or immediately apply to a person's job.
- Employ Adoption and Safety Family Act (ASFA) as a foundation or framework from which to rationalize concepts and practices within curriculum. The training section that discusses ASFA does not thoroughly address how the legislation has had remarkable implications for safety intervention throughout the life of a case. In fact, there is very little commentary on how ASFA has resulted in specific safety intervention requirements both for investigators as well as ongoing CPS.
- The discussion related to the agency's mission and service delivery is important and really could afford further attention. Having staff consider the mission with respect to implications for intervention is crucial because the mission influences an agency's concept for change which in turn dictates the goals, outcomes and objectives for service delivery. If the mission relates fundamentally to child protection then this relates to safety intervention. It is necessary that workers and supervisors have a greater appreciation for how their roles and responsibilities within an agency are integrated throughout all CPS functions for the purpose of achieving the mission.
- The curriculum might benefit from being structured in more of a linear format. Rather than teaching topics in isolation (i.e., information collection and interviewing), young staff may benefit from receiving learning material directly within the context of what they need to know in order to do the jobs in which they are assigned. In other words, thoroughly teach a new worker how to conduct investigations instead of having them learn different aspects of the job without a "how to do" the job context. This would involve providing new hires with an overview of the investigation process including safety intervention. Then proceed step-by-step in teaching them everything they need to know about the purpose and objectives for the investigation; everything they need to know once they receive a case; everything they need to know in preparing for an investigation; everything they need to know for information gathering including what they need to gather and why it is important; everything they need to know to assess safety; and everything they need to know at the conclusion of the investigation in order to make effective decisions.

- Establish an information collection standard that is consistent with family system thinking and necessary for effective safety assessments.
- Consider what concept or concepts form the fundamental basis for CPS intervention. Determine how to promote consistent conceptual application at key decision-making points throughout the life of a case.
- There needs to be a clear distinction in the curriculum regarding the difference between maltreatment, risk and safety, and how each has a unique importance to intervention and influences the delivery of services. If OCS is moving toward a more purely safety intervention approach it may be well to actually reduce the profile of risk within training. In other words spend more time assuring that staff understand safety concepts and don't be very concerned about risk concepts (if they are not be used during intervention for decision making.)
- Select key terms and establish effective definitions for relevant concepts. It is absolutely critical for staff development that the curriculum discontinue the use of numerous terms and concepts interchangeably.
- Given that OCS is moving to a safety-based approach to intervention, it is imperative that safety concepts, processes, practices and decisions be the hallmarks of training.
- Determine and consistently use definitional standards and criteria for safety intervention decision-making (i.e., safety assessment, safety analysis and safety planning).
- The curriculum should outline the safety intervention process and thoroughly describe the relationship between safety assessment, safety analysis and planning.
- The curriculum is noticeably void of significant information related to safety planning. Much more extensive time needs to be devoted to safety planning. Supervisors and workers must have knowledge about what constitutes a sufficient safety plan. Supervisors and workers must have skill in developing sufficient in-home safety plans. Neither knowledge nor skill development related to safety planning is emphasized in the curriculum.
- Adjustments to curriculum design should occur as soon as new policy and procedures are put in place. In so far as possible current curriculum should be adapted in ways that emphasize anticipated changes in policy and procedure.

**Recommendations contained in the report *An Expert Review of Policy that Regulates Practice and Decision Making During Investigation* by ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., released by OCS March 28, 2007.**

The recommendations offered here are simple, straightforward and brief:

- Identify a philosophical base from which OCS operates which includes a belief and values system, mission, purpose for intervention and who OCS seeks to serve.

- Design and adopt an official systematic approach to intervention that fully operationalizes the OCS philosophical base and spells out, in detail, the basis for intervention; how intervention is to occur in a systematic scheme; standards for information and practice; a decision-making framework; and roles, responsibilities and relationships of those carrying out intervention. This might be effectively done in a position paper that fully describes or “pictures” the approach to intervention which then could influence the development of policy, and also curriculum design, quality assurance, information management, etc.
- Collect examples of policy from selected states to evaluate content, format, writing level and style, organization, precision, understandability, etc. in order to formulate OCS’s approach to policy.
- Write new policy. Consider current policy only for the purpose of identifying any content that fits and contributes to advancing or explaining the OCS intervention approach. Do not revise current policy.
- Employ criteria to be applied when developing and writing new policy. An example of criteria used for evaluating current policy is available in Appendix A. Criteria or ways to judge and measure the quality and value of policy can include writing level and style; formatting; use of terms and concepts and so forth. The idea is to establish rules for writing policy that you continue to consider and apply in order to make sure that what is being written complies with expectations you have for what constitutes acceptable policy.
- If necessary, search out resources, guides, literature and examples that provide guidance, direction and specific help concerned with policy development and writing for OCS policy writers in order to enhance their competency and increase their comfort and confidence in formulating and writing policy.
- Seek consultation and technical assistance for OCS policy writers to assist in policy formulation, organization, formatting, design and writing.
- Establish a method for reviewing policy drafts to assure that they meet criteria and effectively provide direction, regulation and support for the OCS intervention approach.

**Recommendations contained in the report *An Expert Review of The Office of Children’s Services Organization and State Office – Local Office Interface* by ACTION for Child Protection, Inc., released by OCS March 28, 2007.**

Because the findings were consistent across the three methods, there is a tendency to ignore the variations and differences across the state. However, given the idiosyncrasies of the dynamics occurring in each local office and region, please note that what works in Juneau may not work in Mat-Su Valley or Anchorage. The reader is encouraged to read the full report as it contains details about differences within offices and across the state and more recommendations for specific geographical locations and offices.

The general recommendations are:

*Increase capacity at the line level*

- Increase clerical staff, identify their duties, and who is to monitor and evaluate their work.
- Assess paperwork responsibilities and consider assigning those duties to clerical staff so case managers can work with children and families.
- Offer a support group for workers to allow them to talk about concerns/morale.
- Develop an exceptional training program for new and experienced workers.
- Based on the OCS workload study findings and any other analysis that may be available, continue to examine ways and means to reduce demand and increase capacity related to case managers.
- Re-assess the MSW requirement for supervisors. Although this may be ideal, it is hindering hiring and retention efforts.
- Make sure the work environment is clean and well maintained.
- Have a person/wizard in every unit who knows the answers to all of the questions so workers are not running around looking for answers particularly in reference to ORCA.
- Train ORCA experts in each field office so that workers receive the assistance needed.

*Improve management and administration*

- Clarify and make explicit to all employees the boundaries between the Field Office and Regional Office, beginning with the respective responsibilities, levels of authority, and accountability of the CSM, Staff Manager, Administrative Manager, Intake and Permanency Supervisors.
- Most Central Office staff assume a great deal of responsibility in their positions. What is needed is a clear and transparent identification of the levels of authority each person has to make and/or enforce decisions.
- Hold people accountable for doing their jobs. Accountability should occur within a top to bottom process which demonstrates to all staff the universal need for accountability. Participatory management is encouraged which includes an effective balance between staff participation and buy-in and accountability. A spirit and approach that encourages, expects and requires competent performance regulated courageously by management and in particular supervisors is an important consideration.
- Physically separate field offices from regional offices (Juneau and SERO)
- Hire an Intake Supervisor and move the Staff Manager to SERO only (Juneau and SERO).

- Assess whether WIC fits within OCS. Consider including WIC but in a different structure. Admittedly intervention/infant learning program may not fit naturally within the CPS context but WIC was the only program specifically identified by information sources. With respect to the other prevention program, interviewees could see the benefit of being in OCS.
- Build upon the work begun by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) by promoting the mission of OCS and develop clear strategies to promote the five priority areas. Every public, stakeholder and staff meeting should repeat the progress being made on the five areas.
- Involve employees at all levels of the agency to develop tactics and strategies that address the five priority areas.
- Develop and lay out an internal communication strategy. An internal communication strategy should be linked to the mission of the agency. In other words, it should be based on respect, compassion, dignity, etc. It should describe the various types of communication used within the agency and when each should be used, i.e., e-mail vs. phone calls, vs. conference calls, etc. Sensitive issues should be communicated face-to-face, for example, rather than in an e-mail. And then it should address process issues. For example, it might describe who should talk to whom about what. It may be useful to intentionally create an informal strategy where that encourages people to talk to one another regardless of position. Of course all communication options should be mindful and respectful of the lines of authority. It is acknowledged that this recommendation obviously involves a highly complex area of administrative/management. Therefore some thought should be given to acquiring consultation and technical assistance that can support OCS in development or revision to its approach to internal communication.
- Provide more valid, timely information on practice at all levels
- Supervisors/managers should listen and value the opinions of their workers and support their decisions.
- Hire an executive coach for the Deputy Commissioner in order to facilitate her professional growth and development in the agency.

*Add services to children and families*

- Work on prevention services where kids are everyday so they never enter CPS.
- Never let a child leave the system without a permanent connection.
- Have discretionary funds that could be used to help kids stay at home. It is very cumbersome to get extra services for families
- Recruit and train more foster homes and more foster/adoptive placement options, emphasize recruitment of therapeutic foster/adoptive placements that take sibling groups.
- Increase subsidy payments to equal therapeutic foster care payments.

- Expand the Family-to-Family program statewide.
- Evaluate what contributes to over-representation of Alaska Native children in CPS custody and develop with tribal entities strategies to influence over-representation.

## Commendations

All OCS employees for their selfless efforts to protect the children of Alaska.

Members of the House Health, Education, and Social Services Committee of the Alaska Legislature (listed below) for their interest in and support of the CRP on behalf of the children of Alaska.

Chair: Representative Peggy Wilson, District 2

Vice-Chair: Representative Bob Roses, District 19

Members: Representative Sharon Cissna, District 22

Representative Anna Fairclough, District 17

Representative Berta Gardner, District 24

Representative Mark Neuman, District 15

Representative Paul Seaton, District 35

Commissioner Karleen Jackson for her vision to commission the audit of OCS by ACTION for Child Protection.

Representative John Coghill and his staff member Rynnieva Moss for their unflagging support of the children of Alaska and the Citizen Review Panel.

Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval for her vision and perseverance.

Field Administrator Richard Nault for his instrumental role in supporting positive change in the Mat-Su office.

Program Administrator Joanne Gibbens for inviting the CRP and other community partners to participate in the strategic planning meeting.

Respectfully submitted by the Citizen Review Panel:



Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Fred Van Wallinga, Chair



Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Carol J. Olson, Vice Chair



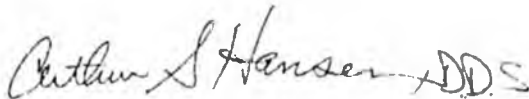
Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Pamela M. Dupras, Member



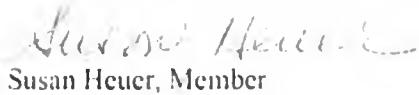
Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Dana W. Hallett, Member



Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Arthur S. Hansen, Member



Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Susan Heuer, Member



Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Esperanza M. Redelfs, Member



Electronically signed  
June 22, 2007

Ralph D. Taylor, Member

*Never doubt that a small, dedicated group of citizens can make a difference.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has...  
~ Margaret Mead*

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## Alaska's Citizen Review Panel



### Who are we?

The CRP is composed of volunteer members who are broadly representative of the state, including members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.



## **CRP Vision**

To enable the Office of Children's Services to implement its policies and procedures for children and families in a culturally sensitive and consistent manner across the state.



## **CRP Duties**

Evaluate Office of Children's Services (OCS) compliance with federal and state laws, examine the policies, procedures and practices of OCS, and, where appropriate, evaluate specific cases of child abuse or neglect.



## Where we have been this year

- Barrow
- Bethel
- Cantwell
- Chitina
- Copper Center
- Delta Junction
- Fairbanks
- Gakona
- Glennallen
- Healy
- Juneau
- Kenny Lake
- Ketchikan
- Kodiak
- Northway
- Petersburg
- Sitka
- Tok
- Valdez
- Wrangell



## We've met with...

- Coast Guard personnel
- Counseling center staff
- District attorneys
- Foster parents
- Health aides & public health nurses
- ICWA workers
- Local police departments
- OCS staff
- School principals, nurses & counselors
- State troopers
- Tribal representatives
- WIC workers



## We found...

- Not every place is broken
- Many workers are going to heroic lengths to protect children
- Many OCS workers are working in less than ideal circumstances



## However, we found...

- The current structure and operation of OCS is not adequately protecting all of Alaska's children.



## Some examples of problems

- In a number of communities, partnering agencies told us that they had stopped reporting abuse to OCS because they either don't answer the phone or don't act upon receiving the report.

40%



Copper  
River  
Basin

## Some examples of problems

- A 14 year old boy who had been hospitalized for suicidal ideation and intoxication 3 times during a three month period was found passed out in the street in sub-zero temperatures. OCS declined to respond when contacted by law enforcement in the middle of the night.



## Some examples of problems

- A 4 year old boy in foster care who required a medical procedure was unable to obtain it for weeks because of a form lacked a signature from OCS.



## The Bethel situation

- A decision was made to move the highest supervisory position, Staff Manager/Supervisor V, from the Bethel OCS office to Wasilla without any prior notification, input or processing in the Bethel office or with community partners.



- Prior to this proposed change, the Bethel OCS office and community partners have been working collaboratively.
- Workers have expressed concern about long distance supervision and subsequent break down of the collaboration.



## Our recommendation

- Create a fifth OCS region headquartered in Bethel, a region which is the size of the state of Oregon. Bethel is a troubled community with high rates of alcohol abuse and the highest rate of sexual assault in the nation.



## Additional funding is required

- This is a pressing concern that needs an additional appropriation. The existing OCS budget is overtaxed and inadequate as is.



## What this will look like

- The existing Staff Manager/Supervisor V, the Permanency Supervisor IV, and the Investigative Supervisor IV would all be housed in the Bethel Region 5 Office.
- The Bethel Region 5 Office must have updated technology to provide more effective child protection.



## Why is this worth it?

- According to Bethel field office line workers, on-site supervision is critical.
- Uniqueness of Yup'ik culture and its effect on child protection is currently understood and valued.
- There has been a willing collaboration between OCS and tribal agencies because of the knowledgeable on-site supervisor which would be maintained.



## Why is this worth it? (cont'd)

- There will be a positive impact on the number of Native children in custody if good relationships with the tribes are maintained.
- On-site administration will result in greater staff retention.
- Prevents lawsuits from maltreated children, hence protects children and saves money
- Helps SCRO
- **Better for children**



## Conclusion

- What's it going to cost?  
Very little—What does it cost if we don't act?!?



"When every human child is receiving the physical and emotional support needed from family and community to actualize the full potential of his or her humanity, we will know we are on course to a new human future. The current state of our children tells us just how far we have yet to travel."

--David C. Korten



## Alaska's Citizen Review Panel



For more  
information,  
please visit our  
website

[www.crpalaska.org](http://www.crpalaska.org)





Citizen Review Panel  
c/o Information Insights, Inc.  
PO Box 73490  
212 Front Street, Suite 100  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707

Sylvan Robb  
Coordinator  
907.450.2456  
sylvan@iialaska.com

February 14, 2008

Chairman Peggy Wilson  
Vice-Chair Bob Roses  
Representative Anna Fairclough  
Representative Wes Keller  
Representative Paul Seaton  
Representative Sharon Cissna  
Representative Berta Gardner

Dear Members of the House Health, Education, and Social Services Committee:

Thank you very much for allowing the Citizen Review Panel time to present our findings about the current state of the Office of Children's Services to you. We appreciate your interest in this matter that is vital to Alaska's future.

Attached are letters from members of the Bethel community and agencies in the area supporting the Citizen Review Panel's recommendation that the Office of Children's Services be reorganized to have five service regions in the state, instead of the four that currently exist. We recommend that the proposed fifth region would be headquartered in Bethel to serve that portion of the state. Some of the letter express support for at least continuing to house the Supervisor 5 position in Bethel, instead of moving that position to Wasilla as has been proposed.

Some of the letters reference a woman named Joan. She is a member of the region and community member of Bethel for over 11 years and a child welfare social worker both tribal and state for all of the 11 years. Other letters are addressed to Sylvan Robb; she is the Coordinator for the Citizen Review Panel. Finally, other letters also reference Susan Heuer who is a member of the Citizen Review Panel. We did not want to edit people's letters in any way, but also did not want there to be any confusion regarding who was being referred to in the letters.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this extremely important issue.

Sincerely,

Fred Van Wallinga, Chair

Dear Ms. Robb and Ms Heuer,

I understand that you both are involved in the Citizen's Review Panel for the Department of Health and Social Services and that one item under discussion is the possibility of changing the supervision of OCS staff and operations of the OCS office in Bethel to another location. I am writing to you as a concerned citizen of Bethel, AK about the need to have a local OCS staff manager in our community.

I work for the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation, Behavioral Health Department and coordinate the SECEL Grant. That grant is involved in teaching professionals and parents about the social and emotional development of children ages 0-5 years old.

Protecting children from abuse and neglect are two essential ingredients in raising healthy children. Unfortunately sometimes that requires interventions and the timeliness of those interventions is very important.

Many village children and youth are at a risk for abuse and neglect related to poverty, substance abuse and domestic violence. Historically, some of the big challenges we have in the YK Delta are the distance and weather which affect the time it takes to get services for children and families. This coupled with not enough case workers or police means that often times the abuse or neglect goes on and on before there is an intervention. To further hamper the speed with which interventions can take place by having the supervision an additional 400 miles away does not appear to be in the best interest of the children.

Our local OCS office has many dedicated workers, some with Social Work degrees and some with out that formal education. All of them work very hard with large caseloads, but continue to have the well being of the children as their focus. It is extremely important that they have supervision in the local office to help them manage all the components of the family, child and law that are involved in protecting our youth.

Our local office serves not only the town of Bethel but dozens of villages. We are the hub of the YK Delta for all kinds of services and have been for OCS as well. Ideally there would be a social worker in each village who would serve the children and families. Since that is unrealistic, then the next best thing would be to have a strong regional office in Bethel where services and help is available in a more timely manner than having it provided from Anchorage or another town outside the region.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mary Johnson  
SECEL Grant Coordinator  
YKHC Behavioral Health  
[mary\\_johnson@ykhc.org](mailto:mary_johnson@ykhc.org)  
907-543-6716

Hello,

I am a professional (and personal) friend of Joan Dewey of Bethel, AK, OCS. It is through Joan that I have heard about the plan to move supervision of the western region of OCS to Wasilla. Through others, I have heard that when this was done on a short term basis, some years ago, the results were disastrous.

I have worked as a children's mental health clinician in the region beginning in 1998 and, currently, I serve a sub-region that includes Aniak and 12 villages, providing mental health and substance abuse services to people of all ages. My experience in the Y-K Delta dates to 1984, when I took a job in Bethel, as a substance abuse counselor.

Over the years, I have become concerned with many issues that remain central to work in the region. A recurring difficulty is people from outside who come in and impose ideas that have no proper application in the region. We have always cut these newcomers slack in noting that after a few years they begin to comprehend the complexities of the region. We would lament over that fact that this was just the time they would leave the region. Just when they got good, they would go.

I have lived in the Y-K Delta a total of ten year if you were to link all my smaller stints together. I have written a piece, now a book, titled Holy Land, that looks at the impact of the outside helper on the region, emphasizing that he who comes in to help will be transformed by the experience. I certainly was.

These were the problems of the past - how to orient the arriving administrator or service provider to the realities of a region the size of Oregon, or better, nearly the size of Poland. When they came from Outside they were slow to understand. If they live in Wasilla, they will never understand.

Compounding the problem is the sad fact that the region stands at the top of measures of human misery from suicide to all the specters of violence that impact families - domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual abuse of children, child abuse and neglect - all of them fueled by alcohol abuse and dependence. I have been listening to the stories since 1984, and I understand the nature of the emergency. I have also lived in the region long enough to respect the culture and to see that the culture has the capacity to save and protect the children. This point of view, one that recognizes cultural values and builds systems of support that include elders and local village leaders, develops through exposure over a long period of time. Everything in the Y-K Delta is based on relationship and trust. Everything is personal and it soon becomes clear that this is the only way that one person helps another. Back in the city, the systems of care hold different perspectives - that presume western interventions are the only way and that cold, detached, distance is a good thing. This presumption comes from ignorance and the needed knowledge is only gained on the ground and in the trenches.

For years, I have been aware of the problem posed with helpers arriving from afar. It takes awhile before they understand what is at stake and begin to truly do to help. But when you move supervision, the power to make the final decision moves, too. When programs that serve the Y-K Delta are supervised from another region of Alaska, there is little chance that those running the show will know the realities we cherish, because the legacy of the people of 10,000 years takes awhile to assimilate and it takes even longer to take up the yoke so that we are moving together toward the important goals of child protection and cultural survival. The two are entwined far more closely than it first appears. It is dangerous to move supervision to Wasilla. The chances that

staff will act willy/nilly with no understanding of what they are disturbing is enormous. They will not know the impact; they will not know what is at stake and even if they promise to do good work, it will not be possible. It is like serving the people of Italy from an office in Spain. The people of the Y-K Delta are truly another people. They need to be understood on their own terms and that can only occur through extended contact accompanied by education and experience.

Thanks for the opportunity to give you my thoughts and concerns about this. I hope you will be able to influence the process and prevent this move. Budgetary considerations do not justify such a move.

Those who have worked at OCS in the past will have far more to offer in terms of specifics but I know that the region is, in a way, an endangered area that requires special consideration. The idea of limiting the autonomy of the local office and allowing shots to be called by program staff in Wasilla is alarming. It's a big deal. It's important. The impact of the shift will be far reaching and serious. There must be a comprehensive review before such a shift is implemented. It's not that easy. Much is at stake.

With kindest regards,

Sandra L. Kleven, LCSW

Sandra L. Kleven  
3978 Defiance Street  
Anchorage, Alaska 99504  
907 332 6735

Lauri J Owen  
P.O. Box 3526  
Bethel, Alaska 99559  
[olauri@gmail.com](mailto:olauri@gmail.com)  
907.543.4246  
January 29, 2008

In re Bethel OCS Management Position

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to recommend that the OCS management position remain in Bethel instead of moving it out of the areas as is currently planned.

There are many good reasons for keeping that position here. In my experience, supervisors need to be able to regularly interact with their staff. Bethel is simply too far from Wasilla for that to happen. I do understand that economics are partly driving this decision, but having to await decisions and having to explain circumstances all the time means that levels and quality of the service the Bethel OCS line staff can provide will fall here, and that is simply not fair to the clients as well as the employees, and it means that the quality of work coming out of the Bethel OCS office will fall. When these things happen, people are more likely to make mistakes, and those mistakes could have a significant impact on OCS.

Second, the Native – and dominant – culture in Bethel is radically different than the culture in Wasilla, or in any other region of Alaska. That means that people think about things differently here, and the people here face very different challenges and expect things to be done in different ways, and a person who is unfamiliar with the paradigm simply cannot understand, much less appreciate, those differences. Intelligent people, including supervisors, (hopefully) make well-reasoned and sensible decisions that work well in their demographic area. However, those otherwise good decisions generally will not work and are not feasible when the recipient of that decision resides in a place where the dominant paradigm is radically different than that the decision-maker occupies. The outcomes of such a system cannot fail to be anti-Yup'ik.

In my opinion, OCS in Bethel needs a supervisor who resides in Bethel, or the YK Delta, so that the daily problems can be addressed appropriately and so that the presenting issues can be addressed without violating local folkways and further damaging the Yup'ik culture.

I work for the Attorney General's Office as an attorney who represents OCS in Bethel, and the opinions I express are my own. They are based on my interactions with the

people who make up the workers and clients in my caseload, and upon my personal dealings with the people who make up Bethel during the last nineteen months.

You may contact me at the above address, telephone or email if I can answer any questions or assist you in any way.

Best wishes,  
Lauri J Owen

P.S. Please let me stress that the opinions I provide are my own and do not in any way represent the position of the Attorney General's Office.

Joan, there is so much that I want to say about this that I do not even know where to start. I can't believe the state is considering moving the management of the Bethel office. That makes about as much sense as pouring gas on fire! I am forwarding your email to some of our providers so they give their feedback too. Look at all the statistics lately. Since region has the highest rate of domestic violence and sexual assault & child sexual abuse in raw numbers, it makes absolutely no sense for the state to move the management of the Bethel OCS office out of Bethel.

Vickie Koehler was wonderful and now that she has retired I am very fearful of that there is not a competent leader in charge of the Bethel office and I have come to that conclusion because of a recent very serious case that I was involved in. The Bethel OCS Office needs a good and competent manager located right here in Bethel!!!!!!!

Marcia

Marcia Coffey, LMSW  
Lead Social Worker  
Hospital Social Services  
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Hospital  
PO Box 287, Suit3 3000  
Bethel, Alaska 99559  
(907) 543-6225

Organized Village of Kwethluk  
ICWA Department  
P. O. Box 130  
Kwethluk, Alaska 99621

Phone: (907) 757-6043, Fax: (907) 757-6321, E-mail: [ovkssiew@unicom-alaska.com](mailto:ovkssiew@unicom-alaska.com)

February 4, 2008

[sylvan@infoinsights.com](mailto:sylvan@infoinsights.com) – Sylvan Robb  
[susan.heuer@alaska.gov](mailto:susan.heuer@alaska.gov) – Susan Heuer

Dear Ms. Robb and Ms. Heuer:

Organized Village of Kwethluk located in the Bethel Region of the state has learned that the Office of Children's Services is planning to move the Social Worker V Manager position to Wasilla. Organized Village of Kwethluk and other tribes were not contacted by OCS to ask for our input or informed of this change.

Moving the Social Worker V Manager job to Wasilla does not provide any benefit to the child welfare work that we do with OCS with regard to Indian Child Welfare Act cases. This position is a key position as we work the ICWA cases with the state since we do not always have access to the Ongoing Social Worker or turnovers with the ongoing Social Worker do happen and are open until filled for more than two to three months. The State apparently does not have the interests of the tribal children in mind if they believe moving this key position several hundreds of miles away from Bethel tribes is best for the State. It is important that OCS keep that position in Bethel where we can access the Social Worker V Manager. We do not believe this is a good decision to move the position to Wasilla.

I am requesting in behalf of the Organized Village of Kwethluk that you present this information to the State Department of Health, Education and Social Services Committee of the Alaska House at your meeting on February 14, 2008.

If you have any questions or need more information, please call me at the above phone number.

Thank you.

*Chariton Epchook*, ICWA Coordinator  
Organized Village of Kwethluk

Organized Village of Kwethluk  
Social Services Department  
P. O. Box 130  
Kwethluk, Alaska 99621  
Phone: (907) 757-6043, Fax: (907) 757-6321

February 4, 2008

[sylvan@infoinsights.com](mailto:sylvan@infoinsights.com) – Sylvan Robb  
[susan.heuer@alaska.gov](mailto:susan.heuer@alaska.gov) – Susan Heuer

Dear Ms. Robb and Ms. Heuer:

Organized Village of Kwethluk located in the Bethel Region of the state has learned that the Office of Children's Services is planning to move the Social Worker V Manager position to Wasilla. Organized Village of Kwethluk and other tribes were not contacted by OCS to ask for our input or informed of this change.

Moving the Social Worker V Manager position to Wasilla does not provide any benefit to the child welfare work that we do with OCS with regard to Indian Child Welfare Act cases. This is a key position as we work the ICWA cases with the state since we do not always have access to the Ongoing Social Workers.

The State apparently does not have the interests of the tribal children in mind if they believe moving this key position several hundreds of miles away from the Bethel area tribes is best for the State. It is important that OCS keep that position in Bethel where we can access the Social Worker V Manager. We do not believe this is a good decision to move the position to Wasilla.

I am requesting that you present this information to the State Department of Health, Education and Social Services Committee of the Alaska House at your meeting on February 14, 2008.

If you have any questions or need more information, please call me at the above phone number.

Thank you.

*Martha Jackson*, Social Services Coordinator  
Organized Village of Kwethluk

**Brian Kay**  
**Post Office Box 1169**  
**Bethel, Alaska 99559**

(907) 543-1234  
toll free (888) 303 8044  
fax (907) 543-1316  
kaylaw@unicom-alaska.com

**Brian Kay, Admitted to Bar**  
Alaska  
Florida, retired County Judge  
Pennsylvania  
Washington, DC

February 5, 2008

To Whom It May Concern,

Please consider this letter of support sent to The Citizen's Review Panel for keeping the Social Worker V Bethel region position in Bethel.

A position move would affect quality of service and immediacy of supervision in my opinion.

I have thirty-three years experience as an attorney including fifteen as a judge in Florida and feel that moving the supervising position away from Bethel is not in the best interests of the residents of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta

Thank you

Sincerely,

Brian Kay

February 6, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a lifelong Alaskan that has lived in Bethel since 1984 volunteering and working at various jobs over the years, including at OCS back when it was known as DFYS. For the past 15 years I have worked with offenders, the last 7 of them at Yukon Kuskokwim Correctional Center in charge of education and rehabilitation programs. This region leads the nation per capita in incidents of child sexual abuse, suicides, fetal alcohol effect, inhalant addiction and many other social illnesses. Alcohol is the main number one drug problem out here. There are bootleggers catering to this demand as well as villagers making homebrew and the toxic consumption of mouthwash and hairspray.

The alcohol problem is literally drowning out the other problems existing out here such as rampant socially acceptable marijuana use, two thirds high school drop out rate, and gambling addictions to name a few. People that live and work out here have much more insight of what all goes on than superiors headquartered in Anchorage or Juneau. The Bethel OCS office needs the Social Worker V position filled and ideally should be the headquarters of their own region. This would increase the ability and opportunity for local staff to work with the strengths and support identified in each of the 57 villages and 7 different school districts that make up the Yukon Kuskokwim region.

OCS, formally DFYS, has evolved over the years to be known in a better light than just some agency that "takes your kids away". The region is slowly healing from the negative cultural intervention history in general: forced boarding schools, deadly influenzas that devastated entire communities, priest sexually abusing children, etc... More local hire and higher education and more communication and trust has empowered the people of this region to self determine a better destiny for the next generation. Bethel OCS needs more staff and leadership support to be a proactive part of this. The safety of Alaskan's children is the number one priority; this agency saves lives.

The OCS staff in Alaska are very dedicated people but it is the ones directly in Bethel and the villages that have the greatest insight on this regions strengths and needs. Thank you for your time and consideration with this.

Sincerely, Susan Taylor

The Honorable Governor Palin;  
Lt. Governor Parnell;  
Rural Liaison, Ms. McBride;  
Representative Hoffman;  
Representative Nelson;  
Citizen Review Panel member, Ms. Robb;  
Citizen Review Panel member, Ms. Heuer;  
Commissioner Health and Social Services, Ms. Jackson;  
Office of Children's Services, Ms. Sandoval

February 4, 2008

Re: Move of OCS Staff Manager in Bethel to Wasilla

Dear Fellow Alaskans:

The Alaska Indian Child Welfare Association (ANICWA) has learned of the move of the OCS staff manager from the Bethel area to Wasilla and we are compelled to address this issue, as it tears at the very fiber of protection of families and children.

It cannot be argued that safety is one of the most important issues facing Alaska children and families today, as we look at the distressing numbers of families involved in child protection services. Expedient responses from all members of the protective teams are essential and indeed life-saving for some. The move of an essential player in the protective team can only be viewed as having a negative impact on the families but the team as a whole.

Governor Palin, you had given the ANICWA board and its' members a pledge to assist in whatever means possible, to help and continue our fight against child abuse and neglect prior to you being elected Governor. We, as board members and our membership ask for your assistance now in this ill advised move.

We do not ask for *reconsideration*, we ask for a **rescinding** of this move. This move was done without the consultation with the tribes and/or tribal leaders in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region. As Alaska Natives, we cannot accept such a move, with such drastic repercussions, which will be felt by the people you so much have pledged to protect and serve. While it can be said that there are also non-Native families that will be impacted by such a move, we are addressing this issue as ICWA workers who are committed to helping our People in times of crises. The disproportional numbers of Alaska Children in custody has long been known and documented and this move is not only counterproductive to the push to lower those numbers but speaks of institutional racism.

Institutional racism has many faces and the display of this magnitude cannot be denied nor should we fear raising this issue when it is facing us.

We, as Brothers and Sisters of those ICWA workers in the Y-K region, as well as the children and families of the region urge an expedient review and rescinding of this move. We request that you present this information to the State Department of Health, Education and Social Services Committee of the Alaska House at your meeting on February 14, 2008.

Respectfully,

ANICWA Board of Directors

**Summer D. Lefebvre, MSW**

3531 Tanglewood Place  
Anchorage, Alaska 99517  
907-350-1257  
[smrdwn@clearwire.net](mailto:smrdwn@clearwire.net)

February 7, 2008

Citizen Review Panel  
212 Front Street, Suite 100  
PO Box 73490  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707

Dear Panel Members:

My name is Summer Lefebvre and I am a social worker living in Anchorage. I am a policy level consultant with nonprofits around Alaska helping providers, communities and coalitions evaluate their work and come up with group approaches to solving the social problems that challenge their communities. The arenas I engage in include substance abuse issues and prevention, mental health and wellness, housing and homelessness and community development.

I would like to voice my concern at the planned relocation of the Office of Children's Services Social Worker V position from the Bethel office to Wasilla. Bethel is a unique community that has very high needs for a strong, consistent, locally based child protection work force.

On a recent visit to Bethel I had the opportunity to speak at length with several social workers at OCS about the challenges the community faces with high rates of child neglect and abuse. Bethel is also challenged by some of Alaska's highest rates of traumatic brain injury and substance abuse. Front line child protection workers need direct available supervision in order to effectively do their demanding daily work. Removing the supervisor from this office will only serve to weaken the child protection services provided in this high needs regional hub.

Currently, social workers in the Bethel OCS office travel to more remote villages than any other region in Alaska. Supervisors must be knowledgeable about the culture and values of the communities in which they serve. Supervisors are responsible for infusing their staff with the importance of culturally relevant family interventions. Supervisors in the region require the experience only available to them by living in these unique communities. We need our best in Bethel and we need the institutional experience that only comes from working within this community and being a part of it.

I urge you to not remove the social worker V supervisor position from the Bethel office. OCS case workers will suffer for it, the community will suffer for it, and foremost the families and children of Bethel will suffer for it.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Summer Lefebvre, MSW

Good afternoon Sylvan: I am the Mental Health Clinician at the Bethel Youth Facility (BYF), and I have been in the Bethel area for five years. For the first year and a half, I traveled to the villages while working at the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) as a Village Clinician. I learned first hand about the challenges of living out here and about the high levels of trauma, abuse, neglect, and addictions.

Presently, I am providing intense therapeutic intervention and treatment for youth on the BYF Treatment Unit, crisis intervention for youth on the Detention Unit, and comprehensive mental health evaluations for the Probation Department. On a daily basis, I am treating youth who have been exposed to multiple developmental traumas. The resulting disruption of primary relationships has profoundly interfered with normal development and the developing brain.

The work that the Office of Children's Services does can significantly impact the numbers of youth entering BYF as well as the severity of their social-emotional dysfunction and criminal offending. OCS can intervene early in instances of child neglect and abuse, and their involvement can reduce the numbers of youth being detained at BYF. One disturbing development is that we are seeing younger offenders as well as more assault and sexual offenses. In addition, the severity of personality, behavioral, and emotional impairments is on the rise. The numbers of youth in the BYF that have mental health diagnoses is well over 75%.

It is my professional opinion that to have the Director of OCS held by someone *not* living in our community will only increase the trends mentioned above. The complexities of making child protection decisions is a difficult one at best. The person in that top position needs to have knowledge and respect for the cultures out here as well as the many challenges and difficulties of living in rural Alaska. Many community partners in this area will be affected by having the OCS Staff Manager position moved to Wasilla. Please don't let that happen.

Dr. Valerie A. Warren,  
Mental Health Clinician II  
Bethel Youth Facility  
PO Box 1989  
Bethel, AK 99559  
(907) 543-4733 (Direct Line)  
valerie.warren@alaska.gov

February 8, 2008

Dear Ms. Robb and Ms. Heuer:

Our tribe, Native Village of Kwigillingok located in the Bethel Region of the state has learned that the Office of Children's Services (OCS) is planning to move the Social Worker V Manager position to Wasilla. Our tribe and other tribes in this region were not contacted by OCS to ask for our input, or informed of this change.

Moving the Social Worker V Manager position to Wasilla does not provide any benefit to the child welfare work we do with OCS in regard to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) cases. This position is a key position as we work on the ICWA cases with the state. The state apparently does not have interests of the tribal children in mind if they believe moving this key position several hundreds of miles away from the Bethel area tribes is best for the state.

It is important that OCS keep that position in Bethel where we could have more easy access to the Social Worker Manager. We do not believe this is a good decision to move the position to Wasilla.

We request that you present this information to the State Department of Health, Education and Social Services Committee of the Alaska House at your meeting on February 14, 2008.

If you have question, or need more information, please call me at (907)588-8117.

Thank you.

**NATIVE VILAGE OF KWIGILLINGOK**  
**Kwigillingok IRA Council**  
President, Tommy J. Andrew

/S/  
Arthur J. Lake, Tribal Administrator

Dear Susan,

Hi, my name is Lillian Kiunya, I am a Tribal Member of the Native Village of Kwigillingok, an LKSD School Community Advocate, and Child Protection Team Member. I am also a mother, grandmother, aunt, great-aunt, cousin, sister of children who are enrolled to our Tribe. The reason I am writing to express my concern and objection to the alternatives of moving the Bethel OCS staff manager position away from the Bethel area. I do not believe this is a good move, since the manager will be away from staff who need the support of the site manager. I understand that the personnel in the office working out of the Bethel office can work following procedures to conduct its purpose to protect children, but I feel that the manager's presence for the workers is vital. Since child protection services can be draining emotionally as well as mentally for the workers, I think having a manager away from the Bethel office is not a good move because the manager will not be able to see and feel the need of support for those working in child protective services.

I am thinking of those children who are already in the state custody cases out of the Bethel office, because they are going to be the unintended victims of the move. It can be a good intent for the state, but please consider those children and family who can be affected by the move.

Thank you for your time.

# TUNDRA WOMEN'S COALITION

WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD A BRIGHTER FUTURE



Michelle DeWitt  
Executive Director  
Feb. 7, 2008

Re: OCS, Bethel

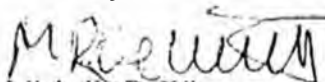
To Whom It May Concern:

TWC requests that DHSS-OCS reconsider the decision to move Bethel's OCS supervisor position out of the region. OCS and TWC have worked closely together on many projects over the years- Family Preservation, directly with families utilizing crisis intervention services, with children and teens in our prevention & outreach programs, and with our Children's Advocacy Center program (which will be addressed in a separate letter from The Children's Center). One constant in this coordination of services and longtime partnership is the OCS supervisor.

At an administrative level, I can understand the desire the division may have to streamline the agency's supervisors. However at the local level, it is not practical for partnering agencies such as TWC to form a strong working relationship with a supervisor who lives in another part of the state. In our community and region the lead supervisor at OCS - traditionally the Social Worker V- has been the person available to meet or call to improve system responses, participate on multidisciplinary teams, get questions answered if the direct case worker is not available, to brainstorm creative solutions to challenges, to assist the staff they supervise on complicated situations- that person has been an invaluable resource.

Given the critical role OCS plays in our region, given the uniqueness of the area we serve, given the caseload and given the partnerships all of the service providers rely on to provide the best services possible, TWC believes it only makes sense to have the supervisor located here in Bethel. We hope that the position will be reinstated in our community. We will also certainly support any effort the division may make to develop a 5<sup>th</sup> region exclusively composed of the Y-K Delta. A 5<sup>th</sup> region may be the most effective solution for the Delta due to the size and number of communities served. Either way, our local OCS office- and the community partners- need a supervisor to coordinate with who lives and works in Bethel.

Sincerely,

  
Michelle DeWitt

February 7, 2008



To Whom It May Concern

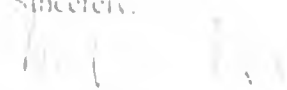
On behalf of the Y-K Delta Children's Center in Bethel, I am writing this letter in support of the Citizen Review Panel's recommendation to create a fifth OCS Region, which would have its headquarters located in Bethel. The Y-K Delta Children's Center is the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) that serves children and families in Bethel and the 56 surrounding villages. As Program Manager for our CAC, I work closely with the Bethel, St. Mary's and Aniak OCS offices.

The Yukon Kuskokwim Delta experiences the highest rates of sexual violence in the state, with alarmingly high reported incidents of child sexual abuse. In 2007 alone, our CAC provided services to 161 children that came to our attention because of concerns of sexual abuse. Approximately 35% of these cases involved an alleged abuser who lived in the home with the child, meaning that OCS was involved with over 50 of these children that came to the CAC. Our staff works closely with the OCS workers in these cases, who are tasked with ensuring that children are safe and families are supported. This is no easy task when all complexities of this region are taken into consideration. The barriers that we face in our day-to-day work are not easily understood by those who are unfamiliar with our region, so in order to ensure appropriate collaboration, I see it as absolutely necessary that the safety needs of children and families in the Y-K Delta are addressed by those who are living and working in this region.

As the facilitator of our CAC's Multidisciplinary Team, I would like to stress that we work very hard to respond to the needs of children, families, and communities in a culturally respectful way. It is my belief that in order for all of us to be effective in our partnerships, we need to have an understanding of the culture of this region and relationships with those who are also working to create safety and change. The daily risks that children face in this region, ranging from sexual abuse to the impacts of alcohol, need to be dealt with from within the region, not from outside our region, in a culturally appropriate way.

The OCS workers who are currently staffing the Bethel, St. Mary's and Aniak offices are undertaking much, and as a representative from a partnering agency, I strongly believe that that these workers need more support and a committed staff manager who lives in this region. The children and families of the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta deserve the level of care, so I urge you to support the Citizen Review Panel's recommendation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Meghan Gaughan  
Program Manager  
The Children's Center

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