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CITIZEN
REVIEW
PANEL
OFFICE OF
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SEAN PARNELL, GOVERNOR

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

P.O. BOX 110630
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-0630
PHONE: (907) 465-3170
FAX: (907) 465-3397

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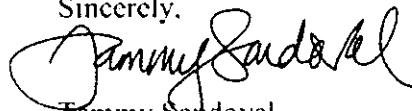
Susan Heuer, Chair
Citizen Review Panel
Office of Public Advocacy
900 W. 5th Ave., Suite 525
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Chair Heuer:

On behalf of the Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services, our other partners and our stakeholders in the child protection system, thanks to you and your panel for the 2009 Citizen's Review Panel annual report. Enclosed please find our response to your findings and recommendations.

I truly appreciate each panel member for the time and efforts freely contributed to the most important of visions – Safe Children and Strong Families. I look forward to another year of productive partnership.

Sincerely,



Tammy Sandoval
Director

Enclosure

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) is thankful to the Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) for their diligence in examining policies, procedures and practices that then inform recommendations toward systems improvement of the OCS. We know that we cannot do the work necessary to prevent, reduce and remedy child maltreatment without the assistance of all of our community partners. In 2009, the CRP and OCS continued its collaborative work to ensure the safety, permanency and well being of the children of Alaska. We believe we have forged a very effective partnership.

2009 proved to be another active, but very productive year for the OCS. Again this year, there was a federal audit for which to prepare and host. In July of 2009, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted a secondary review of the Title IV-E Foster Care Program to determine the level of Alaska's compliance with federal mandates. Secondary reviews are mandated when a primary review determines a state not in substantial compliance with Title IV-E requirements as was the case for Alaska in September of 2006. Reviews ensure compliance with IV-E eligibility requirements and validate financial claims for federal reimbursement to ensure that payments were made on behalf of eligible children.

In November, the ACF determined the OCS to be in substantial compliance with federal eligibility requirements and with the allowable percentage case error and dollar error rate of 10 percent. The OCS was commended for its efforts to improve the program since the September 2006 review and provided with recommendations for continued improvement. The next review will be held within three years of July 2009.

Another federally mandated milestone that was reached this year is the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) was approved on December 1, 2009. The PIP is the corrective action plan to address areas needing improvement as identified in the Child and Family Services in September 2008. A copy of the PIP document can be viewed/downloaded at - http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Publications/2009_pip.pdf . The OCS will need support and assistance from every one of its stakeholders in completing the PIP in the required 2 year period. The foundation of the PIP and that of the entire OCS, is our Practice Model Overview. This document seeks to create a conceptual map and represent our organization's ideology to how staff, stakeholders and families served within the system will partner together to engage in child welfare services. See - http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Publications/2009_practicemodel.pdf.

As we did last year, we continued rolling out Family to Family (F2F) within OCS, this year to Wasilla. The F2F Initiative is now almost 5 years old and we have begun institutionalizing the core principles and practices statewide, therefore we are going to soon drop the phrase "Family to Family Initiative" and instead, refer to the particular associated practices, to demonstrate our commitment to the work being fully incorporated into OCS' repertoire.

The following are the responses to the specific recommendations made in the CRP 2009 Annual Report:

Recommendation 1 - That resources for state departments be standardized.

While the OCS can only request and encourage state government to allocate resources to increase support for the safety of our children, we are appreciative that the CRP has included this recommendation in the 2009 report. We also recognize the concerted efforts of the Administration and the Legislature to increase the resources available to OCS in the past several years. Since 2005, we have been given 70 new frontline positions and a net increase of close to \$12 million.

OCS completely agrees with your observations regarding the extremely slow Internet connection speeds in our rural offices. Unfortunately, the solution is far from simple and the problem is not exclusive to OCS. Many rural offices in Alaska have Internet connectivity issues.

Department and OCS information technology staff believe that the best and only effective solution to Internet connection speeds is for some entity; be it state, federal, or private, lay a fiber optic cable from Anchorage to Western Alaska. The cost of this enterprise is in the tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars. Even if funding becomes available, a solution will not be realized for several years.

Knowing that the best and most permanent solution is out of immediate reach, we aggressively remind our state Enterprise Technologies staff of the problems in our rural offices and seize any and all alternate solutions. For example, OCS was able to dramatically increase Internet speeds in our Kodiak office by partnering with our federal peers. To quote Mary Gray, our Social Worker IV Supervisor in Kodiak: "It has utterly changed our productivity for the better."

Recognizing that our Bethel, St Mary's, and Aniak offices are some of the most adversely affected offices, we were able to work with the Governor's Office to secure funding for the purchase of 17 laptop computers that now allow the field workers from those offices to enter case notes and keep up on their email correspondence while in the field. Once the field worker returns to their respective office, the case notes can then be uploaded into ORCA.

OCS is also working with our Information Technology partners on new technologies for compressing the size of the Internet signal being transmitted through the satellite to and from our rural offices. This is a difficult and expensive solution, and there is a high risk that the technology will not work in Alaska. Because we believe that if there is a chance it will help our rural offices, we must at least try.

We also agree that the ability to provide rural housing would positively impact retention of staff in the rural areas. We have taken the issue to DHSS administration and learned that while there are some existing models in other departments; those models were grandfathered in, making the effort to provide housing a little more difficult for OCS. We have learned that we may be able to provide housing by leasing existing rental property, but must charge workers for rent. When vacant, the OCS would need to continue lease payments, dipping into already stretched operating funds. This option has not been discounted, and we will continue to determine where the most need is and explore options available to us.

CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

2009 Annual Report



Alaska

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Mission and Mandate

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.

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)

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.

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. Hansen, Fairbanks
Susan Heuer, Anchorage
Kristin Hull, Wasilla
Ralph Taylor, Eagle River

Former members who left the group during this reporting period

Paul Burke, Nome
Esperanza Redelfs, Ketchikan

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 underrepresented areas of the state as well as a greater diversity of child-centered expertise and backgrounds.

OCS liaison Tammy Sandoval, Director, 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

July 10, 2008	In person — Anchorage
September 17, 2008	Teleconference
November 11, 2008	Teleconference
November 21, 2008	In person — Anchorage
February 4-6, 2009	In person — Juneau
March 26, 2009	Teleconference
May 1, 2009	In person — Anchorage
May 26, 2009	Teleconference
June 2, 2009	Teleconference
June 19, 2009	Teleconference
June 29, 2009	Teleconference

Other activities

August 28, 2008	Fairbanks: Art Hansen, Fred Van Wallinga, and Sylvan Robb met with Representative John Coghill and his Chief of Staff, Rynnieva Moss
September 10, 2008	Participated in teleconference for the Child and Family Services Review
November 18, 2008	Fairbanks: Art Hansen and Sylvan Robb met with Coleen Turner, Children's Services Manager for Northern Regional Office
November 20, 2008	Met with Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner, Bill Hogan
January 6, 2009	Safety training teleconference with Director Tammy Sandoval
January 7, 2009	Dillingham: Art Hansen and Susan Heuer met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies
January 8-9, 2009	King Salmon: Art Hansen and Susan Heuer met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies
January 12-13, 2009	St. Mary's: Dana Hallett and Kristin Hull met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies

January 18-21, 2009	Unalaska: Dana Hallett and Sylvan Robb met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies
January 28, 2009	Bethel: Pamela Dupras and Fred Van Wallinga met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies
January 29-30, 2009	Aniak: Pamela Dupras and Fred Van Wallinga met with local OCS staff and partnering agencies
April 27-30, 2009	Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare Agency, Second Annual Alaska Child Welfare Summit
May 14, 2009	Sylvan Robb presented to the Tribal State Consortium
May 20-22, 2009	Jackson Hole, Wyoming: Fred Van Wallinga attended the 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 five years. The group meets face-to-face quarterly, with monthly teleconferences in between. Panel membership has remained steady this year with eight members, although there were extended absences during the year. Two members missed a portion of the year; one for health reasons and the other due to military deployment. One member resigned when she moved out-of-state. A newly recruited member had to resign due to a family medical emergency before becoming very active. Another new member was recruited and has been an active participant for much of the year.

The CRP continued to focus this year on two areas for which we had previously advocated. The CRP visited the Copper River Basin area in November 2007. We had serious concerns about this area before and after our site visit. The local OCS field office in Glennallen was a one-person office and struggled to retain a staff person. We have continued to monitor the progress and keep a close eye on the office. We were extremely encouraged to see the community rally and organize to start a child advocacy center (CAC) for the area. OCS was responsive to the needs of the area and the acknowledged additional staff time required by the creation of the CAC. A second staff person has been assigned to the field office. The office suffered an unfortunate set back when the newly hired staffer was seriously injured in a car accident. OCS has been very responsive to the needs of the region and recently promptly filled that position with a new worker in the interim.

Our second area of focus has been, and continues to be, the creation of a fifth service region for OCS to be headquartered in the Bethel area. That was our most important

recommendation in our annual report last year and is a recommendation again this year. More information is included in the recommendations section of this report.

As more people become aware of our existence we receive more calls from dissatisfied citizens. As in the past, we inform people that we do not intervene in individual cases, but encourage people to avail themselves of either the OCS grievance process or to open a case with the Ombudsman's Office. When we are aware of cases, we do try to monitor complaints with an eye out for patterns of problems.

We collected a great deal of regional data personally through community site visits. We interviewed local OCS staff and staff from the following types of partnering agencies regarding what is working and what needs improvement in their relationship with OCS and how we can help facilitate those efforts.

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

We also learned a great deal from other people in these same job types during discussions at several conferences we attended. One conference we attended was the Second Annual Alaska Child Welfare Summit put on by the Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare Association (ANICWA). Attendance at these conferences provides extremely valuable networking opportunities, especially to hear from rural residents from many communities. Conference attendance is an excellent way to continue to make people aware of our existence. A 3' by 6' banner with our name and logo was purchased, and we were able to staff a table with information during the ANICWA conference. Unfortunately, attendance was down this year as travel budgets have been cut or frozen due to the poor economy.

We had additional training opportunities this year to include one member attending the National Citizen Review Panel Conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Attendance at the national conference allows us to learn of any legislative changes that impact citizen review panels and to network with members from other states to exchange ideas. We are active participants in the national listserv for CRPs. We have responded to data requests

as well as submitting several questions to solicit information from the national community of CRPs.

In addition to collecting data, we also provided data this year. We attended a teleconference to provide input on the Child and Family Services Review conducted by the federal Children's Bureau. One of our members, Art Hansen, also participated in an in-person meeting and several teleconferences related to this process. We look forward to monitoring OCS' progress towards the goals laid out in the Performance Improvement Plan. We also provided feedback to OCS for the mandatory five-year plan they submitted to the federal government.

Director Tammy Sandoval has been our OCS liaison for the entire year. We have been pleased with the direct communication and access this affords us. The relationship and outcomes have improved between OCS and the CRP. In addition to her involvement in our quarterly meetings, Director Sandoval also provided us with a half-day tutorial on the Safety Assessment which is a new practice being implemented throughout the state.

As part of our public outreach we presented testimony to the Alaska House Health and Social Services Committee about our activities and recommendations. While in Juneau we also met with members of the Governor's staff, the Commissioner of Health and Social Services and numerous individual legislators. We also continue to maintain our website for public outreach at www.crpalaska.org.

At our May meeting, we held officer elections and Susan Heuer was elected as our new chair. Carol Olson was re-elected as vice chair.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. That resources for state departments be standardized

Currently there are many resources that are available in numerous state departments that are not standardized. We acknowledge and agree that not all departments have the same needs nor do they require being treated the same in all circumstances. However, if Alaska values the safety of its children it will not prolong the time it allows the Office of Children's Services to continually be under-resourced.

In nearly every rural community we visited, we have heard of the problems plaguing OCS offices related to slow Internet connections. This is not a matter of convenience, as some may imagine it; the horrifically slow Internet connections endured by these offices has a tremendous impact on productivity. Workers in rural offices can spend 20 minutes doing something that takes two to three minutes in an office with a decent connection.

One result of these very slow connections is to impact the safety and outcomes for children as workers have less time to provide services to children and families. While that alone should be enough to motivate a remedy to the situation, directly jeopardizing the safety of children is not the only impact. Due to the overwhelming amount of time needed to enter data into OCS' ORCA database in offices with these tremendously slow connections, workers tend to get quite behind with their entries. This leads to a substantial lag between the data in ORCA and the reality on the ground. Since OCS is admirably trying to make decisions based on data, ORCA is frequently mined for data to inform decisions. However, those decisions are then made based on outdated data.

Another example of the impact this has on children could be witnessed during a recent termination trial. An OCS supervisor from Bethel was called as a witness and the Attorney General was asking her questions based on ORCA entries. Her testimony lasted four hours when it should have been 45 minutes. The long lapses allowed previously unprepared defense attorneys time to prepare and left the supervisor feeling frustrated and unprofessional. Even though it was not her fault, the delay left a bad impression of OCS's expertise on the court. Additionally, it wasted three hours of the supervisor's time.

The most frustrating part of this scenario is that in nearly all the communities we have visited where we heard of these exceedingly slow Internet connections, we have found other offices of state government to be connected at the highest speeds. OCS should not always be provided with the slowest connection. We understand that this problem requires remedy by those outside of OCS in other state agencies. We have faith that these agencies too will value Alaska's children's safety and work with OCS to find a solution to this issue. OCS workers have jobs with plenty of inherent challenges; they

don't need to endure this maddening one while knowing that the school, the Trooper's office, and the public health nurses all have faster connections.

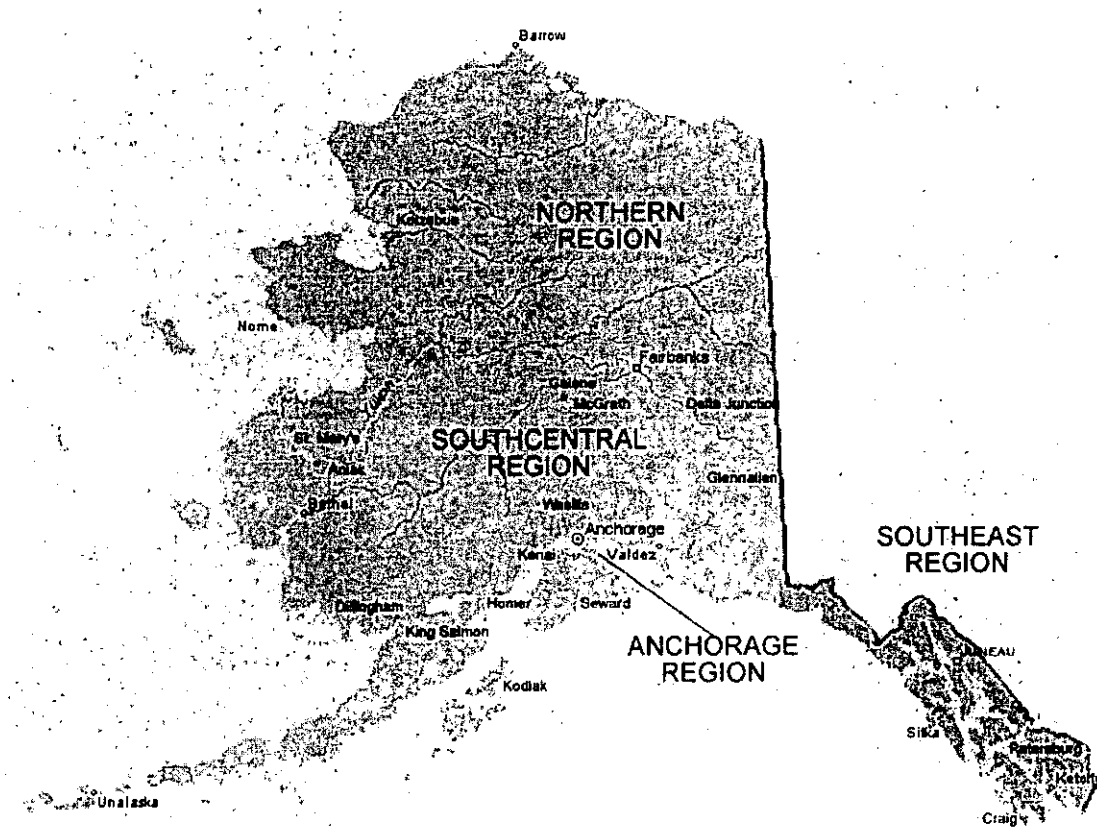
The other resource that is available to some state agencies as a recruitment tool for rural workers is housing. Schools and Troopers in some rural communities have recognized that being able to offer decent housing makes it much easier to recruit qualified workers to remote communities. OCS would like to be able to use this recruiting tool as well since attracting applicants to rural positions is difficult. We hope this issue can be explored. Since the model already exists in other departments, the issue seems one of funding rather than figuring logistics or having to pilot a project.

While our immediate desire is to see OCS receive the same quality Internet connection as other offices and the same recruiting tools, we think the state is missing an opportunity to save money by consolidating these services. In the same way that all state agencies must book travel through the state travel office, all state agencies in a community should share an Internet connection. Likewise, all agencies could share state housing in a community for recruiting purposes. We feel this has the potential to raise the caliber of everything being offered by various agencies. Better services would decrease frustration, improve employee retention, and improve the delivery of state services.

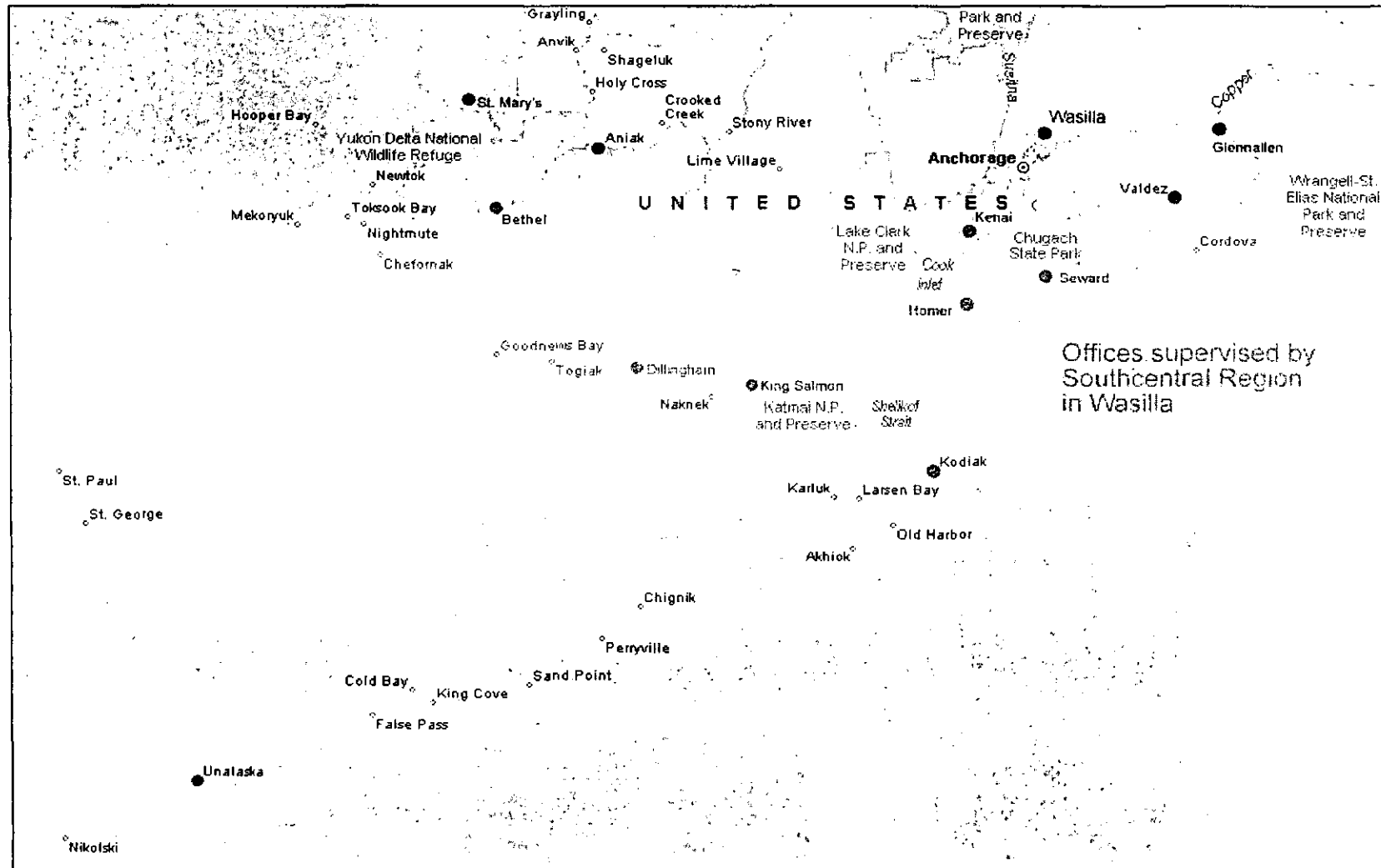
Recommendation 2. That OCS continue to work toward having a fifth service region headquartered in Bethel

Population and Land Area

Currently OCS serves the state through four regions: Southeast, Anchorage, the Northern region (which includes the area north of St. Mary's) and the Southcentral region (which is the remainder of the state). The map below shows the existing regions.



Currently there is one office in the Anchorage region, five offices in the Southeast region, seven offices in the Northern region and 13 offices in the Southcentral region. The existing Southcentral region has 12 field offices which is twice as many as the region with the next largest number of field offices—six in the Northern region—and three times as many field offices as Southeast (which has four field offices). The following map shows the dozen field offices in the Southcentral region and the regional headquarters in Wasilla.



We propose that in order to better serve the sizable and culturally distinct area of Southwest Alaska, OCS create a fifth region to be headquartered in Bethel. This region would be broken out from the existing Southcentral region (SCRO). The existing Southcentral region includes 37% of Alaska's land area and 30% of its population. SCRO as it exists is the size of California and Michigan combined.

In our annual report last year we also advocated strongly that OCS develop a fifth service region. Last year we advocated carving off six of the field offices from the existing SCRO—Aniak, Bethel, Dillingham, King Salmon, St. Mary's and Unalaska. We continue to feel passionately that creating a fifth service region will allow OCS to provide better services in both the new region and in SCRO--which would be much smaller after the creation of the new region. After making our recommendation in last year's annual report, we had the opportunity to travel to all six field offices that we proposed for inclusion in the new fifth region.

After meeting with OCS workers and community partners in all six communities, we are amending our recommendation this year. The fifth region we propose would be headquartered in Bethel and would include the Bethel, Aniak and St. Mary's field offices. While the inclusion of the six offices proposed last year makes sense geographically, the inclusion of all six communities does not make sense when travel routes are considered. As the crow flies, it is 850 miles from Wasilla to Unalaska and only 510 miles from Bethel to Unalaska. However, the only route between Unalaska and Bethel travels through Anchorage, so serving Unalaska and other communities on the Anchorage travel corridor from Bethel does not make sense. However, we continue to believe that the 56 Yup'ik villages in the Bethel area—a culturally cohesive area and an area with many challenges - deserves to be served from a region headquartered in the area.

The table below lists all the boroughs and census areas included in the existing Southcentral region. Those areas above the heavy line would remain in the Southcentral region after the proposed Southwest region is created. Those below the heavy line would be in the proposed Southwest region. The existing boundary between the Northern region and SCRO is a straight line east-west across the state, so it does not follow borough or census area boundaries. We have estimated the percentage of the census areas in the proposed Southwest region for those census areas bisected by the boundary.

Borough or Census Area	Population (2006 Census Bureau est.)	% Population Under 5 Years Old	% Population Under 18 Years Old	Land Area (sq. miles)
Aleutians East Borough	2,647	3.5	12.1	6,988
Aleutians West Census Area	5,239	3.2	12.8	4,397
Bristol Bay Borough	1,042	6.5	27.0	505
Dillingham Census Area	4,970	8.7	33.6	18,675
Lake and Peninsula Borough	1,548	8.1	31.2	23,782
Kenai Peninsula Borough	52,304	5.8	24.7	16,013
Kodiak Island Borough	13,072	7.7	30.0	6,560
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	80,480	6.4	26.2	24,682
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	9,872	6.2	24.7	34,319
Bethel Census Area	17,147	11.2	37.1	40,633
Wade Hampton Census Area	6,443*	13.7	42.4	14,614*
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	877**	6.5	27.9	21,885**
Total current SCRO	201,745	7.0	27.3	213,053
Total proposed Southwest region	24,467	11.7	38.2	77,132
Total remaining SCRO	177,278	6.2	25.6	135,921
Alaska	670,053	7.4	27.1	571,951

* Estimate 85% of Wade Hampton Census Area in proposed Southwest region, figure is 85% of total.

** Estimate 15% of Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area in proposed Southwest region, figure is 15% of total.

The proposed Southwest region would have 4% of Alaska's population, although it would contain 2% of Alaska's children under 18 years old. While the population in the proposed new region is not sizable, 38% of that population is children. The proposed Southwest region would also include 14% of Alaska's land area. This would leave the remaining SCRO with 26% of Alaska's population, 24% of Alaska's children under 18 years old and 24% of Alaska's land area.

The proposed Southwest region has a large number of communities. There are at least 56 villages in the Bethel region. All of those communities are substantially closer to Bethel than to Wasilla in many ways. The communities are geographically closer, culturally closer, and much closer in lifestyle being all off-road small, rural communities.

Great Need—Troubled Region

As reported in the Anchorage Daily News article, *Slowly, Western Alaska starts to break silence on sexual abuse, Children are often victims of relatives* by Alex DeMarban of the Tundra Drums, Bethel has more sexual assaults than Anchorage in absolute numbers (not per capita). This article was published on January 22, 2008. A portion of the article is excerpted below.

EPICENTER: BETHEL

New statistics from the Alaska State Troopers suggest that Western Alaska leads the state in cases of sexual abuse of a minor -- often when girls are raped or molested by intoxicated adult male relatives and acquaintances -- and cases of sexual assaults against women.

A soon-to-be released study of 989 such cases investigated statewide by troopers in 2003 and 2004 shows that the greatest number -- 476 cases, or 48 percent -- occurred in Western Alaska, said Katie TePas, a troopers program coordinator.

The region is immense -- containing more than one-third of the state's land mass -- and stretches from Kotzebue in the north to Kodiak in the south and out the Aleutian Chain past Unalaska. It's served by 13 trooper posts in what's known as the C Detachment.

But the population is small, represented by dozens of villages -- many with fewer than 500 people -- and a handful of hub communities, such as Kodiak, Bethel or Nome, each with fewer than 6,000 people.

In the vastly more populated regions along the road system -- including Anchorage, Fairbanks and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough -- troopers investigated fewer such cases during the two-year period. Combined, trooper posts in those areas investigated 299 of the studied cases, or 30.2 percent of the total during the two-year period.

Ground zero is the Bethel region, where troopers investigated 17 percent of the cases, more than any other post in the state, TePas said.

"We have an epidemic," she said. "It's a statewide epidemic, but the epicenter, our data shows, is the Bethel region."

CHILDREN MOST VULNERABLE

TePas presented the numbers at a summit on Alaska Native child sexual abuse in Anchorage earlier this month.

The results are highlights from an 102-page study done by the Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage, she said.

Only trooper cases that entered the justice system during the two-year period and reached a conclusion -- cases that did and did not result in a conviction -- are included in the study, TePas said.

The early figures paint a disturbing picture of rapes and other sexual violence against adults and children in Western Alaska, where the population is largely Alaska Native and villages are often loose extensions of family.

In all the 989 cases, family members and friends sexually abuse or assault each other in more than 90 percent of the incidents, she said.

They're especially hurting children. The most common charge during the two years was second-degree sexual abuse of a minor, a class B felony that generally means the rape or other molestation of someone 16 years old or younger, often by an adult.

Almost one-fourth of the child victims were from ages 13 to 15, she said. Nearly the same number were from ages 6 to 12.

Strangers were the perpetrators in less than 1 percent of the cases involving children, TePas said.

Precedent in Other Agencies

There are other state agencies that have more than four regions. The best example is that the Alaska State Troopers divide the state into five detachments (A-E) headquartered in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Ketchikan, Palmer and Soldotna. They have posts in 36 communities. The Troopers are the best agency for OCS to compare itself to because both agencies share a need to be able to respond quickly in emergency situations. Safety requires proximity. Additionally, knowing the community can provide a great benefit in allowing workers to diffuse situations and find the most appropriate outcome. Workers in both agencies need to be culturally competent and familiar with the local services. While the Troopers' detachment C does not mirror exactly the proposed Southwest region, the areas are similar. This arrangement works well for the Troopers and would work well for OCS. With the Troopers being a primary partner for OCS, it makes good sense to have this region to strengthen the partnership between these agencies.

Community Support

Prior to our testimony before the House Health, Education, and Social Services we

received letters from residents and agencies in the Bethel area in support of keeping the Supervisor 5 position in Bethel and for the creation of a new region. We received 15 letters of support which may be viewed in their entirety on our website.

Conclusion

There are many strong reasons for creating this new region.

- The area is 14% of Alaska. If it were a state, it would be the eighteenth largest state just behind South Dakota, but ahead of Washington.
- The area is entirely off the road system, complicating travel and creating different circumstances than on-road communities face.
- The area has a higher percentage of population who are children than the state overall.
- The area has a great need having the highest rates of sexual assault.
- The area is culturally distinct due to the large, strong Yup'ik population.
- The Alaska State Troopers, who also provide public safety, serve the state through five regions.
- The community supports the effort.
- The OCS offices and staff are already in place. Only four new positions need to be added.

In addition to serving this culturally distinct area that comprises 14% of Alaska much better, removing responsibility for this area would allow the currently over-stretched SCRO to provide better services to all those children and families remaining in its area. SCRO has many challenges and would greatly benefit from having less on its plate. There are so many good reasons to do this.

Given what we have learned in the time since we first made this recommendation, we intend to continue to collect data regarding this idea. We also have a better grasp of the funding process and know that such an idea cannot be implemented immediately and will require much advocacy on our part and those from the communities in question who support the idea to make it a reality. Our conviction remains strong that this is needed to make headway at resolving a majority of the child protection issues in this region.

We request that OCS provide us with an action plan that includes a time line to make this a reality. We would like that plan to clearly specify what can be accomplished every year until the fifth region is created. The CRP pledges to continue to advocate for this region while collecting data via a survey to determine the exact boundaries of the proposed region.

Recommendation 3. Supporting and developing the relationship between OCS & ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) workers

A great deal of effort has been directed toward the problem of disproportionality in Alaska's child welfare system; the problem being that approximately 65% of the children in OCS custody are Alaska Native while only 15% of the population of the state is Alaska Native. There are many causes for this problem and many well-qualified, well-funded people have been and continue to work on this issue.

We have one recommendation that we feel can only help address this issue. An improved relationship between OCS workers and ICWA workers in all communities will improve communications, trust, and outcomes for children. If workers can see each other as resources, teammates, and trust that the other also has the best interest of the child as their motivation the system can only be improved.

We know that many efforts have been made at the highest levels to improve communication, collaboration and trust between OCS and the tribal agencies. However, we are really advocating for relationship building at the ground level. We recommend that OCS find models where these relationships exist, where there are new and different programs and try to replicate those successes. Some innovative programs include the Knowing Who You Are program supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the program being implemented in Quinhok, and the Lakota program - Family Group Decision Making.

One way for OCS to demonstrate its trust in ICWA workers, and free its workers to make home visits and do other necessary tasks, is to allow ICWA workers to license foster homes. In many communities it takes nearly a year to become a licensed foster home, in part because of the infrequency of visits to many communities by OCS licensing workers. Allowing ICWA workers to make those visits would speed the process of becoming licensed. This will encourage more people to open their homes if the licensing process is not so drawn out and onerous.

We encourage OCS to implement any recommendations made by the Casey Foundation related to this issue.

Recommendation 4. OCS explore any and all means to relieve social workers of some of their paperwork burden

In too many of the communities we visit we hear social workers complaining that their title is a misnomer since they do not have time to practice social work due to paperwork burdens. Social workers are skilled practitioners and should be spending as much of their time as possible using those skills to provide services to children and families. Any ideas should be explored and encouraged to make this a reality, including a dictation service (being used by at least one office). Having more social services aids (SSA) on staff would enable these lower paid workers to handle some of the paperwork burden, freeing more highly paid social workers to use their valuable skills to help support Alaska's struggling families.

We urge OCS to develop and implement a staffing ratio for social workers-to-SSAs and to work to secure funding to enable this ratio to be implemented. Adequate ratio of SSAs to SW enables OCS to work smarter—using limited resources in a more efficient manner. Another way to improve social workers' productivity is to purchase more laptops for workers to use when traveling. Especially in rural Alaska where weather delays can last days, having a secure laptop is the difference between wasted time and productive time while waiting out a storm.

Enabling social workers to practice social works helps improve worker retention. This is the number one request we have heard from social workers when we are in the field. They need help with filing, making basic calls, and transporting children; all tasks that do not require a social work background to do a good job.

Commendations

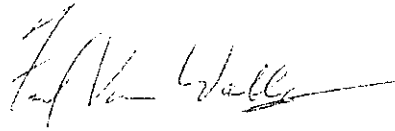
We would like to thank Governor Palin for granting a waiver to OCS during the hiring freeze.

We commend OCS for thinking outside the box to implement the Knowing Who You Are training sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to forge personal and working relationships between regional OCS and ICWA workers. Both groups report a high degree of satisfaction with the new collaborations that have resulted.

We commend OCS Director Tammy Sandoval for supporting the new child advocacy center in the Copper River Basin by finding a way to collocate the Glennallen OCS Field Office with the CAC.

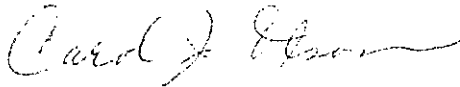
We commend OCS Director Tammy Sandoval for working to improve collaboration with several other state agencies, such as the Division of Juvenile Justice and the Division of Behavioral Health. This is an excellent idea and we hope she will continue in this vein, reaching out to as many other state agencies as possible. In this climate of reduced state funding, collaboration is one way to try and stretch state dollars to serve as many children and families as possible. Certainly, many state agencies can and frequently do have the same clients.

Respectfully submitted by the Citizen Review Panel:



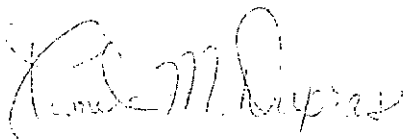
Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

Fred Van Wallinga, Chair



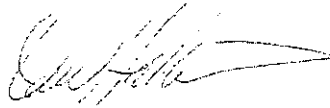
Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

Carol J. Olson, Vice Chair



Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

Pamela M. Dupras, Member



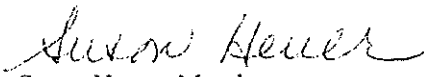
Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

Dana W. Hallett, Member



Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

Arthur S. Hansen, Member



Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

Susan Heuer, Member



Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

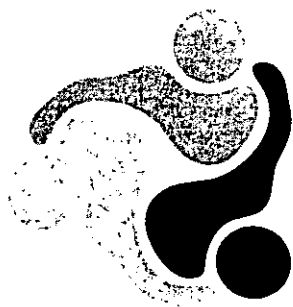
Kristin Hull, Member



Electronically signed
June 30, 2009

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*



alaska office of
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
safe children | strong families



Practice Model

State of Alaska • Department of Health & Social Services
Office of Children's Services

Practice Model

Sean Parnell, Governor, State of Alaska
Bill Hogan, Commissioner, Department of Health & Social Services
Tammy Sandoval, Director, Office of Children's Services

State of Alaska • Department of Health & Social Services • Office of Children's Services
P.O. Box 110630 • Juneau, Alaska 99811-0630 • Telephone: (907) 465-3191 • FAX: (907) 465-3397
<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/>

Recommendation 2 - That OCS continue to work toward having a fifth service region headquartered in Bethel.

While the OCS believes there is merit to the CRP recommendation to establish a fifth, 'Southwest' service region for the Bethel area, again this year the Governor's Proposed FY2011 Budget does not include such a request for OCS. The CRP reports that the current South-central region's 12 field offices, Bethel included, are twice as many as the region with the next largest number of field offices (Northern region). The current South-central region includes 37% of Alaska's land area and 30% of Alaska's population. This newly proposed region includes an area of the state with the highest rates of sexual assault. It is culturally distinct due to its large Yup'ik population. Communities in this area are geographically and culturally closer to Bethel than Wasilla, the current region's headquarters. These communities represent off-road, small and rural communities and villages.

OCS believes having a fifth service region headquartered in Bethel could result in an increase in local knowledge of families; familiarity with the available service array; an increase in cultural competency of OCS staff; better support, retention, supervision and management of OCS staff; a savings in OCS travel expenses; and improved outcomes for children and families in the region.

While the CRP has created considerable public support for this area of the state standing as its own region, it is important to note that this recommendation is contingent upon other State of Alaska priorities.

Recommendation 3 - Supporting and developing the relationship between OCS & ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) workers.

The OCS agrees wholeheartedly with this recommendation. It is precisely our intent to continue to collaborate with tribal agencies to best serve Native Alaskan children and families. For several years OCS and tribes (Tribal State Collaboration Group) have come together three times a year to meet, discuss and plan our collaborative work to improve outcomes for Native Alaskan children in the state's custody. TSCG addresses all policies related to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and state compliance with ICWA.

In the past several years, both OCS and tribes have agreed on the value of cross training and have begun to invite one another to training as a means of increasing collaboration, shared education experiences and improved cultural competency of state staff. One example of such training is "Knowing Who You Are" (KWYA) training. Please see <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Initiatives/KnowingWhoYouAre/> for more information about the specific 3 phase training that has been mandated for all OCS staff involved in child and family decision making.

Most evident of the commitment by OCS to collaborate with tribes is the work of the Federal Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center (IC). In April of 2009, Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, together with 15 other Alaska Tribal Organizations, applied for and received an award of assistance to further TSCG's efforts related to disproportionality within the state child welfare system. The IC will assist tribes, OCS and the Court System to develop a targeted strategy and action plan for addressing long term systematic change with a keen focus on several crucial issues impacting Native families who come to the attention of OCS.

Additionally, last year, state and tribal work expanded to include working together on child maltreatment prevention, in that an Alaskan Team was selected to attend a National PREVENT conference to develop culturally competent strategies related to reducing the rates of child maltreatment in the Native communities in Alaska.

The OCS continues to develop and support ways to empower tribes to intervene with families before an OCS intervention is warranted and to be involved in an Alaskan Native family's OCS intervention from the very beginning. Given the past history of state involvement with tribes, this work will be ongoing and critically reviewed to assure improvement in communication, trust and outcomes for families.

Recommendation 4 - OCS should explore any and all means to relieve social workers of some of their paperwork burden.

Like most of the challenges facing Alaska's Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworkers, the paperwork aspect of the job is an area of concern for CPS workers in many other states. CPS management across the nation strives to balance the necessity of meaningful family contact with the requirements of documentation and reporting a type of public service that is subject to legal review and strict federal funding rules. The OCS completely agrees with the recommendation that caseworkers should be spending as much of their time as possible with the children and families they serve. We will continue to explore and implement ideas that can decrease time spent on administrative duties and increase the time our staff spends doing work in the field with families.

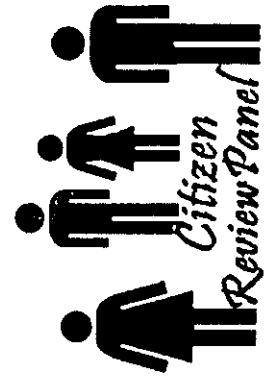
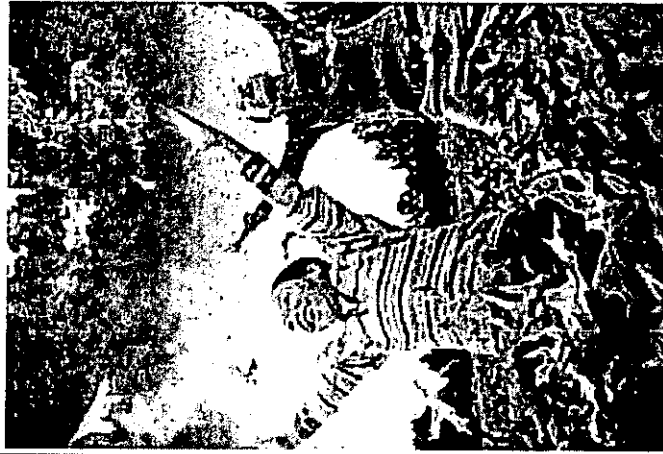
Transcription services or 'dictation services', as referenced in CRP report, was being utilized throughout the OCS Anchorage, Fairbanks, Ketchikan, Kenai, Wasilla, Homer and Unalaska offices during 2009. On average, approximately 32 caseworkers used the service each month. The availability of transcription services is explained to all new caseworkers when they attend the new employee orientation training provided by the UAA Family & Youth Services Training Academy. To increase transcription services usage in 2010, OCS management intends to focus on a promotional effort by identifying super-users of the service and asking them to deliver presentation and training opportunities to their peer groups. (As a side note to the dictation services issue, the Juneau OCS has also been using the transcription product Dragon Speak and the Fairbanks OCS recently started piloting this tool as well.)

In another effort to help caseworkers better manage the administrative requirements of their job, as noted above, the OCS distributed Netbooks to our Bethel, St. Mary's and King Salmon offices in October of 2009. These mini laptops will allow staff to access their State of Alaska e-mail accounts and word-processing applications while in travel status or otherwise away from their office computers. This tool is expected to help caseworkers maximize the hours in a work day, decreasing the amount of work waiting for them when they return to their desks and thereby increasing the amount of time available to them to make family contacts. The original distribution of Netbooks is being considered a pilot project. If implementation is deemed successful, the OCS intends to purchase more Netbooks and deploy this tool to all rural offices across the state.

The OCS agrees that having more Social Services Associates (SSA) would greatly assist the front line worker in completing their plethora of tasks; however, new appropriations are determined through the Governor's priorities and the will of the legislature. In lieu of no new proposed positions in the upcoming fiscal year, OCS will continue to review its staffing and workload levels around the state and propose current position relocations or reassignment of tasks between job positions if deemed necessary to manage workload.

In summary, OCS continues its efforts to change the culture and improve the practice of CPS work in Alaska. Systems reform will continue during 2010 and each year thereafter. Recruitment of quality staff, their development, and the support they're provided remains a top priority. We recognize that the safety of many children and the strength of many families are reliant upon our ability to retain the most competent of staff and provide the most effective of services Alaska has to offer.

Alaska's Citizen Review Panel



Our focus areas today will be:

- To provide a brief overview of the Citizen Review Panel & to highlight our activities since last year
- To share with you what we hear about the Office of Children's Services
- To ask you to help improve the situation



Mandate for the Group

The Citizen Review Panel is mandated by state and federal law. The CRP was created through the federal Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act (CAPTA); Keeping Children & Families Safe Act of 2003 and through Alaska statute Sec. 47.14.205.



CRP Vision

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



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. The group chooses its own members.



Current members

- Fred VanWallinga,
Willow (Chair)
- Carol Olson,
Anchorage (Vice-
Chair)
- Pamela Dupras,
Kodiak
- Dana Hallett,
Soldotna
- Art Hansen,
Fairbanks
- Susan Heuer,
Anchorage
- Kristin Hull, Wasilla
- Ralph Taylor,
Anchorage (currently
deployed with the
Alaska National
Guard)



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.



CRP Duties (continued)

The CRP must also:

- Maintain confidentiality
- Conduct public outreach
- Produce an annual report
- Meet at least quarterly



Our focus for the past year

- Potential for additional 5th service region
- Improving situation in Copper River Basin



What we've been doing

- Holding monthly teleconferences
- Produced an annual report
- Attended the Alaska Native Indian Child Welfare Summit
- Attended national Citizen Review Panel conference in Minnesota
- Meeting in-person quarterly



What else we've been doing

- Meeting with OCS partner agencies
- Meeting with OCS staff from Director Sandoval to line workers
- Participated in the federal Child and Family Services Review
- Met with UA staff responsible for OCS training
- Meeting with the Commissioner and Legislators



A couple more things we did

- Attended the Family to Family Conference
- Attended the Community Care Conference
- Heard from concerned citizens
- Received training on safety assessment



Where some of us have been

- Aniak
- Bethel
- Copper Center
- Dillingham
- Fairbanks
- Glennallen
- Juneau
- King Salmon
- Naknek
- St. Mary's
- Unalaska



We've met with...

- 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



OCS is improving due to...

- Key personnel changes
- System changes—safety assessment, expanded training, ORCA programming improvements
- Increased collaboration with partnering state agencies (DJJ, Dept. of Law, etc.)



OCS is improving due to...

- Continued and increased financial support from Legislature during past couple fiscal years
- Responsive to outside recommendations (ACTION for Children, CRP, federal audit)



Issues of concern

- Hiring freeze
- Region 5
- Many solutions to problems are beyond the control of OCS, Director lacks discretion
- Standardization



Issues of concern

- Hiring freeze

OCS is public safety like the Troopers in as much as they have a protective function

In rural areas, workers are already stretched, further unfillable vacancies with no end in sight will directly affect child safety

Increased risk of current workers leaving due to work overload



Issues of concern

- Region 5
 - Last year we strongly advocated for Region 5 based on Bethel community support
 - SCRO has 13 offices, next largest region has 7
 - OCS costed-out Region 5 for \$1.5 million, but the region was not in the Governor's budget



Issues of concern

- Region 5
 - Bethel OCS and community partners continue to support this idea, but other communities have concerns
 - Over the next year, the CRP will intensively survey all Southwestern Alaska field offices and community partners
 - We continue to think that a smaller more culturally focused region is in the best interest of children



Issues of concern

- Many solutions to problems are beyond the control of OCS, Director lacks discretionary powers



Issues of concern

- Standardization of supports for employees varies between state agencies
 - Housing
 - Internet



We'd like your help to address these concerns

- Support the exemption of OCS from hiring freeze and issuance of immediate variances
- Investigate and resolve the lack of standardization between state agencies



Benefits of CRP

- Seven volunteer members all contributing a minimum of 250 active hours annually
- We're the eyes and ears of the public for the Legislature and OCS
- Unique function of identifying and advocating for ancillary services that OCS cannot request
- Jointly we can achieve a vastly improved child protection system for the children of Alaska



Alaska's Citizen Review Panel

For more
information,
please visit our
website

www.crpalaska.org

