

# Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Oversight Board

## Board Meeting Record

Thursday, July 15, 2021 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., virtual meeting

**Member Attendance:** Katie Biron, Annie Blackledge, Justice Bobbe Bridge, Sen. Jeannie Darneille, Ben de Haan, Co-Chair Rep. Tom Dent, Loni Greninger, Diane Liebe, Charles Loeffler, Lois Martin, Co-Chair Shrounda Selivanoff, Rep. Tana Senn, Sen. Judy Warnick

**Staff in Attendance:** Crista Johnson (*Executive Director*), Nickolaus Colgan (*Administrative Coordinator*)

**Public in Attendance:** Patrick Dowd, *Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds*; Victoria Vang, *community member*, Erica Hallock, *Family Impact Network*, Laurie Lippold, *Partners for Our Children*, Megan Carter, *community member*, Taylor Mirfendereski, *King 5 Investigative Reporter*, Deanna Ginter, *community member*, Representative Michelle Caldier, *State Representative*, Ross Hunter, *DCYF*, Stacia Hollar, *Attorney Generals Office*

*Only public attendees who chose to identify themselves in the chat box during the meeting, or who made public comment, are recorded in the official meeting minutes.*

### Welcome, Roll Call & Opening Remarks

The meeting was called into order at 10:00 a.m. Co-Chair Representative Dent started the meeting and provided opening remarks along with Co-Chair Shrounda Selivanoff. Roll call of DCYF Oversight Board members was taken. The April 15, 2021 meeting minutes were approved.

### DCYF Leadership Engagement on Current Issues | Ross Hunter, Secretary, DCYF

Secretary Ross Hunter answered questions asked by Representative Dent and Oversight Board members regarding the placement and treatment of high needs youth in out-of-home care, as well as questions regarding the medical consultation processes that result in the removal of a child from their family.

To hear the full question and answer session, please find the recorded conversation [here](#) starting at time stamp 9:12.

### Office of Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) Investigation Briefing | Patrick Dowd, Director, Office of Family and Children's Ombuds

Placement exceptions have steadily increased from 120 in 2015, to 1,863 in 2020, with a small group of children and youth accounting for the majority of hotel stays. OFCO is currently doing an independent investigation on the agency's handling placement exceptions recently covered in media investigative reports. OFCO's process includes interviewing DCYF staff, youth, and families impacted by this issue. The final report about the investigation will be published in December 2021. OFCO will update the DCYF Oversight Board on the progress of this investigation a future Board meeting.

### DCYF Oversight Board Discussion on Potential Actions and Next Steps

Based on the conversation with Secretary Hunter during the first agenda item of the meeting, the Board requested DCYF provide written responses to questions asked. The Board also decided to continue the conversation on both medical consultations and placement exceptions at a Board meeting scheduled to occur on September 2, 2021.

**Public Comment:** Due to the extended time provided for public comment at this meeting, the following are summaries of participant contributions. To observe full public comment remarks [please view the meeting recording](#) at starting at time stamp 2:17:50.

Victoria Vang, community member: Victoria stated she was attending the meeting to advocate for parents who face false allegations of child abuse, a problem extending beyond just Washington State. She expressed concern that the rights of innocent parents are not protected and that professionals who allege abuse will not retract their statements even with evidence points to the contrary. She encouraged further attention on the topic in order to minimize harm and better protect families.

Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children: Laurie acknowledged that increasing placement exceptions is not a new issue and that she hopes this time there are short term fixes to deal with immediate problems. Laurie encouraged the consideration of the opportunity presented by the upcoming legislative session to act also on more long-term fixes. She stated it is important to be actively working with the parents and community on finding solutions for these long-standing issues.

Erica Hallock, Family Impact Network: Erica spoke about the need to address mileage reimbursements for family time providers across the state. She continued, like many human and health services, the current system is under resourced and that prevents families from being able to access regular visits with their children. Reimbursements were limited back in 2008 during the recession and it has not been changed since then. Erica stated it is passed time to address this important issue that works towards the reunification of families.

Megan Carter, community member: Megan stated her children were removed from her care for 414 days due to false allegations of abuse made as a result of a medical consultation. She continued that while the doctor responsible is no longer employed at the hospital, no other actions have been made to hold the doctor accountable for her actions. Megan expressed discontent with DCYF's response to questions posed during this meeting and stated the reasoning provided was too simplified for such a complicated topic. Megan ended her public comment by stating the lack of accountability for parties involved in the issues she presented means the problems will continue to persist.

Taylor Mirfendereski, King 5 Investigative Reporter: Taylor provided additional information on the details and processes involved in King 5's investigative reporting regarding Dr. Woods and child abuse and neglect medical consultation practices. Taylor expressed shared concern with Megan Carter regarding the lack of oversight over the medical professionals involved in child abuse and neglect medical consultations, and how these medical opinions are weighed differently in the process. Taylor ended with expressing interest in what the Oversight Board will do in regards to the information they learn throughout this meeting and moving forward.

Deanna Ginter, community member: Deanna stated she is a former DCYF afterhours social worker who worked in Regions 3 and 4. She stated she did not agree with some of the information provided earlier in the meeting by DCYF, as it differed from her own experience as a former employee of the agency. Deanna stated she was unaware that DCYF staff had access to OFCO as a resource for filing complaints. She expressed a fear of retaliation as an employee in a non-permanent position if she were to bring any issues forward to DCYF regarding agency decisions or actions she, or other employees, felt were problematic. Deanna encouraged the Oversight Board to look into culture in DCYF and talk to direct service staff.

Representative Michelle Caldier, 26<sup>th</sup> District, State Legislature: Representative Caldier stated she is a foster parent who provides placement for the harder to place youth. She expressed concerns that DCYF suggested the potential option of placing some of the hard-to-place youth in inpatient psychiatric care. She stated her goal was to remove youth from hospital settings and have them be in less restrictive environments. She

acknowledged observing a good support system for the after-hours social workers in Region 5. She ended acknowledging that the harder-to-place youth need extra supports that not all foster parents are able to provide which may trigger the youth and cause them to cycle in and out of placements.

### **Closing Remarks and Adjourn**

The next meeting is scheduled for September 2, 2021 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm on Zoom.

**Adjourned at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, July 15, 2021**