

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

Board Meeting Record

Friday, January 17, 2025, 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., virtual meeting & Helen Sommers Building

Member Attendance: Katie Biron, Justice Bobbe Bridge, Sen. Leonard Christian, Rep. Tom Dent, Dr. Ben de Haan, Dr. Marian Harris, Pamela Javier, Danielle Johnson, Ruth Kagi, Dr. Diane Liebe (Co-chair), Lois Martin, April Messenger, Sen. Claire Wilson (Co-chair)

Staff in Attendance: Lyscha Marcynyszyn, PhD, *Executive Director* & Nickolaus Colgan, *Administrative Coordinator*

Public in Attendance: Kathy Elkins, *community member*, Douglas Thigpen, *community member*

Only public attendees who chose to identify themselves 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 8:30 a.m. Co-chair Senator Claire Wilson started the meeting welcoming new board members April Messenger, as a representative of an organization that advocates for the best interest of the child, and Senator Lenoard Christian as the Republican appointee from the Senate. Barbara Serrano, Senator Judy Warnick, and former Representative Tana Senn were thanked for their time serving on the DCYF Oversight Board. Lyscha Marcynyszyn did roll call of DCYF Oversight Board members, quorum was met. Lyscha proposed approval of the November 14, 2024, meeting minutes and asked for any edits to the draft minutes. With no edits provided, Lyscha requested a motion be made for approval, Bobbe Bridge made a motion to approve the minutes and Senator Christian seconded. Lyscha requested all in favor to approve, all members in attendance voted yea.

Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO) 2024 Annual Report Overview | Patrick Dowd, OFCO Director

Patrick Dowd reviewed the [2024 Annual OFCO Report](#), focusing on the sections about Complaint Issues and Adverse Findings, Placements Exceptions, Juvenile Rehabilitation, and Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities.

Questions/Takeaways:

- 713 complaints received by OFCO in 2023 (September) - 2024 (August)
- Were there any complaints filed regarding implicit bias of racism from social workers? If there are, how were they handled and if there were not, how would they be handled?
 - There are some complaints alleging bias, discrimination and retaliation. OFCO has a structure for assessing those complaints starting with, did the act occur and then what was the motivation? An example could be a delay in reunification being stated as discrimination from the bio parent, OFCO will look at both sides for a determination, maybe the bio parent had a relapse recently, or it could be discrimination. It is a rare occurrence that it can be substantiated that discrimination, or if retaliation did occur, OFCO can flag it as something to note in the case if it is inconclusive.
- It would be helpful to see the percentage of cases that are related to implicit bias and/or racism and which cases have been elevated.
- How has the new Office of Equity had an impact on OFCO's work?

- The Office of Equity has done a great job with high level work and identifying systemic issues, but we do not do as good of a job on the granular level. Those are the levels where OFCO complaints are highest.
 - Patrick mentioned wanting to work of the Office of Equity more in the future on the current structure OFCO follows when dealing with complaints surrounding implicit bias and/ or racism. How can they do it better?
- In adverse findings, it shows that child safety has not risen in numbers of complaints, but in the report, the data show that it has almost doubled from 2022. We are unable to rule out child safety as a concern if the higher complaints are found to be adverse.
 - It is not directly child safety, but an umbrella term and many items fall under it.
- What do these DCYF leased facilities look like, are youth needs being met, and who is running it? They have improved greatly with stability and the same staff people working with the youth.

DCYF 2024 Selected Outcome Review & DCYF 2025 Focused Priorities Overview [Draft] | Jenny Heddin, Deputy Secretary – Chief of Staff

Jenny Heddin outlined outcomes focusing on equity, intention, and capacity with equity being a throughline in all the outcomes.

Questions/Takeaways:

- Request was made for an update on Supporting Americas Children and Families Act and how it impacts Washington State
- Has there been any engagement around a time frame for cell phones to be confiscated, i.e. 8 pm – 7 am, versus the phone being removed?
 - Yes, it should be an individualized approach.
- Is there anything in the DCYF priorities regarding improving staffing?
 - Reducing turnover and retaining employees are a priority.
- When it is stated that child welfare is fully funded, what is the measure for that given that many offices around the state are only running at 50%?
 - At the statewide level DCYF is slightly overspent, individual offices will differ.

DCYF Session Preview and Impact of Budget Freeze | Allison Krutsinger, Director of Public Affairs

Allison Krutsinger provided an update on the many changes facing DCYF from leadership transitions within the agency and the Office of the Governor as well as the current state spending freeze.

Questions/Takeaways:

- There are three freezes impacting the agency (travel, hiring, and goods & services) along with having to submit a proposal for cutting a portion of DCYF's budget.
- How will the travel freeze impact the many advisory councils DCYF has?
 - All advisory councils were directed to be virtual for 2025.
- How are the youth who participate in co-designs and other lived experts affected by travel freezes?
 - There might be some exemptions for certain programs, but there will be an impact to groups who travel. Can follow up.

Public Comment | Co-Chair Diane Liebe

Kathy Elkins, community member, spoke about how a misdiagnosis of a skull fracture led to harm to her family by DCYF. Kathy said the reports provided to CPS were filled with errors and falsified. She shared that her family was ignored when they were trying to tell the truth and that DCYF withheld information. She believes DCYF

took part in the quiet removal of the doctor who misdiagnosed her granddaughter with the skull fracture and noted that OFCO ruled there was no issue in the case. She concluded by saying that better policies and procedures need to be implemented that will better serve families and save taxpayers money.

Casey Thigpen, community member, spoke about how his granddaughter was misdiagnosed with a skull fracture and that DCYF investigated this even though law enforcement ruled there was no abuse. He continued that DCYF sought custody of his granddaughter, so his family got legal counsel. He stated DCYF presumes families guilty instead of innocent and that the social worker and their supervisor both lied on their forms about this case. He concluded by stating DCYF needs to be held accountable, so other families are not harmed and that someone needs to do an investigation into DCYF.

2025 Vision and Q&A | Secretary Tana Senn

Secretary Tana Senn spoke to the board about her plan and vision for new role at DCYF.

- Areas of focus for first year in DCYF:
 - Communication:
 - Example, only 16% of eligible families are accessing Working Connections Childcare, DCYF needs to do a better job communicating these opportunities and similar opportunities to families eligible for services.
 - Internal communications need to improve as well, from sharing goals, new laws and trainings, especially through this leadership change.
 - Support:
 - Social workers need support and to feel supported, same with childcare workers and employees in Juvenile Rehabilitation facilities. All those staff doing such critical and taxing work. If affected employees and their families are not feeling supported, that is a miss for DCYF.
 - Service:
 - Having a service mindset, the agency is focused on public service and now we need to bring in that customer service aspect as well.
 - Caregivers and providers have expressed challenges in gaining licenses and families in need of services have found the application process confusing, DCYF needs to make these more accessible.

Questions/Takeaways:

- Do you have any thoughts about the relationship between the DCYF Oversight Board and DCYF?
 - DCYF would love to work closer with the board on the data analyzed and used to make sure we are aligned and in agreement. This can help to make sure the board also has access to all the data they need. We are excited about some of the focus the board is moving toward.
- A concept talked about in the Blue Ribbon Commission and in legislation is how many services DCYF must rely on are provided by other departments, how are you thinking about working with all these other areas?
 - These are areas agencies should be working on without legislation, the betterment of kids. It will be a strong focus area.
- What are your thoughts around incorporating lived experience youth and having their experiences add to DCYF and having an impact on legislation made about them?
 - It is so incredibly valuable listening to lived experience. Working with young people is fundamental to our work.
- What is your approach going to be for dealing with the JR crisis?

- This is at the top of the agenda and requires action. Ensuring JR is rehabilitative through trauma informed care is essential. We also must make sure, first and foremost, that it is safe for both the residents and staff. These are challenging to deliver, but start by reducing capacity, additional beds are in the works and hopefully can be active by March. It is a continuum, and we need to focus on prevention services. I have a good relationship with county courts and DCYF needs to continue to have a good relationship with all partners. It would be helpful to get a better sense of who is coming to the facilities and what needs must be met to get the best outcomes. Working to understand some of the county “hot spots” where there is a lot of JR issues, what is going on, and what resources are needed.
- Being a co-sponsor for Fair Start for Kids, how do you see DCYF approaching workforce stability and increasing access for families across the state?
 - In the last few years 12,000 families have accessed childcare services and used the state subsidies. Disappointed that we will not be able to stay with the original timelines for Working Connections childcare, we know there are so many families still eligible who are not accessing it. We need to work on getting it out there to people and figure out why families are not getting their subsidies. We are not cutting services; we are just slowing growth.
- What is the Governor’s strategy around expanding access to small business employees and how that intersects with Fair Start implementation and the budget crisis?
 - Governor Ferguson would like to expand childcare access to those working at small businesses. Very important to him to support those small business families and single parent households.
- How is DCYF going to address communities in rural areas and their needs as well as undocumented residents with small children?
 - The Facilities Fund is there to help, but they need to be staffed. I visited Canada and they have people who actively go out into rural communities and identify gaps and the needs of those areas, such as childcare, to help better provide services, I would love to explore those ideas. Identify communities who could benefit from ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program), rather than waiting for them to utilize it. Focusing on border counties, i.e. Spokane, who borders Idaho, may have people who live in Idaho working in a Washington childcare facility. Making sure they still have access to childcare benefits even if they live in a different state. As for undocumented citizens, important to look at Project 2025 and its potential impacts for immigration concerns. Protecting our residents and setting up young people for success and making sure families are not shying away from services because of fear.
- When you look at the past administration, what goals do you have, specifically your heart goals? Also, your goals for the first 90 days?
 - There was so much talk about culture change, DCYF had just become a complete agency and then the pandemic hit, and then recovery mode. I look forward to focusing back on culture change, where people feel supported and part of a team. Focusing on culturally relevant services. There has been so much change in the system, I would like to make some stability. Legislation doesn’t just make things “so” we need to take time to tell people why change is happening, making sure people are supported, and trained in new laws. For the first 90 days, I have asked all the folks in leadership positions to share with me how they would like me to see their work. This job is about being on the ground, visiting locations. Understanding the community.

2025 DCYF Oversight Board Priorities Summarized | Lyscha Marcynyszyn, Executive Director

Lyscha shared a PowerPoint presentation about the 2025 DCYF Oversight Board priorities collected from the October 2024 Board Retreat, the Needs and Aims identified in the 2024 Annual Report, and a survey that board members completed during December 2024.

2025 Priorities:

- Build stronger relationships with (a) DCYF, its new leadership, and (b) the Governor's Office
- Continue to monitor and address disparities across DCYF programs that limit opportunities and success for children and youth.
- Track the trends for outcomes identified in the 2024 Annual Report as "needing improvement" to determine whether these areas are making progress or remain a concern.
- Prioritize monitoring adolescent outcomes given DCYF's continued implementation of JR to 25 and reentry supports.
- Review the implementation and early impacts of recent reforms to JR facilities.
- CW Workforce Well-being Pilot Report (using existing data)
- DEI Training and Review of the Board's Shared Values
- Launch Ad-hoc Subcommittees

Questions/Takeaways:

- This is excellent, this captures very well all the items information was taken from and you have done well collecting all our ideas.
- A takeaway from the retreat was that we need to focus, and I think this capture it all very well.
- The priorities make perfect sense to me, but I am wondering how they will be implemented.

Ad-hoc Subcommittees and Next Meeting | Lyscha Marcynyszyn, Executive Director

Lyscha noted that there was a desire on the board to have some subcommittees so certain members can focus more in-depth on specific areas. There were two subcommittees proposed.

Annual Report Subcommittee, focused on revisiting the selected outcomes and report structure. Volunteers include Dr. Ben de Haan, Dr. Marian Harris, and Pamela Javier.

Juvenile Rehabilitation Outcomes Subcommittee, focused on following up and monitoring outcomes. Volunteers include Justice Bobbe Bridge.

Ruth Kagi noted that she is interested in being on a subcommittee focused on child welfare worker well-being outcomes. Lyscha agreed that this is a priority but noted the decision to start with two subcommittees. Lyscha also mentioned the opportunity to use findings, for DCYF staff, from the [2023 Washington State Staff Engagement Survey](#) to begin to "get" at this question. The release of the 2024 survey data was discussed.

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

Co-Chair Claire Wilson thanked all attendees for their time today. The next board meeting will be February 21 from 5:30 – 8:00 pm.

Adjourned at 12:30 p.m. on Friday, January 17, 2025.