

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

Board Meeting Record

Friday, February 21, 2025, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m., virtual meeting & Helen Sommers Building

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

Staff in Attendance: Nickolaus Colgan, *Administrative Coordinator*

Public in Attendance: Kathy Elkins, *community member*, Victoria Rivera, *community member*, Katie Cruikshank, *community member*, Tristan Fujita, *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 5:30 p.m. Co-chair Senator Claire Wilson started the meeting welcoming new board members Mary Sprute Garland as the non-voting Office of the Governor representative, Representative Steve Bergquist as the Democratic appointee from the House of Representatives, and Anna Armstrong the Eastern Washington Tribal representative. Nickolaus Colgan did roll call of DCYF Oversight Board members, quorum was met. Nickolaus proposed approval of the January 17, 2025, meeting minutes and asked for any edits to the draft minutes. With no edits provided, Nickolaus requested a motion be made for approval, Bobbe Bridge made a motion to approve the minutes and Katie Biron seconded. Nickolaus requested all in favor to approve, board members voted 12 yeas and one abstained.

Federal Grant Pause | Jenny Heddin, Deputy Secretary – Chief of Staff, DCYF

On January 28, the Federal Government announced they would not give states access to federal funds, pending reviews on the types of programs they were being used for and if they were aligned with the current administration's priorities. Jenny Heddin gave an update on where the Department of Children, Youth, and Families is currently at with the federal grant pause and how it is impacting the agency. Jenny provided two links with information about this topic and emphasized the situation's fluidity as it can change daily. Links: (a) [Washington joins multistate suit over federal financial assistance freeze](#) and (b) [Judge grants injunction in WA suit against unconstitutional birthright citizenship order](#).

- The Attorney General's Office along with many other agencies, including DCYF, filed a lawsuit against these actions, since then the federal government has allowed fund retrieval. Jenny noted that this does not mean that the directive from the federal government has changed, it is just in a waiting period.
- Many programs have been directed to remove references to health and human services and include disclaimers stating that the activities in these programs do not reflect the federal government's position.
- Datasets that have been traditionally available for DCYF use have been removed, forcing the agency to consider alternate ways of obtaining these data and necessary information.
- DCYF is also a declarant in the lawsuit related to the Birth Right Citizenship Executive Order along with many other states.

Questions/Takeaways:

- What is going to happen to the funding when there are 17 states violating the Hyde Amendment and then their funding is blocked, any current plan on that?
 - DCYF is keeping in constant contact with the DCYF Attorney Generals to see what is being passed and what is going to impact us.
- Does the injunction cover the entitlements as well as the discretionary money? Did the federal government intend to stop the funding Title IV-E, or was that caught in the crossfire?
 - Yes, DCYF was given full access to all their federal funds once the injunction went into place. At this point we don't know what exactly the federal government intended, but all federal funds are pulled from the same system, so when it went down so did all federal funds.
- Have there been any changes in Region 10?
 - Not from any staffing levels that DCYF has heard about, but the questions we are posing to our federal partners are taking much longer to get answers because they are having to do more checking for what is permissible.
- Historically ECEAP and Head Start have serviced so many families, what do you know about the funding for Early Head Start & Head Start and what do we need to be thinking about in terms of how many students could be impacted?
 - DCYF saw an almost immediate response to the federal pause from providers utilizing funds from Head Start. They shut down the programs that day and stopped providing services to avoid incurring expenses for which they would not be able to reimburse staff with. Overall, it has been a lack of clarity, no one knows how immediate future impacts could be.
- Are there any national movements since the federal government funds nearly half of the child welfare system to sort this out, or is it just the states who have jumped in on the injunctions?
 - Mainly it has just been battled in the court systems.
- Will Working Connections Child Care be impacted by the federal funding pause?
 - A portion of Working Connections Child Care is federally funded, so currently payments are being used by state funding, but since the federal funding is a large part the state funding will run out quickly. Any action will be taken as a statewide conversation and is not just up to DCYF in order to cut.

DCYF Staff Engagement Survey Results: Child Welfare Worker Well-Being | Frank Ordway, Deputy Secretary of Operations, Dorene Perez, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Child Welfare, & Richard Gobble, HR Strategy & Planning Manager

DCYF presented results from the [2024 Washington State Employee Engagement Survey](#) focusing on DCYF's Child Welfare Workers. One of the 2025 priority areas for the DCYF Oversight Board is the well-being of Child Welfare Workers. DCYF provided these results as a starting point (e.g., baseline) for monitoring outcomes moving forward. DCYF also provided an outline of initiatives the agency has taken focused on employee safety and well-being.

Questions/Takeaways:

- Do these results include folk's worker within [JR-25](#)?
 - There are survey results for them, but tonight's results are child welfare focused only. We will send the JR-25 results later.
- When talking about a response rate of 4 out of 10 workers, with respect to the numbers in red (Strongly Agree), how many of them represent case carrying folks?
 - DCYF does not have the capacity to call out those staff who are case carrying employees specifically. Employee demographics can be broken out by region and office, but not by job class. However, the majority of the child welfare staff are case carrying.
- How is the survey disseminated?

- The survey was open for three weeks and sent to all employees. We contacted specific workers who are in the field and may not always have access to a computer to remind them. DCYF had individual supervisors reach out to their staff and encourage them to complete the survey.
- Are you able to tell if supervisors themselves are facing any burnout?
 - Yes, DCYF can pull out data for supervisors. Will send that information.
- Why are the response rates for “I receive the information and communication I need to do my job effectively” so much lower than the rest of the survey?
 - The hard part of doing surveys is that we ask questions that prompt more questions. The only way to know is to go back and ask more questions, there might be reasons why employees did not answer this question as much.
 - DCYF does not require employees to answer all questions.
- Is it possible for future surveys to add sections for commentary so that employees can give direct feedback?
 - Yes, DCYF can ask for more information in the survey as open-ended questions. It was not a possibility for this year, because it significantly increases the amount of time and resources needed to analyze that data, maybe in the future.
- How many questions does an employee have to answer in order to be included as a full responder?
 - Unsure at this time, I will follow up with that answer.
- What are the thoughts around comparison data over the years?
 - DCYF recently changed the questions, so there is not a lot of comparison data currently. Question changes should be minimal moving forward.
- Is it possible to see what the racial and ethnic makeup of the survey respondents are in the survey?
 - Yes, there is, that is one of the demographic questions DCYF asks. We will share demographic breakdowns of staff as an agency.
- Is staff turnover currently trending down?
 - Yes, staff turnover has gone down from 26.9% in 2021 to 16.8% in 2024.

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 about communication between them and the doctor in court. She asked that the relationship between the doctor and DCYF be terminated as the doctor is still being used as a credible witness in cases.

Tristan Fujita, community member, spoke as a representative of a group of foster parents regarding HB 1227 (2021). She asked the Board to consider the alternative outcomes to this bill, while it has been decreasing the number of kids in foster care it has resulted in an increase in fatalities and near fatalities. She said that you can't call something a success when looking at a decrease while ignoring the other side. She encouraged the Board to read the fatality reports from DCYF and consider whether the potential cause is HB 1227.

Katie Cruikshank, community member, spoke in support of the previous public comment to have the Board look into HB 1227. She told a story about a foster child she had who was sent back to a parent and the child then overdosed in the house and the child was sent back to her. This parent was not following the treatment plan, and the child is currently back with them today. She stated that the lock boxes meant to store substances are unhelpful because people who are using substances are not taking the time to store their drugs. She continued to discuss the dissatisfaction that she and many other foster parents have for the new reimbursements rate system that is being implemented in DCYF. She said that her current foster child is going

through many ongoing health tests, and the rating system is not currently allowing for adequate support since the child is still undiagnosed.

Victoria Rivera, community member, spoke as a concerned parent and community member about medically complex cases that get sent to DCYF under suspicion of abuse, specifically young kids and how the cases are handled. She stated there is a lack of due process for many of these cases for the families. She continued, many social workers defer their opinion of abuse to medical doctors, which can be short sighted and biased as families cannot contest medical opinions. She stated that families should have the option to have a thorough medical deferential [review] with a multi-disciplinary team that is usually already hired by the state to do these assessments, but these assessments need to include any sickness and diseases via testing to rule out those as potential signs of abuse. She asked that families have the right to review their child's entire medical review before their children are taken away.

Representative Dent asked if any people who provided public comment today could also follow up with written public comments to staff. Staff compiles any written public comment and sends it to the Board prior to a board meeting.

2025 Legislative Bill Update | Co-Chair Senator Claire Wilson & Representative Steve Bergquist

Senator Wilson and Representative Bergquist provided updates on bills that they felt the board would be most interested in based on the board's scope of work.

Subcommittee Update | Nickolaus Colgan, Administrative Coordinator

Nickolaus updated the Board on the two subcommittees discussed at the January 17 meeting. This included who volunteered to participate and when they would start meeting.

- Annual Report: Dr. Marian Harris, Lois Martin, and Dr. Ben de Haan. The first meeting will be on March 18.
- Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR) Outcomes: Dr. Diane Liebe, Bobbe Bridge, Pamela Javier, and Danielle Johnson. The first meeting will be on February 26.

Questions/Takeaways:

- The JR Outcomes subcommittee:
 - This was inspired by the desire to evaluate what is being measured and whether it accurately reflects what we need to assess to determine if we are effectively serving JR-involved youth.
 - It will be important for the subcommittee to closely monitor developments at Green Hill School over the next few months, as this is an existing crisis.
 - Resource: Senator Claire Wilson recommended that the subcommittee look at the 2024 Biennial Washington State Juvenile Justice System Report (see: <https://dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/2024JJGovernorsReport.pdf>)
 - Resource: Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) audit of DCYF's Juvenile Rehabilitation Programs Performance is due July 2026 (see: <https://leg.wa.gov/about-the-legislature/legislative-agencies/jlarc>)

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

Co-Chair Claire Wilson thanked all attendees for their time today and Dr. Diane Liebe reminded the board that the next meeting will take place on March 20 from 9 AM – 1 PM.

Adjourned at 8:30 p.m. on Friday, February 21, 2025.