

HB 1661 “Looking Back to Move Forward” Meeting Themes

Background: A small group of board members involved in DCYF’s creation, Ruth Kagi, Dr. Ben de Haan, Rep. Dent, Bobbe Bridge, and Lois Martin, met in June to reflect on the board’s history and consider future directions. Co-chairs Dr. Diane Liebe and Sen. Claire Wilson, along with staff, also attended as part of a listening session. The group discussed three questions: (a) What was the original rationale for “oversight”? (b) Do you feel the Board has been able to carry out its function? (c) What challenges do you see as we move forward? Staff reviewed notes to identify common themes, which closely aligned with those from recent Annual Report subcommittee meetings.

Overarching main themes: Purpose, Prioritization, and Effectiveness

1. Board Purpose and Oversight Clarity

- Original intent was active oversight with real power, rather than an advisory role.
- Lack of clarity around the definition and execution of oversight.
- The board has broader authority than it has historically used.¹
 - Can receive reports from OFCO and access relevant records;
 - Can request and receive information, outcomes data, documents, and records from DCYF.

2. Legislative Challenges and Opportunities

- Original legislation was overly prescriptive, limiting flexibility.
- Need to revise the statute to allow adaptability and clearer focus.
 - Less specificity in statute, with flexibility to change as needed. E.g., “the OB will determine outcomes to prioritize and monitor biannually.”
- Need to define the Board's unique value relative to other bodies.

3. Strategic Focus, Prioritization, and Effectiveness

- **Focus on Fewer, High-Impact Priorities.** Narrow goals to a manageable set of high-value areas to maximize effectiveness and avoid dilution of effort.
- **Use Subcommittees Strategically:** Subcommittees can help the Board accomplish more within its capacity by advancing work on prioritized issues.
- **Targeted Oversight for Greater Impact:** Well-focused oversight efforts can improve agency performance and potentially reduce state costs.

4. Data, Evaluation, and Accountability

- Opportunities to improve the consistency of data sharing between OIAA and the board.
- Greater collaboration with OIAA, courts, and others could enhance insight.
- Surveys seem to be under-leveraged and need better design/use.
- Limited board staffing constrains ability to execute surveys, stakeholder engagement, etc.

5. Proactive vs. Reactive Interaction with DCYF

- Tendency to engage with DCYF post-crisis is counterproductive.
- Need for proactive engagement to influence decisions early.
- DCYF challenge to meet key obligations (e.g., FFPSA data) has major consequences.

6. Engagement and Voice (Internal and External)

- Gaps in incorporating youth/lived experience and community input.

¹ Examples of unique powers: (10) The board has the following powers, which may be exercised by majority vote of the board: (a) To receive reports of the ombuds; (b) To obtain access to all relevant records in the possession of ombuds, except as prohibited by law ([RCW 43.216.015](#)).

- Public comment opportunities are limited and need expansion.²
- Need stronger partnerships with stakeholders, unions, and the Governor's Office.

7. Priority Area Selected by the Board: Worker Well-being

- Workforce issues at DCYF seem critical and persistent.
- Opportunity to make a meaningful impact in workforce turnover and retention to promote better outcomes for children, youth, and families.

² Oversight Board leadership believes the board is not intended to address individual cases; that responsibility lies with the Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds (OFCO). Instead, a formal feedback loop has been established, through which DCYF leadership receives a summary of public comments from each meeting.