

This Report contains activities, systemic findings, and recommendations that must be made available to the public under Maryland Code Family Law Section 5-539.1(c)(2).



MONTGOMERY COUNTY CITIZENS REVIEW PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

July 2021

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND	3
Mission	3
Responsibilities	3
Methods.....	3
Membership.....	3
Scope	4
State Board and Local Oversight.....	5
OVERVIEW of FY 2021 ACTIVITIES	6
Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families	6
LGBTQ Foster Youth.....	7
Agency Operations	7
Panel Collaboration with Other County Panels.....	8
Panel Challenges in FY 2021	8
Panel Opportunities for Improvement.....	9

BACKGROUND

Mission

Citizen's Review Panel for Children ("Panel") is charged with examining the policies, procedures, and practices of Maryland and Montgomery County agencies to evaluate the extent to which Montgomery County agencies are effectively fulfilling their responsibility to implement the child protection standards.

Responsibilities

The Panel's responsibilities include:

- Evaluating how effective Montgomery County is in protecting its children;
- Reporting the Panel's findings to the Montgomery County Executive, the County Council, the Maryland State Citizens Review Board for Children, and the Maryland State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect;
- Preparing and making available to the public a report summarizing the Panel's activities within sixty days after the end of each fiscal year; and
- Assisting the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services upon request.

Methods

The Panel assesses the policies and procedures from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

- Quantity is assessed through review of metrics (intake, assessment, screening, and investigation).
- Quality is assessed through the Panel's examination of policy, practice, and procedures and can include a review of specific cases and evaluations provided by both families and mandatory reporters. The Panel can conduct public outreach and request comment to assess the impact of current Montgomery County policies, procedures, and practices upon children and families in the community, in accordance with 42 U.S.C. 5106a(c)(4)(C).

The Panel's annual findings, which include highlights of success stories as well as areas in which the County could be more effective, are presented to the DHHS leadership.

Membership

The Panel consists of nine to fourteen members. The Montgomery County Maryland's County Executive appoints seven voting members to the Panel (subject to County Council confirmation), one member is a county resident selected by the State's Citizen Review Board for Children (CRBC), and one member is a county resident selected by the State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect. The Executive may appoint up to five non-voting members to provide technical and professional advice to the Panel about child protective services. Under

the authority of Montgomery County Code Section 27-49A, the County Executive appoints the Chair and Vice-Chair, subject to County Council recommendation. Members serve three-year terms without compensation according to the County Code.

Maryland Code 5-539.2(d) allows members to serve four years and continue to serve until a successor is appointed and qualifies¹.

Members of the Panel for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 include the following individuals.

- Wilma Brier, Voting Member
- Laura Brown, Technical and Professional Advisor
- Laura Coyle, Voting Member
- Kathleen Dunn, Voting Member
- Kay Farley, CRBC Representative
- Marci Roth McCoy, Technical and Professional Advisor (Chairperson for 2019 - 2021)
- Stacey McNeely, Voting Member
- Sarah Stanton Huxta, Voting Member

Efforts are currently underway to recruit new members to fill five vacancies.

Scope

The Citizen's Review Panel scope includes monitoring the effectiveness in implementation of state and county child protection standards and works with the Commission on Children and Youth.

While the Citizen's Review Panel has synergies with other Boards, Committees, and Commissions of Montgomery County Maryland, it differs from them in its narrower subject scope (on child protection) and duty scope (the monitoring of agencies' effectiveness in implementing the child protection standards). The Panel can monitor the Department, the Board of Education, law enforcement, and other entities in their implementation of child protection standards. When the Panel reaches out to other Boards and Commissions, it does so with the intent of gathering information about the efficacy of certain local agencies child protection practices that other Boards and Commissions may have better insight.

The Panel is distinguished from the local County CRBC for minor children in out-of-home care referred to in Maryland Code 5-540 through 5-546 as an independent advisory board. The Panel is also distinguished from the State CRBC, which is charged with evaluating Maryland's child protective services and making recommendations for systemic improvement. Although CRBC is housed within the Maryland Department of Human Services organizational structure, it is an independent entity overseen by its State Board.

The Panel does NOT hold hearings, collect data, identify changes in funding, recommend policy, suggest programs, plan new strategies, recommend priorities, solicit advice and

¹ There is a conflict between the state statute and county code on the length of terms for Panel members.

suggestions from agencies, or provide public information. The Panel works with the Commission on Children and Youth (“Commission”) to amplify their recommendation for procedures, programs, or legislation deemed necessary to promote the well-being of children, youth, and families in the community. The Panel supports the Commission’s task of coordinating services between and among agencies serving children and youth in a manner that protects children from abuse and neglect. The Panel may ask for specifics about particular child protection cases or ask specifics on Department practices, but the Panel does not develop new procedures or teach the Department how to effectively practice the policies and procedures.

The Panel monitors the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Department’s policies, procedures, and practices.

State Board and Local Oversight

The Panel meets monthly with staff from the Department of Health and Human Services (“Department”) to monitor the effectiveness and appropriateness of the Department’s policies, procedures, and practices.

The State of Maryland’s State CRBC is obligated under Maryland Code Family Law Section 5-539(b)(1) to train the “Panel”. The Panel, equipped with knowledge of State standards and priorities, then reviews Montgomery County’s response to child abuse and neglect and monitors Montgomery County’s out-of-home care policies, procedures, and practices.

The Panel provides the Montgomery County Executive and Council with information as to how well Montgomery County is performing compared to the state and national average (accounting for resources and population).

OVERVIEW OF FY 2021 ACTIVITIES

In FY 2021, the Panel asked input from the Department of Health and Human Services to identify two policy areas in which the agency would benefit from an independent review. The two policy areas selected for FY 2021 were the recruitment and retention of resource families and services for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) foster youth. The Panel also reviewed agency statistics and operations as a component of the monthly meetings. In addition, the Panel worked with two other county panels to plan and host two community forums. Finally, the Panel undertook efforts to address challenges facing the Panel and to identify how the Panel could improve fulfilling its mission.

Recruitment and Retention of Resource Families

Methods of Review

The Panel initiated a variety of approaches to gather information about the agency's current policies and procedures, including the following.

- Reviewed the recruitment and retention materials provided to the Panel by the agency
 - DHS/SSA Maryland Resource Parent Manual,
 - Maryland Resource Parent Handbook, (2016), and
 - DHS/SSA policy, Resource Parent Home Standards (SSA-CW #19-15);
- Reviewed the *New Resource Home* policy issued by the State Department of Health and Human Services Office in 2019;
- Reviewed the FY 2021 Foster Parent Closing Tracker developed by the agency staff to better understand the reasons that resource families were closing their homes;
- Received a presentation from agency staff regarding the content of the "Foster Care Information Meeting" for prospective foster and adoptive parents;
- Met with agency staff and supervisors on current foster parent recruitment and retention processes and procedures;
- Reviewed geo-mapping information on the children coming into foster care compared to the location of licensed resource homes; and
- Reviewed the [Foster and Adoptive Parents Services](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/CYF/CYFFosterCareMeetings.html) materials on the Department of Health and Human Services website (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/CYF/CYFFosterCareMeetings.html>).

Additionally, the Panel met with Mr. Chris Plummer, President of the Montgomery County Foster Parent Association (FPA), to secure input from the FPA membership's experiences as resource homes. Mr. Plummer answered questions about the kinds of support the resource families need and shared feedback on recruitment and retention policies and procedures.

Recommendations

The Panel has not completed its work on this policy issue but has made the following recommendations to the agency thus far.

- Share recruitment information on community and neighborhood listservs and other social media platforms.
- Host joint FPA and CYFS recruitment booths with at local fairs and community events.
- Explore the development of a comprehensive welcome packet for new foster parents in conjunction with FPA.

- Explore sending a follow-up postcard to offer additional information to prospective foster parents after the initial information meeting.
- Reach out to the language immersion school to secure its help with recruitment.

Potential Follow-up Actions to Gather More Information

In the coming year, the Panel has discussed additional activities;

- Develop and implement a survey of foster parents related to their experiences with recruitment and retention,
- Develop a process for foster parents to express concerns or make complaints, and
- Explore barriers to establishing an expedited licensing process for relatives of foster youth.

LGBTQ Foster Youth

Methods of Review

The Panel began an assessment of this policy issue by reviewing two prior surveys.

- The Los Angeles Foster Youth Survey Final Report, Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care: Addressing Disproportionality and Disparities in Los Angeles, (August 2014)
- Results of the Panel's LGBTQ Survey of agency staff (July 10, 2017)

The Panel also reviewed the DHS/SSA policy, *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth and Families* [SSA-CW #18-13 (revised)]. Based on this revised policy, the Panel developed a survey to assist the Panel in understanding whether the agency's policies and procedures follow the revised policy. Agency staff were asked to complete the survey.

Recommendations

The Panel is still gathering information on this issue and has made no recommendations thus far.

Potential Follow-up Actions to Gather More Information

In the coming months, the Panel will be reviewing the answers to questions submitted to agency staff regarding local agency practices and compliance with the state policy.

Agency Operations

Methods of Review

For each Panel meeting, the agency provides the Panel with a child welfare report that includes the following data elements;

- Number of calls to screening,
- Number of new alternative response investigations (in-home services),
- Number of new information and referral investigations (in and out of home services),
- Number of new non-CPS requests (requests for services received from other agencies),
- Number of children/youth in out of home care,

- Number of families receiving in-home services,
- Number of resource homes,
- Number of resource home applications, and
- Number of resource homes closed.

The Panel reviews and discusses the caseload trends with the agency staff.

The agency's monthly report also includes information on general operations. This past year, many of the updates and discussion focused on the agency's challenges and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the agency's implementation of the Department of Health and Human Services' new Child-Juvenile- Adult Management System (CJAMS) case management system.

Recommendations

The Panel has asked for additional data elements as part of the monthly meetings related to the number of children/youth leaving care, the number of children living with relatives, and the number of voluntary placements.

Given the additional stress staff were experiencing because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Panel recommended offering a Wellness activity for agency staff. The panel planned and hosted a *Virtual Mindful Yoga Workshop* on December 10, 2020 that was free for all agency staff.

Potential Follow-up Actions to Gather More Information

The Panel needs to better understand the data and reports generated from new CJAMS case management system that was not available from the CHESSIE system.

Panel Collaboration with Other County Panels

In collaboration with the Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AODAAC) and The Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC), the Panel assisted in the planning and implementation of two community virtual forums.

- *Many Pathways to Wellness*, October 1, 2020
- *Confronting Barriers to Addiction and Mental Health Services: Equity, Isolation, and Digital Divide*, May 6, 2021

Panel Challenges in FY 2021

Term limits and resignations resulted in five vacant positions and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted recruitment. Term limits and vacancies were posted on the County website in July 2021. Filling the positions will allow the Panel to be more productive and effective.

The Panel also worked to clarify its roles and responsibilities to ensure that its current and planned activities remain within its mission and scope. The Panel researched the County Code and State statutes to understand better the Panel's roles and responsibilities. The research results are reflected in the Background section of this report and in the activities and proposals for the follow-up described in this report. In the coming year, the Panel will be reaching out to the State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect regarding appointment of a county resident to the Panel, reconnecting with the Commission on Children and Youth, and consider ways to reach out to other entities in the county involved in child protection.

Panel Opportunities for Improvement

The Panel approached the State CRBC to inquire about the training that is available for new Panel members. State CRBC confirmed that it will provide background/resource materials to new Panel members, invite new Panel members to CRBC's pre-service training sessions, and invite all Panel members to all CRBC's in-service training sessions.

