

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



June 28, 2022

Shana Bartley, Interim Chair
Citizens Review Panel
c/o Center for Child Protection
714 G Street SE, #3
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Ms. Bartley,

The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) received *The Citizen Review Panel's Annual Report May 1, 2021 – April 30, 2022*. CFSA appreciates the Citizen Review Panel's (CRP) commitment to the children and families of the District of Columbia and the Panel's work to support improvement in outcomes and services.

We also want to acknowledge and thank Joyce Thomas for her passion, consistency, and steadfast dedication as the role of the CRP Facilitator since 2012. Ms. Thomas shared her thoughtful lessons learned as we move forward with the transition to a new CRP Facilitator in July 2022. CFSA incorporated the suggestions into a Memorandum of Agreement that is in the finalization process that Ms. Thomas helped CFSA develop with the CRP approval.

I thank the CRP Older Youth Workgroup for evaluating services to support older youth in foster care at the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). The evaluation culminated in the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA): Preparing Older Youth for Independence report, that provided several findings and recommendations for youth's financial readiness and educational achievement in foster care ages 15-21. CFSA received the report on January 9, 2022. On February 9, 2022, CFSA leadership convened a virtual meeting with the CFSA's Office of Youth Empowerment (OYE), and the CRP, where CFSA provided a detailed response to each recommendation and then sent a written response to each recommendation.

In my commitment to transparency and stakeholder involvement, CFSA will schedule a follow-up meeting in September 2022 with the CRP members to discuss the progress made on the recommendations.

Please see the attached responses to the CRP's recommendation in the Annual Report relating to CFSA.

I look forward to working with the CRP to benefit the children and youth and families served by CFSA.

If you have any questions, please contact Roni Seabrook, Planning Specialist in the Office of Planning, Policy and Program support at Roni.Seabrook@dc.gov.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Matthews

Robert L. Matthews, Director
DC Child and Family Services Agency

CFSA's Response to the DC-CRP Annual Report, May 1, 2021 – April 30, 2022

- A. Challenge #1: CFSA is seeking to select a new Facilitator for FY 2022-2023 to provide substantive support, administrative/fiscal services, and technical assistance for the maintenance of the CRP website. This is a critical role for the CRP operations and the grantee is responsible for facilitating, supporting, and assisting in the implementation of all CRP activities and events.

Rationale: Grant # DCRL-2017-U-0030 that funded the Center for Child Protection and Family Support (CCPFS) to serve as CRP Facilitator for the period of May 1, 2021 to April 30, 2022 has ended. A new Request for Application (RFA) was initially posted in February 2022, but due to a lack of response, an extension was granted to maintain continuity of services. A new RFA was posted, and applications are due no later than May 13, 2022, at 2:00 PM via online submission.

Recommendation: CFSA should reach out and invite CRP members to participate in the grant review process. It would be beneficial for CFSA to get input from current volunteers about qualified grant applicants to consider for the Facilitator position. Once a selection is made, CFSA should ensure there is adequate overlap coverage to assist with orientation, technical support, and coaching to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities.

CFSA Response: CFSA Response: CFSA provided the Citizens Review Panel with the CRP Facilitators' Request for Proposal's Scope of Work for the CRP's input. A representative from the CRP was a technical panel evaluation member. CFSA extended the facilitator's contract for a transition period except due to procurement delays that could not happen.

- B. Challenge #2: For over 2.5 years, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced CRP members to work remotely and to maintain social distances which has created isolation and has negatively impacted CRP and CFSA. There have been limited group interactions and collaborations. Communications with key individuals at CFSA have been impacted as demonstrated by the need to develop memoranda to remind individuals about professional behavior expectations. It is important for panel members and CFSA staff to participate together to discuss shared values, gaps in services, agency values, and to identify projects that will enhance the child welfare system. The last full day CRP retreat was held on September 28, 2017, in which the In-Home project was conceived. Since that time, it has been difficult for the CRP to identify working group projects that are consistent with the priorities of CFSA.

Rationale: A one-day retreat designed to assist the CRP in defining its vision for the future is greatly needed. The retreat also would be beneficial to help the CRP establish the sequence in which projects should be developed to bring new knowledge to CFSA. The retreat should guide the CRP to clarify their values and to define their vision for the DC-CRP Annual Report, May 1, 2021 - April 30, 2022 future. The retreat should also help the CRP establish the sequence in which those projects should be implemented to reach its stated vision.

Recommendation: Each year, the CRP should develop a modified strategic plan during an annual one-day retreat. This is critical for review of CFSA priorities, formulation of working group topics, clarification of values, and building relationships with the child welfare agency. An initial assessment should be done to determine the overall expectations and concerns of CFSA and CRP participants.

Everything should flow from this strategic plan/retreat to help identify program priorities and gaps. There should be different voices at this gathering to include panel members and CFSA staff. The CRP Facilitator, CRP Chairperson, and CFSA staff should work together to plan the one-day retreat.

CFSA Response: CFSA agrees and welcomes participation in a retreat and will work with the CRP to plan it.

- C. Challenge #3: The intent of the CRP is to provide an external perspective on the efficacy of policies, procedures, practices, and programs of the child welfare system in the District of Columbia. This is difficult work and to achieve appropriate outcomes, many CRP volunteers should have an opportunity to gain fundamental information about how the system works. Some CRP members need basic knowledge and others may need a more focused set of skills. Clarification of CFSA phases such as “front door, Four Pillars, and temporary safe haven” are often not understood or appreciated by new CRP members.

Rationale: Training can broaden knowledge, enhance skills, and refresh the passion of CRP volunteers. Learning opportunities about prevention strategies, safety issues, and what it takes to accomplish permanency can enhance panel members’ understanding of the responsibilities of the child welfare agency on these and other child protection issues.

Recommendation: CFSA should offer CRP members an opportunity to participate in preservice training or other educational sessions as schedules and need permit. Information is needed on how to connect CRP members to the CFSA Training Academy, and to the appropriate contact persons.

CFSA Response: CFSA agrees and welcomes participation in a retreat and will work with the CRP to plan it.

- D. Challenge #4: There has been a long-standing belief that citizens should be involved in government systems. But, sometimes this is very difficult to accomplish. CFSA is a large and complex system and frequently asked questions by many new CRP members are, “Where do you start to identify gaps in policies and practices of CFSA?” and “How can the CRP establish an effective, trusting, and reciprocal relationship with the child welfare agency?” Answers to these and other questions need follow-up information. Rationale: To avoid confusion and frustration, panel members need a better understanding of goals and priorities of CFSA. On several occasions, working groups were started only to find out after the fact, certain programs are working well, and DC-CRP Annual Report, May 1, 2021 - April 30, 2022 and limited changes are needed. For example, this occurred when attempting to assess medical services for foster children, and to evaluate the cases involving positive toxicology screen in newborns. In both situations, time was spent going in the wrong directions, and the projects were discontinued. On other occasions, when projects and recommendations were sent to CFSA, the feedback was discouraging because it presented no new knowledge.

Recommendation: CFSA should be more transparent and inform the CRP about their annual priorities, program specific gaps, and issues that can benefit from CRP involvement. It is always great to know about the wonderful accomplishments of CFSA, but it would be important to share information about struggles that exist. During CRP meetings that are held each quarter, there should be more focus on gaps in services and information that CFSA feels the panel can weigh in on.

CFSA Response: The Director provides updates to the CRP and has held multiple stakeholder meetings. CFSA invites the CRP and other stakeholders to stakeholder forums and pop-up briefings where CFSA discusses strategies, successes, and challenges. CFSA wrote into the RFP an annual strategic planning session where CFSA provides the strategic plan and areas where the CRP can offer beneficial recommendations to practices of interest that would benefit CFSA. In addition, CFSA and the CRP wrote a detailed scope of work that outlines the development and implementation of CRP projects.