



## Alaska Citizen Review Panel

### Members

Diwakar K. Vadapalli, Chair  
Rebecca Vale  
Bettyann Steciw  
Sonya Hull  
JP Ouellette  
Donna Daniels  
Cameron Adams  
Wendy Barrett  
Cassandra Kincaid  
Dylan Conduzzi

### Staff

Denali Daniels & Assoc.  
admin@crpalaska.org  
[www.crpalaska.org](http://www.crpalaska.org)

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel evaluates the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies for effectiveness in discharging their child protection responsibilities. The Panel is mandated through CAPTA 1997 (P.L. 104-235), and enacted through AS 47.14.205.

## Southeast Region 2018 Site Visit Report

Regional Office	Southeast Region
Field Offices Visited	Juneau
Communities Visited	Juneau
Dates of Visit	February 8-9, 2018
Panelists	Donna Daniels and JP Ouellette

### Stakeholders Consulted

#### **Alaska Native Entities**

*Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska*

#### **Public Safety**

*Juneau Police Department  
Alaska State Troopers*

#### **Legal Community**

*State of Alaska/Attorney General's Office*

#### **School System**

*Auke Bay Elementary School*

#### **Service Providers**

*State of Alaska/Office of Children's Services  
Juneau Youth Services*

*The Panel would like to thank the stakeholders and partner agencies who met with us during February 8-9, 2017 in Juneau, Alaska.*

**INTRODUCTION:** Before the February 2018 site visit to the Southeast Regional Office of OCS in Juneau, the panelists reviewed the annual goals and priority areas established by the CRP for 2017-2018. During the meetings with stakeholders that were conducted as part of the site visit, the panelists used the 2018 workplan priorities to guide the discussions. They collected a vast amount of information during these visits, and used this material to develop a set of key observations and recommendations that are specific to the region.

**Goal 1:** Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process and whether the changes made in 2015 have improved the system.

**Goal 2:** Examine if ‘family reunification’ is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home care placement, and OCS’ efforts in pursuit of ‘family reunification’.

**Goal 3:** Examine OCS’ efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.

**Goal 4:** Expand public outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.

**Goal 5:** Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.

## **Key Observations:**

### **Goal 1: Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process and whether the changes made in 2015 have improved the system.**

Stakeholders across the board expressed frustration with the current process. While appearing to be more efficient, it's felt to be far less effective at actually serving the best interest of the children. The rigid scheduling of reviews often renders the case worker and the parents unable to participate leaving input and decision-making to personnel in Anchorage who have far less invested in cases in Southeast. There was consensus among stakeholders that this was a solution to a problem Southeast wasn't facing and that regional reviews were far more efficacious at addressing the needs of the children served in the Southeast Region.

Stakeholders were not optimistic about a prospective judicial review process as they felt the courts were already overburdened and this would delay case planning in Southeast. Ideally, the courts could be more helpful given more resources to include more family-friendly programs (like FIT court, a CINA attorney, and a more family-friendly GAL).

### **Goal 2: Examine if 'family reunification' is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home care placement, and OCS' efforts in pursuit of 'family reunification'.**

#### ***Underlying Philosophies***

In Southeast, there was unanimous agreement in the community that family reunification was a priority for OCS workers. OCS and community workers spoke with eagerness about the importance of kids staying with or being reunited with their biological families. There is a strong sense of collaboration between OCS and local agencies to prevent children from being separated from their families.

Though published policies and procedures are the same in both the Anchorage and Southeast regions concerning family reunification, the results of the interviews conducted by the CRP in these two regions differed greatly. In Anchorage, there was general discouragement among stakeholders around the experience that family reunification was not a priority for OCS workers, and it was more of an implausibility that created one more burdensome objective for OCS workers to try and obtain.

There seems to be a philosophical difference around the importance of keeping families intact between the two regions. One reason suggested for this

was that leadership and staffing in the Southeast Region across many agencies have more longevity. In fact many CPS-related leaders and workers grew up in the community they now serve, and have more of a personal investment in and understanding of the families in the region. Another was that, despite what studies show about the importance of keeping families intact, the mindset that “*Some children are just better off with better parents*” is pervasive, very difficult to overcome, and over-applied in certain areas around the state. This philosophy leads inexperienced, though well-meaning, case workers with little personal investment in the community they serve, to work under the assumption that *most* children are better off with better parents in spite of OCS's stated objectives. More directly, it may be a leadership issue at the supervisory level that is difficult to overcome when turnover is so high and longevity is so low.

### ***Permanency Guidelines vs Access to Treatment***

Stakeholders described a difficult dance between permanency guidelines and the time it takes for parents desiring help to access services. They often have to seek treatment outside of the area and, despite their efforts, fall short of the timelines set by the state for permanency. Southeast workers were confident, however, in their abilities to discern when extension applications were appropriate and how to utilize the resources available to help children stay connected with their families.

### ***The GAL***

Multiple stakeholders complained that the GAL tends to overrule the case planning team, making decisions for the child that most involved don't agree with. Many felt that the GAL has a high degree of mistrust for parents.

### ***In-Home Support (Prevention and Follow Up)***

At other times, kids go home too soon without the right supports in place for the parents and repeat maltreatment occurs. They would like to see more capacity to provide more in-home services. This would provide better post-care and also *prevent* children from entering state custody in many (maybe most) cases.

**Goal 3: Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.**

### ***Hesitant Families***

A concern was that parents are hesitant to offer information about relatives due to shame/pride. Relatives are hesitant to get involved to avoid family drama. There are financial barriers for relatives. Though relative placement *has increased* since the implementation of emergency placement funding, that

funding runs out after two weeks. Families don't want to commit to becoming a licensed foster home which, subsequently, leaves them in a tight spot financially and also makes ICWA foster homes are very rare.

### **Good Teamwork**

In Southeast, supervisors state they do extensive and effective relative searches using the software available, and, most importantly **local knowledge**. They state longevity of workers and tight-knit community results in workers having a good working knowledge of families in the area. Tlingit/Haida Tribal Council echoes this sentiment and states OCS works very well with the tribes to find relatives for placement.

### **Due Process Versus Cultural Appropriateness**

Multiple stakeholders state a concern with the mandated petition for removal when creating a safety plan. Parents and extended family often fear the ramifications of this "removal" and the perception of parental termination often creates a resistance to compliance. There is also difficulty in balancing cultural appropriateness and due process.

- **Goal 4: Expand public outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.**

According to all stakeholders interviewed, including Tlingit/Haida Tribal Council, Southeast has developed good tribal collaboration even before the strategic plan/compact. The compact simply puts more of a concrete definition around what they have already been practicing and allows them to increase collaboration in areas such as tribal case-loads. They have good working relationships of trust with outlying areas including Metlakatla. While OCS workers feel tribes are capable of handling more cases, tribal council states they believe in starting slow and, as attorney general's office states below, not moving faster than they can handle (as in taking responsibility for CPS in larger chunks than are realistic for the tribe). The desire is to take the burden off of OCS tribal cases, but understand that doing that responsibly requires patience...and funding. THTC representatives state that funding for more workers would enable them to build more infrastructure for caring for tribal children.

The Preserving Native Families (PNF) program has helped improve tribal collaboration. As stated above regarding relative placement, though tribal governments are collaborative, tribal families still have a great deal of mistrust in the state which makes foster placement very difficult as families won't even participate in tribe-initiated foster programs for fear that they are "giving in" to the state.

- **Goal 5: Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.**

This goal is not relevant to OCS as far as panel recommendations, though the panel is working to address this goal internally.

### **Other Observations:**

#### ***Centralized Intake***

Stakeholders feel Anchorage addressed a problem Southeast didn't have and it is reducing efficacy in the region. Children in need of immediate assistance can be left unaddressed and workers can be responding to an "urgent" case that's already been stabilized. Local authorities get frustrated with the redundancy of the system and the poor (and often inaccurate) relay of information to the case workers. Local authorities appreciate that the system provides checks and balances that could be overlooked in remote areas (like an intake worker omitting data about friends and family). They continue to contact the local case workers directly, however, to ensure someone addresses the needs of the child in a timely manner. The triage is very poor and it's presumed that the centralized intake worker has little to no experience/knowledge about the region nor of how these cases are to be triaged. Other partners in the region who report echo these concerns and state that the ability to access OCS care for a child is greatly diminished.

#### ***Support for Supervisors***

Supervisors in Southeast want more support in being *good leaders* in order to reduce burnout of field staff and pass along valuable region-specific knowledge.

## **Support for In-Home Services**

Southeast OCS feels more preventative in-home services to address basic needs and provide support to families on the edge of mandatory state involvement would greatly reduce the number of children in foster care.

## **Training for OCS Workers**

*Child Interviews:* As was stated in the Anchorage visits, stakeholders feel case workers need better training in interviewing children. Even case workers state that, as parents, they can tell when other workers have not had experience with children as they address them in ways that leave children confused or frustrated (as if they are adults). The troopers office shared concern about the number of times a child is interviewed increasing the trauma caused by an adverse event. Between JPD, troopers, OCS, and CAC, children are often interviewed intensively up to 4 times, which only increases the negative impact on the child.

*Safety/Self Defense:* Troopers office and JPD also advocate for case workers to be trained in self defense and given authority to carry pepper spray for protection against dangerous people as well as animals. At present, they rely on troopers for protection; and troopers aren't always available. Information was shared during this visit between troopers, JPD and OCS to coordinate the training.

## **Recommendations:**

### **Administrative Review Process**

The panel recommends OCS consider the requests from stakeholders across the board to revert to *regional* admin reviews that were more effective at addressing the needs of the families served.

### **Family Reunification**

Consider what appears to be a strength in Southeast and applying it to larger, more complex regions. Consider breaking Anchorage into smaller regions that would be assigned to case-working teams who would familiarize themselves with the families, resources, community supports, cultural norms, schools, etc in their assigned region. Preferably the case worker would live in or near their region leading to more personal investment and "inside information" about the variables that make that region "tick."

Review the report, if available, from a recent state-funded visit to New Jersey to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of their in-home support methods. What can Alaska's CPS system utilize toward *prevention* of abuse and neglect, and provide ongoing support for families to decrease repeat maltreatment in reunified families.

Utilize funding to attract more *competent* case workers (rather than simply *more* caseworkers) and supervisors to slow down the turnover and bring better equipped workers and leaders into the field who have more capacity to support efforts in family reunification as well as set an example for less experienced workers.

### ***Support for Supervisors and Field Workers***

Utilize local leadership for mentoring rather than send workers from other regions to Anchorage for mentorship.

### ***Child Interviews***

Review policies and procedures on interviewing children after an adverse event and provide training and mentoring to ensure

1. Case workers are adequately equipped to interview children without adding stress
2. Information can be shared effectively and redundant interviews eliminated

### ***Safety/Self Defense***

Information was shared during this visit between troopers, JPD and OCS to coordinate self-defense training.

Reconsider current policies on bear spray to ensure OCS workers aren't unnecessarily vulnerable in potentially dangerous situations (be it animals or humans).



## Alaska Citizen Review Panel

### Members

Diwakar K. Vadapalli, Chair  
Rebecca Vale  
Bettyann Steciw  
Sonya Hull  
JP Ouellette  
Donna Daniels  
Cameron Adams  
Wendy Barrett  
Cassandra Kincaid  
Dylan Conduzzi

### Staff

Denali Daniels & Assoc.  
admin@crpalaska.org  
[www.crpalaska.org](http://www.crpalaska.org)

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel evaluates the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies for effectiveness in discharging their child protection responsibilities. The Panel is mandated through CAPTA 1997 (P.L. 104-235), and enacted through AS 47.14.205.

## Western Region 2018 Site Visit Report

Regional Office	Western Region
Field Offices Visited	Bethel
Communities Visited	Bethel
Dates of Visit	April 18-20, 2018
Panelists	Dylan Conduzzi and JP Ouellette

### Stakeholders Consulted

#### Alaska Native Entities

*Association of Village Council Presidents*

#### Public Safety

*Bethel Police Department  
Alaska State Troopers*

#### Legal Community

*State of Alaska/Attorney General's Office  
Guardian Ad Litem*

#### School System

*Lower Kuskokwim School District*

#### Service Providers

*State of Alaska/Office of Children's Services  
CAC: Tundra Women's Coalition*

*The Panel would like to thank the stakeholders and partner agencies who met with us during February 18-20, 2018 in Bethel, Alaska.*

**INTRODUCTION:** Before the April 2018 site visit to the Western Regional Office of OCS in Bethel, the panelists reviewed the annual goals and priority areas established by the CRP for 2017-2018. During the meetings with stakeholders that were conducted as part of the site visit, the panelists used the 2018 workplan priorities to guide the discussions. They collected a vast amount of information during these visits, and used this material to develop a set of key observations and recommendations that are specific to the region.

## **Citizen's Review Panel 2018 Workplan Goals**

**Goal 1:** Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process and whether the changes made in 2015 have improved the system.

**Goal 2:** Examine if 'family reunification' is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home care placement, and OCS' efforts in pursuit of 'family reunification'.

**Goal 3:** Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.

**Goal 4:** Expand public outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.

**Goal 5:** Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.

## Key Observations:

**Goal 1: Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process and whether the changes made in 2015 have improved the system.**

Most stakeholders were satisfied with the current review process. Compliments were given specifically to the facilitators who “are doing a great job.” Reviews focused on parent-progress were much appreciated; though there was a desire to encourage parents to attend the reviews. Case workers appreciated the streamlining of the case through the new process. They did note, however, that the boxes needed to be checked in the AR aren’t in sync with the efforts actually being made to help the families, and that case workers would be better than supervisors in attendance. Case workers also feel like the AR points out insufficiencies without offering solutions, which is tough on the moral of an already overworked office.

Stakeholders were not optimistic about a prospective judicial review process as they felt the courts were already short-staffed. The courtroom environment would not be suitable to the relationship of trust they’re trying to establish with parents. Some felt it would be too costly and create legal issues given the contrast between the legalities of the reviews and those of the court. While specific challenges exist in the current AR model, in general it seems to be a relative strength and is viewed as a positive support and process, and in general, is seen as a significant improvement over the prior process.

Additional considerations may be needed to address issues of redundancy, multiple sources expressed concern about the formatic nature of the process, which led to ‘box checking’ and didn’t produce the goal of encouraging active efforts towards reunification. Of particular consideration for the process would be that of, for any ICWA case or for any OCS cases where there is a predominantly Alaska Native or Native American population, for the development of a culturally specific component with a greater focus on active efforts and towards reunification.

We recommend that a training or orientation on the AR process be developed and delivered for case workers and families to better understand the scope and goals for AR and what should be the anticipated outcomes that follow from an AR.

**Site specific consideration:** Based on site and general community feedback, and given the unique role of Elders in the Yupik community, and their direct effect on family and community members ability to express ideas and navigate Western systems, we would recommend that a role for Elders to be present during AR reviews be a particular point of emphasis for the Western region. We believe inclusion of an Elder in this process would potentially have a significant impact on active efforts, connecting with community and tribal resources, and may impact reunification efforts.

**Goal 2: Examine if 'family reunification' is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home care placement, and OCS' efforts in pursuit of 'family reunification'.**

The Western region has an asset in the familial nature of the communities. Families work together to keep kids in the home and bring them back home. This is likely the highest contributor to the success of family reunification in the region. Reunification as a priority feels like it's hit-and-miss with the case workers. Most complaints were directed toward workers who come in from the lower 48 and don't understand the different cultural norms for families in Western Alaska. Many stakeholders stated active efforts are not being made in ways that actually support reunification. "Reasonable efforts" are not agreed upon. The visitations were described as "heartless". One non-tribal partner stated visitations were more effective when there was more collaboration with the tribes and that tribal resources were underutilized.

Tribes feel like there is not enough weight given to the input of the ICWA workers. They believe the OCS case workers are doing their best, but are bound by policies that simply don't fit healthy tribal culture, and don't have the time available to invest in supporting family case plans. In this particular culture, being non-confrontation is a value, which is interpreted as complicity and ICWA workers don't feel empowered to advocate for the families they serve.

There is a significant need for the implementation of an immediate and systematic culturally specific and relevant training to address the apparent divide between the Western region and its community partners. While the tribe and community seem to be a strong potential asset, the methodology and current functioning of communication and relationship between OCS and the

Tribe and its members seemed to be antithetical and not supported or facilitated.

Contrasted to other regions where there is a particular effort towards the development of cultural competency and the empowerment of ICWA specialists within the OCS systems, and the efforts to be inclusive of tribal partners and their perspectives, it is a stark contrast for an office which exists in a predominantly Alaska Native region of the state. Over 90% of the clients within this system are Alaska Native, this cultural disconnect represents a significant and ongoing barrier towards reunification and it also represents a breakdown in the basic functioning of the social system. Particular focus must be taken to correct this: it is clear the divide in perspective and difference in practice (for OCS case work) is exacerbating and not alleviating this cultural and system challenge, making it difficult if not impossible for case workers to be successful in their efforts towards reunification.

While the IA division does seem to have a good relationship with the community and has used ICWA workers and Tribal resources to benefit (as highlighted in their efforts towards finding relative placements) its unclear why this relationship doesn't extend to FS or other processes within the Western office.

**Site specific consideration:** Based on site and general community feedback, and given the unique role of Elders in the Yupik community, and their direct effect on family and community members ability to express ideas and navigate Western systems, we would recommend that a role for Elders to be present during all aspects of case work as a support for both families and case workers. The ICWA specialist could use the relationships with local Elders and community leaders to help case workers develop effective strategy for community engagement and interaction with Tribal resources and perspective.

As for any office within a region which is predominantly Alaska Native within the system there is a site specific demand for enhanced training and methodology in the practice of Child Welfare. We recommend that all employees have access and are required to attend the 'Knowing Who You Are' Training as part of their site specific requirements for employment. We believe this program is a potential resource for cultural competency and site specific training which currently is not accessible to the majority of employees within the Western Office

### **Goal 3: Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.**

This area was a significant and relative strength for this region. There was a near unanimous feedback that was affirmative that relative placements were available and that they were utilized and engaged as part of OCS's strategy for placement. Many noted that the IA workers were particularly adept at working with Tribal partners and ICWA workers and with families to identify potential homes. In general the IA workers were noted to be a relative strength across multiple agencies and there seemed to be a particular focus for this division towards active engagement and community involvement.

Stakeholders in both tribal and state agencies expressed that current barrier crime policies are excluding homes of rehabilitated family members who would otherwise be competent caregivers. Availability of housing and funding is a significant barrier for relative placements as already large families don't have the capacity to take on children of relatives. The ERS definitely helps, but many parents simply can't get through the licensing process before those funds cease. Care-givers could use more hands-on support in completing the foster licensing process.

There is a reported chronic understaffing in this office, related by both OCS and community partners. This is having a profound effect on multiple areas of the quality of case work, and seems to be impacting the foster family systems as well. A particular focus for recruitment and retention for this office may need to be a point of particular focus for this region. In addition there seems to be a major cultural divide between the local Yupik community and OCS system, there seems to be a significant and immediate need for a culturally specific and relevant training and ongoing resources to bridge any divide between these perspectives.

The current fingerprinting process seems to be a barrier to the licensing process for foster homes: we would suggest researching alternative processes or methods to address this barrier. There seems to be an ongoing communication or cultural disconnect between OCS and the community, we recommend ICWA, Tribal and Elder resources, which seem abundant in the community, be a particular focus of strategy towards engagement to address and enhance the foster and relative placement efforts, which seem to be a relative strength for this region. In general

there seems to be a particular strength in the general community: the extremely high rate of relative placements demonstrate a willingness of the people of the community to support OCS efforts.

Based on feedback however it does not appear, outside of the initial IA process, that these efforts or this resource has been built on or engaged further, representing a potential resource but also a potential barrier to further engagement if these disconnects continue.

- **Goal 4: Expand public outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.**

Based on interview feedback, it is clear there is little to no engagement with or direct and applicable understanding of the role of Tribal State work or the benefits this can have for OCS systems. Most of those interviewed were not familiar with the process or what, if any, benefit this group can have on their work. Many in OCS were unfamiliar with the impact Tribal State had on their formation of their region or the impact this work had leading towards the creation of their current office. Most were recommended to seek additional information.

It is clear there is a lack of understanding of the work and the importance of and potential application of the efforts of the current Tribal State workgroup for this office/region. We suggest outreach and engagement occur directly with this office. While Tribal stakeholders were more aware of the group and had participated in the work previously, there seems to be at present a significant breakdown of communication and functionality locally between Tribal and State systems. There would be great benefit towards engagement and an open dialogue for local partners, involving both in Tribal State could be an important part of this engagement. Tribal State activities and recommendations could also greatly benefit this region and could represent a resource for this region which seems to current need an expanded perspective on culturally specific and appropriate ways of conduct and of meeting ICWA requirements.

- **Goal 5: Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.**

During this site visit a town hall meeting was held. This allowed an expanded forum for engagement, however also was not likely the appropriate forum for recruitment and retention efforts given some of the other challenges with this form of facilitation, especially in a community where there is a significant breakdown between social systems. This said, we recruited three potential members, received one application, and are passing the contact information for two more potential CRP members to the coordinator. All sites visited were given contact information for the CRP. It is highlighted that the CRP continues to be a resource which isn't well understood, needs promotion, and is limited in what information it receives (outside of direct site visits) as a result.

Recommendations: Focus recruitment efforts from multiple regions, use local CRP members to help spread information and experience, enhance systems, and provide a portal for new information to enter CRP.

## **Other Observations:**

### ***Centralized Intake***

Unlike in Southeast, most stakeholders have gotten accustomed to the new intake system and are satisfied with it. There were some similar frustrations, however. The level of risk assigned by the intake worker(s) is very inconsistent. Supervisors suggested intake workers have the risk assessment defined in the policy and procedure manual handy and simply follow the guideline for risk on all calls. There is also a significant delay between when the information is given to intake worker and it getting back to the local caseworker. Similar to Southeast, reporters often utilize local connections to get kids the help they need in a timely manner.

### ***Cultural Competency***

ICWA workers and other tribal members feel there is a significant cultural disconnect between OCS workers and tribes in the Western region. A lack of understanding and respect for cultural priorities and norms reduces the efficacy of OCS in the region.

### ***Worker Safety***

OCS case workers reported having to visit homes of individuals known to be dangerous. Some just accepted it as part of the danger of the job, but some situations described are unacceptable. Workers have no means of defending themselves and often don't have additional personell available to accompany them on potentially dangerous visits.

### ***Communication with/Accessibility of OCS***

All community partners stated it was *nearly impossible* to reach OCS for case information and messages were rarely returned. This could likely have to do with case workers being stretched out to various and changing locations across the community due to lack of office space. It also could be a matter of beng short-staffed and unable to keep up with the case load communications. Some partners complained that the field office manager was always *in a meeting any time they needed to reach him*. Partners complained they often didn't know why a referral was made, or what the status of an action plan is because they couldn't reach anyone in the office, and no one is communicating with

them. Other regions have made this complaint about the Bethel field office as well.

## **Recommendations:**

### ***Administrative Review Process***

The panel recommends more consistency and competency among intake workers. Callers often feel like they're getting an answering service that has little to no availability to triage and access region-specific resources.

### ***Family Reunification***

While this is a relative strength for the region, the panel recommends more emphasis for workers in the region to collaborate with ICWA workers in developing and supporting case plans toward reunification. With the shortage of OCS workers, and the resources available within the tribes, families would greatly benefit from more collaboration and shared workload with ICWA workers. More recommendations under *cultural competency* below.

### ***Relative Placement***

The panel recommends OCS revise policies around barrier crimes to allow for fair and timely reassessment of potential caregivers who have a history of barrier crimes. The vetting of such individuals should be done in collaboration with the tribes.

### ***Safety***

Reconsider current policies on bear spray to ensure OCS workers aren't unnecessarily vulnerable in potentially dangerous situations (be it animals or humans). Review policies on dangerous visits to ensure that field offices can accommodate adequate protection for workers be it utilization of additional staff, or not assigning women to visits of known rapists, for example.

### ***Cultural Competency***

This may be the most significant concern in the region. Tribes desire to collaborate more with OCS, but don't feel the agency respects their input on how to best care for their members.

1. Require attendance to the *Healthy Families* workshop offered by the Association of Village Council Presidents. This was once a

practice until a worker complained of some of the content and OCS stopped sending workers to the workshop. The workshop orients workers to the people of the region, their values, and strengths they can offer the CPS system.

2. As for any office within a region which is predominantly Alaska Native within the system there is a site specific demand for enhanced training and methodology in the practice of Child Welfare. We recommend that all employees have access and are required to attend the 'Knowing Who You Are' Training as part of their site specific requirements for employment. We believe this program is a potential resource for cultural competency and site specific training which currently is not accessible to the majority of employees within the Western Office.
3. Provide education on region-specific norms and healing practices. For example, if anger management classes have not been successful for tribal members in the region and often exacerbate anger issues, leading to the inability to complete the case plan; perhaps traditional methods, such as mentorship and outdoor activities are culturally appropriate alternatives would be more efficacious. Such measures are being developed in the carrying out of point 6 of the Tribal State Strategic Plan: Culturally specific services and supports.
4. Mandatory collaboration with ICWA workers. Workers complained scheduled visits were rarely coordinated with them rendering them unable to attend or having to make dramatic schedule shifts to accomade the OCS visit. ICWA workers need to be present to further the intent of the tribal state strategic plan, and this does not seem to be a priority for OCS in Bethel.
5. Whether they actively participate or not in a meeting, elders provide an empowering presence for tribal members. This does not translate in Western culture, but is effective in Yup'ik culture. ICWA workers and other tribal members are more likely to be better self-advocates with an elder present. We recommend

case workers in Bethel coordinate with AVCP to have an elder present when possible in case-planning meetings.

6. Interpretive services for Yup'ik speakers. Many tribal members afraid to admit they don't understand what they're being told and comply with case plans or directives. They could benefit greatly with someone can ensure they understand what's being said and can help them ask appropriate questions.

### **Communication with OCS Field Office**

The panel recommends efforts be made to improve accessibility to OCS workers by community partners. Poor communication is going unchecked and hindering collaboration of active efforts in the region.

**Thank you for the carrying the responsibility of protecting our children in the vast and challenging state of Alaska. The CRP is grateful for the opportunity to give feedback in accordance with the federal mandate to assist OCS in achieving it's objectives, as well as the effective and timely execution of the priorities outlined in the Tribal State Strategic Plan.**



## Alaska Citizen Review Panel

### Members

Diwakar K. Vadapalli, Chair  
Rebecca Vale  
Bettyann Steciw  
Sonya Hull  
JP Ouellette  
Donna Daniels  
Cameron Adams  
Wendy Barrett  
Cassandra Kincaid  
Dylan Conduzzi

### Staff

Denali Daniels & Assoc.  
admin@crpalaska.org  
[www.crpalaska.org](http://www.crpalaska.org)

The Alaska Citizen Review Panel evaluates the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies for effectiveness in discharging their child protection responsibilities.

The Panel is mandated through CAPTA 1997 (P.L. 104-235), and enacted through AS 47.14.205.

## Northern Region 2018 Site Visit Report

Regional Office	Northern Region
Field Offices Visited	McGrath
Communities Visited	McGrath
Dates of Visit	April 25-26, 2018
Panelists	Sonya Hull and JP Ouellette

### Stakeholders Consulted

#### **Alaska Native Entities**

*Unavailable due to the recent death of an elder*

#### **Public Safety**

*Alaska Wildlife Trooper Northern Detachment*

#### **Legal Community**

*No local legal community*

#### **School System**

*McGrath School*

#### **Service Providers**

*State of Alaska/Office of Children's Services  
Foster Families in McGrath*

*The Panel would like to thank the stakeholders and partner agencies who met with us during April 25-26, 2018 in McGrath, Alaska.*

**INTRODUCTION:** Before the April 2018 site visit to the Northern Regional Office of OCS in McGrath, the panelists reviewed the annual goals and priority areas established by the CRP for 2017-2018. During the meetings with stakeholders that were conducted as part of the site visit, the panelists used the 2018 workplan priorities to guide the discussions. They collected a vast amount of information during these visits, and used this material to develop a set of key observations and recommendations that are specific to the region.

Given that the Northern region encompasses such a vast and diverse area, this report is focused mostly on the area covered by the McGrath office which includes the villages of Anvik, Grayling, Holy Cross, Lime Village, Medfra, Nikolai, Shageluk, Tekotna, and Telida as well as the area covered by the Delta Junction office who shares supervision in Fairbanks with McGrath.

## Citizen's Review Panel 2018 Workplan Goals

**Goal 1:** Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process and whether the changes made in 2015 have improved the system.

**Goal 2:** Examine if 'family reunification' is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home care placement, and OCS' efforts in pursuit of 'family reunification'.

**Goal 3:** Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.

**Goal 4:** Expand public outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.

**Goal 5:** Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.

## Key Observations:

**Goal 1: Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process and whether the changes made in 2015 have improved the system.**

Stakeholders in the McGrath area, including supervisors in Fairbanks were pleased with the admin review process. The format and precision of the process helps to provide accountability as well as momentum to keep a case moving toward the goal of permanency. There was the notion that more experienced workers may find the AR process more helpful than less experienced workers as they are more comfortable receiving oversight and explaining when and why we have to go outside the checked boxes to accomplish the objectives. The requirement to put a timeline on permanency goals is helpful. As in other regions, parties such as parents and attorneys rarely participate. The current format is much more convenient for rural workers' travel schedule.

**Goal 2: Examine if 'family reunification' is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home care placement, and OCS' efforts in pursuit of 'family reunification'.**

Like Western region, the McGrath area has an asset in the familial nature of the communities. OCS workers and families work together to keep kids out of state custody or to bring them back home when at all possible. The McGrath office appears to an outstanding relationship with all stakeholders including the tribes and families in the area. Longevity is a real asset for this office; trust and collaboration has been built over time and the families are well cared for here. Case workers, supervisors, and ICWA workers lean on one another to coordinate care and utilize the resources at their disposal to prevent removal and to bring kids back home.

Some barriers to reunification that were identified include having to utilize the Bethel Court System which is "notoriously slow" in moving child welfare cases through. It's reportedly difficult to get removal findings from the court in order to begin putting together a case plan for the family.

Another barrier to reunification is that parents in the region seem to have the presumption that OCS will require them to receive services in Anchorage in order to be reunified with their children (this is apparently a lingering idea from the days

of DFYS when that was more often a reality). So parents move to Anchorage and end up getting lost in the shuffle and are unable to stabilize their lives. Of the services that are available in the area, villages either utilize South Central Foundation or YK Health. The areas covered by SCF yield much better results and, consequentially, those cover by YK Health (the villages of Anvik, Holy Cross, Shageluk and Grayling), are less likely to reunify after receiving behavioral health services.

**Goal 3: Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.**

Again, similar to the Bethel area, the presence of large, willing families, and the diligence of case workers in the region make relative placement another strength. Members of the local office, regional office, and ICWA workers all do a good job of completing relative searches prior to the initial assessment.

While ERS is a significant aid to relatives, poverty and housing continue to be challenges to placements with families, especially when members with barrier crimes return home. In areas where there is no post office or a check is difficult to cash, ERS doesn't offer much help.

▪ **Goal 4: Expand public outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.**

Many stakeholders were not very familiar with the Tribal State strategic plan. They were encouraged to review the plan on the OCS website. Some leadership, however was aware that TCC had signed the compact and they were in the process of educating staff on the impact of that. There will be a regional meeting in June to allow more staff to get the information on the plan and how it applies to their work. As noted above, the McGrath office already works very collaboratively with the tribes. The perception is that the tribal courts in place in the region are doing well at this point.

- **Goal 5: Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.**

This goal is not relevant to OCS as far as panel recommendations, though the panel is working to address this goal internally.

## **Other Observations:**

### ***Centralized Intake***

Despite the rough start-up period, this system seems to be working well for the McGrath and Delta Junction areas. The challenges of having a centralized intake system- delayed and inconsistent reporting at times, have been accepted as a reality of having such a system. However, the region works together well to mobilize local resources when a child has an immediate need and generally views the intake line as a useful way to begin documentation of the case.

### ***Worker Safety***

It was noted that the only safety officer in the McGrath region is a Fish and Wildlife officer. That role has a limited capacity to provide safety in the region. During our visit, a good portion of the town was shut down do to a local manhunt that required the assistance of troopers from out of the area to come in. This proves very problematic when a removal is required due to a dangerous person. Similar to every other remote region we've visited, workers have little to no protection when tending to the immediate needs of children.

There was an incident in February with a very unsafe child and the community members didn't feel safe intervening. The fish and wildlife trooper was out of the area and the VPSO position was vacant. The troopers from Aniak had to go through Bethel and got stuck due to weather. The SSA had to wait for the Trooper and there was no worker available due to vacancies. The SSA here in McGrath had to do the removal with the Trooper once they arrived, which took several days. Child safety was compromised for several days due to the unavailability of the Troopers. Ultimately the child was removed and the perpetrators were arrested.

## **McGrath Field Office**

It's notable that the field office worker in McGrath has an outstanding reputation in the community with all stakeholders interviewed. Both the case worker and the SSA work very well in the community and obviously have an investment in the well-being of the families under their "watch". It's another example of the type of worker we need more of in the system. More ideas about how to work toward that are addressed in the next session.

## **Worker Longevity, Experience, and Resilience**

In the face of worker shortage and increasing caseloads, finding qualified workers that have the skills, character, and *resilience* to serve the needs of Alaskan families is key. Of the regions the CRP has visited, the ones that produce the best results have some things in common. Staff at varying levels include people who have time invested in the region as well as in their field of work. Workers producing the best results are invested in the communities they serve either because they grew up the area, or they have lived there long enough to consider it *home*. In a field where the average worker lasts about 2.5 years, those that have 5 and 10+ years in the field are invaluable assets, especially if they're invested in their region. The panel presumes there is a significant screening process for new applicants, but the across the regions, the shared perspective is that the current crisis has led to a significant decrease in the qualifications to becoming a case worker including job-specific education and experience. While this may serve to fill empty positions, it doesn't send the best Alaska has to offer into our areas of greatest need. In fact, sending unqualified workers into the field has created more problems, per our observation and the feedback we've received, than it has resolved including distrust and animosity between families and OCS. This and a lack of focus on self-care perpetuate burn-out at a high cost to families, workers, and the state budget.

## **Recommendations:**

## **Family Reunification**

While this is a relative strength for the region, it seems that villages who rely on YK Health for behavioral health services often don't achieve results leading to reunification. It's unclear if the new health facility currently underway in Bethel will bring about needed changes in YKH's capacity. It may be prudent to consider working with SCF to expand their service area in the region.

The judicial boundaries for the region are not serving the needs of the families who require the assistance of the courts. Consideration should be made to shift the region's court caseload to Fairbanks where OCS workers report having a much better working relationship. It should be noted, however, that this recommendation is made without the benefit of input from the tribes on the issue and it would be helpful to get such input before making such a transition.

## **Safety**

Reconsider current policies on bear spray to ensure OCS workers aren't unnecessarily vulnerable in potentially dangerous situations (be it animals or humans). Review policies on dangerous visits to ensure that field offices can accommodate adequate protection for workers in the absence of safety personnel.

## **Worker Longevity, Experience and Resilience**

The panel recommends more focus be placed on identifying those workers who have longevity, experience, *and* are producing the best results and giving them opportunities to mentor new case workers.

The panel also recommends screening applicants for a significant measure of education and/or work experience in the field of social work.

In addition, we recommend screening for resiliency. While we understand it's unfair to disqualify an applicant based the number of ACE's they may report (for instance), it's observable that unresolved trauma in younger, less experienced workers hinders their ability to adequately and objectively care for families in traumatic situations leading to dissatisfaction and high turnover rates in the field.

In addition, more attention needs to be given to self-care. This requires an aggressive effort by supervisors to invest in providing staff (including themselves) with routine wellness checks which could include counseling/coaching and wellness workshops offered by SCF or other agencies. Perhaps a regional chaplain or similar role could provide a measure of mental and emotional well-being that is currently not being met.

**Thank you for the carrying the responsibility of protecting our children in the vast and challenging state of Alaska. The CRP is grateful for the opportunity to give feedback in accordance with the federal mandate to assist OCS in achieving it's objectives, as well as the effective and timely execution of the priorities outlined in the Tribal State Strategic Plan.**

# WORK PLAN

2017 -2018

**Approved: September 15, 2017**



**ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL**  
880 H Street, Suite 106, Anchorage, AK 99501

*The Alaska Citizen Review Panel evaluates the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies for effectiveness in discharging their child protection responsibilities. The Panel is mandated through CAPTA 1997 (P.L. 104-235), and enacted through AS 47.14.2015.*

[www.crpalaska.org](http://www.crpalaska.org)

This document outlines the proposed work and annual calendar of the Alaska Citizen Review Panel for the year 2017-2018. During the course of its work, the Panel often identifies specific practices, procedures, or policies for deeper examination at a later time. A list of these has been maintained over the years and serves as a primary source of focus areas for the Panel's work. A set of 4-6 goals are identified each year which either address one or more policies, procedures, and practices of the state's child protection agency in Alaska, or are focused on the internal functions of the Panel.

The Panel held a meeting August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Anchorage Alaska to discuss the goals and focus areas for the upcoming year. There were guest speakers, partners, advisors and legislators who spoke with the CRP during this meeting, and the goals outlined in this document reflect the outcome of these and other discussions. This document consists of three main sections: goals, other major work, and calendar.

**Goals:** Each goal may start out being broad, vague or containing multiple sub goals. Each goal will be further specified and may be narrowed or broadened through the year. In addition, goals from the previous year may continue to be relevant or may not have been fully addressed. All potential goals are discussed by the Panel before adopting goals for the year.

**Other major work:** The Panel also continually collects and compiles data and information on several other components of OCS' work, and addresses selected issues of importance that may surface during the course of the year. Each year's annual report provides specific content on these issues. The Panel also conducts surveys to collect public input, maintains and manages an active website, and presents at various venues to increase public awareness about the Panel's work and functions.

**Calendar:** The Panel meets quarterly, as required by the mandate. In addition, the Panel meets with OCS senior leadership each month, conducts site visits, presents to the legislature, and attends the national CRP conference. Some of the dates identified in the calendar are tentative when this document was approved.

#### GOALS FOR THE YEAR 2017-2018

- GOAL 1:** Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process
- GOAL 2:** Examine if 'family reunification' is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home placement, and OCS' efforts in pursuit of 'family reunification'.
- GOAL 3:** Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.
- GOAL 4:** Expand Public Outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.
- GOAL 5:** Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.

## GOALS

---

### **GOAL 1: Examine the effectiveness of the current administrative review process**

The panel continues to hear two major concerns about the new administrative review process adopted by OCS in 2015:

1. The new process is too short and does not allow the opportunity for all parties of the case to know each other, nor discuss many aspects of the case.
2. The process serves mostly to check for minimal compliance and identify the next impending deadlines, with minimal attention to substantive progress on the case.

The new review process was a substantial change, and examining its efficacy and efficiency in comparison to the old process has been a goal for the CRP since the change. Our past work revealed that OCS senior management made the change to primarily improve efficiency, and ensure the reviews were completed on time.

This has traditionally been an area of strength for OCS. According to the CFSR that just concluded, periodic case reviews were found to be a strength (Item 21). There were only three reviews overdue as of January 2017. Though data were unavailable on this item in 2009, stakeholder interviews established that case reviews were conducted regularly and on time. While it is clear that reviews are being completed in a timely fashion (efficiency), the CFSR does not assess the effectiveness of these reviews. CRP continues to receive complaints about their effectiveness since moving the reviews to the QA section. In discussions with OCS, the agency leadership expressed a desire to better understand these concerns.

Therefore, the panel intends to reach out to various stakeholders to better document the concerns with the current QA reviews. The panel will:

1. invite various stakeholder agencies, individual professionals, and other interested parties to relay their concerns through written statements, during one-on-one interviews, or through a survey.
2. closely examine the intended outcomes of the new administrative review process, establish criteria of effectiveness, and assess effectiveness of the process.

### **GOAL 2: Examine if ‘family reunification’ is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home placement, and OCS’ efforts is pursuit of ‘family reunification’.**

The panel outlined five allegations stemming from the packet of information forwarded to the panel by Alaska Department of Law (DOL), Office of Special Prosecutions on January 18, 2016 (see the panel’s 2017 Annual Report). Among those, it was alleged that OCS does not prioritize family reunification, and spends very little resources on this effort.

Reunification is a widely preferred outcome when children are removed from their home. Federal law requires ‘reasonable efforts’ in all cases, and ‘active efforts’ in cases where the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is applicable, to return the child home. Both federal and

state laws provide exceptions in cases where reunification is not possible. Considerable debate over several decades pitching family reunification against the safety of the child caused wild shifts in federal policy. Irrespective of the debates, OCS' policies and practice must adhere to the current set of federal and state statutes and regulations. However, since circumstances of each case are unique, and the courts have some discretion in determining if reunification is preferred in a particular case, OCS' practices may vary over a spectrum of possible paths in pursuit of permanency.

To determine if reunification is prioritized as a goal for children in out-of-home placements, the panel will:

1. examine OCS' data on permanency outcomes to determine trends in reunification over time
2. examine OCS' policies and procedures to determine if and how family reunification is prioritized

Since many factors impact the permanency outcome, and reunification is one among many possible permanency outcomes, it is extremely difficult to establish adequacy of effort. The courts overseeing a child protection case are required to examine every case for either reasonable or active efforts. Therefore, the panel will

3. consult with the Alaska court system to explore the possibility of determining adequacy of efforts
4. confer with OCS staff, relevant stakeholders, and service providers to collect perspectives on adequacy of efforts

**GOAL 3: Examine OCS' efforts in finding relatives for placement of children in foster care.**

In its 2017 Annual Report, the panel outlined five allegations stemming from the packet of information forwarded to the panel by Alaska Department of Law (DOL), Office of Special Prosecutions on January 18, 2016. Among those, it was alleged that the efforts of OCS' workers in searching for relatives of children in foster care for their placement were inadequate.

Federal payments for foster care and adoption assistance are contingent upon Federal law under title IV-E of the Social Security Act, which requires that a state "consider giving preference to an adult relative over a nonrelated caregiver when determining placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant State child protection standards" (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(19)). Alaska OCS defined relative as "an individual who is related to another by blood, adoption, marriage, or Tribal custom" (CPS Policy Manual § 3.5.4, updated 12/12/2016).

Title IV-E (42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(29)) further requires "that, within 30 days after the removal of a child from the custody of the parent or parents of the child, the State shall exercise due diligence to identify and provide notice to the following relatives: all adult grandparents, all parents of a sibling of the child, where such parent has legal custody of such sibling, and other

adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents), subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence, that

- A. specifies that the child has been or is being removed from the custody of the parent or parents of the child;
- B. explains the options the relative has under Federal, State, and local law to participate in the care and placement of the child, including any options that may be lost by failing to respond to the notice;
- C. describes the requirements under paragraph (10) of this subsection to become a foster family home and the additional services and supports that are available for children placed in such a home; and
- D. if the State has elected the option to make kinship guardianship assistance payments under paragraph (28) of this subsection, describes how the relative guardian of the child may subsequently enter into an agreement with the State under section 673(d) of this title to receive the payments;

Chapter 3 of the OCS' Child Protection Manual provides detailed instructions on relative search. Adequacy of efforts can only be assessed against certain criteria. In response to the allegation that efforts of OCS' workers in identifying relatives are not adequate, the panel will:

1. Examine relevant federal and state statutes, regulations, and OCS' policies to determine criteria for adequacy
2. Confer with OCS staff, relevant stakeholders and service providers to identify practices and procedures for relative search
3. Identify if these practices meet the criteria identified above

**GOAL 4: Expand Public Outreach in collaboration with efforts under the Tribal-State strategic plan.**

"Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children: Strategic Plan 2016-2020" was released in August 2016, and is a product of innovative and collaborative work by OCS, several other state agencies, and many leaders from various Alaska Native tribes and tribal organizations. In response to the panel's insistence, OCS invited the CRP to participate in any of the six Priority Area Working Groups to implement the plan. The panel consistently participated in two priority area group deliberations during this year.

The panel's participation in the priority area groups opened some potential opportunities, specifically under the Community Engagement Priority Area of the plan. In recognition of the statutory responsibilities and current efforts of Alaska CRP in engaging various stakeholders and community partners, and due to considerable overlap between the panel's duties and the goals of the Community Engagement Priority Area Workgroup, OCS and CRP committed to leverage current CRP efforts in furthering the work of this Workgroup.

Members of this priority area group have been discussing various ways of leveraging CRP efforts, and avoiding duplicate efforts. Specifically, they identified two tasks for next year:

1. Town hall meetings: The panel plans to conduct a town hall meeting during every site visit this year. The Community Engagement Priority Area Group identified this as an opportunity for community outreach. The panel will work with the Priority Area Group members to design and conduct town hall meetings in way that will further the goals of both entities.
2. Survey of ICWA workers and Tribal Service Providers: CRP conducts an annual survey of all attendees at the BIA Social Services sessions of the BIA Providers Conference. OCS conducts a periodic survey of tribal service providers. Where both surveys are conducted in different ways, they cover similar topics and reach the same target population. In order to maximize the benefit and avoid duplication, these surveys will be combined into one, and will be conducted by the panel.

**GOAL 5: Strengthen the panel through aggressive recruitment of new members, enhanced website, and tools to reach diverse groups of stakeholders.**

**Recruitment** – The panel agreed that recruitment needs to be a top priority and that participation of panel members must be encouraged. The opportunity to serve as a panel member needs to be advertised and promoted, and existing panel members should be encouraged to suggest potential members. An updated Job Description for Panelists should be disseminated and suggestions need to be followed up by the CRP Coordinator.

**Website** – The CRP Coordinator will continue improvements and regular maintenance of the CRP website, and will distribute the link to panel members on a regular basis. Materials will continue to be posted in a timely manner.

**Mailing Lists** – The CRP needs mailing lists or access to mailing lists to conduct the service providers' survey. Lists should be solicited from various groups of stakeholders.

## **OTHER IMPORTANT WORK**

---

### **Proposed restructuring of the panel**

Senate Bill 122, introduced during the 2017 legislative session, proposes to move the Alaska CRP from its current location within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) to the Alaska Ombudsman's Office. The bill also proposes to significantly reorganize the panel's functions, membership, and accountability structures with respect to OCS. This is a substantial change, and the panel looks forward to contributing to the conversations that will significantly impact its functioning in the future.

### **Indicators of OCS performance**

During the course of its work over the years, the Panel identified the following indicators that are useful in understanding OCS' operation, and helpful in contextualizing the panel's findings.

1. Performance of each OCS field office of Quality Assurance (QA) reviews: CRP collects data from each QA review through the year, and compiles a database to assess relative strengths and challenges of various field and regional offices. This has been very helpful in choosing locations for panel's site visits, and quickly identify the systemic challenges of each field and regional office.
2. Quarterly data on vacancy and turnover: The panel compiles this data by quarter, specifically among frontline Protective Services Specialists positions. Turnover among these positions has consistently been close to 35% over the last fifteen years. Many other challenges faced by OCS are directly related to this. This data allows the panel to better understand the factors enabling such high turnover.
3. Employee survey data: The panel's report from the OCS employee survey in 2016 was appreciated by OCS' as having more depth in analysis. While OCS appreciated the work, it chose to have its internal QA unit conduct the next employee survey. The panel will continue to collect data from the employee survey conducted by OCS and examine trends on various employee-related challenges and opportunities.
4. Backlog of Initial Assessments (IA): The panel has been concerned with the periodic high backlog of Initial Assessments at OCS. While many of these backlogged IA's may be low priority investigations that were never closed due to high workloads, this is nevertheless an indicator of many issues including high workloads, turnover, and other systemic issues at OCS. The panel will continue to monitor the high backlog of IAs.

### **Outreach**

The panel will continue to present its work to the following:

- Committees on Health and Social Services in the Alaska House and Alaska Senate
- Advisory Board of the Alaska Center for Resource Families
- Alaska Court Improvement Project

- BIA Providers Conference
- Alaska's Children's Justice Act Task Force
- The National CRP Network

The panel also plans to conduct a series of town hall meetings as part of its site visits to the five OCS regions this year. In addition, the panel will be available to any group of stakeholders or individuals for presentations. Much of the information about the panel, and all its published documents, are available on the panel's website.

# CALENDAR

---

## Quarterly Panel Meetings

The Panel will meet for 90 minutes quarterly on the second Tuesday of each the month, unless otherwise noted. A public notice of the panel’s meeting, along with the agenda and related materials will be posted on the State of Alaska Public Notices system at least one week ahead of the meeting. While these meetings are public, they are business meetings, with opportunity for the public to witness the work of the panel. All meeting dates in the table below are tentative, subject to change due to scheduling conflicts.

Quarter	Date	Time
1	Tuesday September 19, 2017	12:00 – 1:30 pm
2	Tuesday December 12, 2017	12:00 – 1:30 pm
3	Tuesday March 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	12:00 – 1:30 pm
4	Tuesday June 12 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	12:00 – 1:30 pm

## Meetings with OCS senior leadership

The panel meets with OCS senior leadership every month during the panel’s work year (August through June). These meetings are not open to public. The purpose of these meetings is to continue to discuss important matters as they relate to the current challenges and opportunities facing OCS, the panel’s progress on its work plan goals, and other matters as necessary.

## Site Visits

The panel intends to complete five site visits this year, one in each of the five OCS regions. We plan to conduct one each during the months of October 2017 through February 2018.

## National CRP Conference

The 2018 National CRP Conference is scheduled for May 15-17, 2018, in Detroit, MI. Two individuals will be representing Alaska’s panel at the national conference.

**AUTHORITY:** The Alaska Citizen Review Panel (CRP) is federally mandated through the 1996, 2003, and 2010 amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and authorized through Alaska Statute Sec. 47.14.205. The Panel operates under a set of operating guidelines which are available on the Panel's website.

**FUNCTIONS:** The primary purpose of the Citizen Review Panel is to help state and local child protective services be more responsive to community needs and to give stakeholders the opportunity to participate in improving child protective services through public outreach and engagement.

The Panel is neither a grievance redress mechanism nor an audit mechanism, and thus is not equipped to address any concerns or situations involving individual cases or contracts. Where applicable, the Panel may review individual cases and contracts to examine systemic issues.

#### PRIMARY FUNCTIONS OF THE ALASKA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Evaluates the extent to which OCS is effectively discharging its child protection responsibilities under:

- The state plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under 42 U.S.C. 5106a(b);
- Child Protection standards under federal and state laws; and
- Any other criteria that the CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children.

Conducts public outreach and gathers public comment on current OCS procedures and practices involving children and family services.

Advocates for relevant actions that would help improve the child protection services system in Alaska.

**STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP:** Membership on the Panel is voluntary and is expected to represent the diversity of the state. The Panel selects its own members through a formal recruitment and application process. Members elect a Chair and Vice Chair from among the membership. While members are expected to serve for at least two years, there are no stipulated term limits.

**STAFF SUPPORT:** Denali Daniels & Associates (DDA) provides staff support under a contract with the Office of Children's Services. The CRP Coordinator can be contacted at:

Alaska CRP Coordinator  
880 H Street, Suite 106  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Email: [admin@crpalaska.org](mailto:admin@crpalaska.org)

