



North Carolina Department of Public Safety

Governor's Crime Commission

Roy Cooper, Governor
Erik A. Hooks, Secretary

Robert Evans, Chairman
Caroline C. Valand, Executive Director

Children's Justice Act (CJA) Quarterly Meeting

April 9, 2020

1 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Call to Order:

Chair Wendy Sotolongo called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

Attendees:

Whitney Belich; Molly Berkoff; Cindy Bizzell; Gail Carelli; Kiesha Crawford; Donald Cureton Jr.; Frederick Douglas; Jennifer Evans; Vickie Foster; Kella Hatcher; Deana Joy; Christy Malott; Vic Maynard; Matt McKay; Rhonda Morris; Shamioka Rhinehart; Susan Robinson; Wendy Sotolongo; Kristine Sullivan; Emi Wyble.

Review and Approval of Minutes: Chair Sotolongo called attention to the meeting minutes of January 16, 2020. Susan Robinson moved to approve, Cindy Bizzell seconded.

DSS Update: Emi Wyble

- Social workers are required to visit children in foster care on a monthly basis. The Children's Bureau issued new policy in March permitting such visits to be conducted by videoconferencing so long as the child's safety is not compromised. The risk of not having face to face with the child must be weighed against the risk of contagion.
- Other meetings such Child and Family Team Meeting are also being done via video or telephone conferencing.
- Additional questions were added to CPS' intake screening form that are Covid-19 related. When CPS staff gets to a home, they must ask the questions again. Staff must maintain social distancing regardless of the answer they receive.
- For parents with court-ordered visitation, DSS issued guidance on March 20 recommending that the county reach out to the parents and request that they temporarily cease in-person visitation. Parents may agree to video, Facetime or telephone visitation. For those who do not agree, the visitation must continue unless the Director believes that the visitation is not consistent with the juvenile's health and safety.
- There were concerns that some agencies or parents may not have access to internet or electronic devices.

2020 Applications, Program Instruction, Funding, and Scoring: Toni Lockley

- Program Instruction. Two applications for 2020 CJA were received. They were Safe and Secure Schools (SASS) and 2020 NCCDA Child Abuse Resource Prosecutor. Both are two-year applications. The 2020 NCCDA Child Abuse Resource Prosecutor will provide support and training to allied professionals in a criminal justice context. SASS is a continuation project for Disability Rights North Carolina.

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- Funding. The estimated funding for 2020 is \$490,800.00. After 15% for planning and administration, \$417,180.00 will be available for both grants. The 2020 NCCDA Resource Prosecutor Project requested \$256,315.00 and the SASS Project requested \$244,777.89. The funding period is October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2023.
- Scoring. Nine members did the scoring (Attachment 1).
- For the first time, CJA made the decision about the applications versus Juvenile Justice (JJ).
- A motion was made to approve funding the two applications proportionally. Each will receive approximately 95% of their request. Cindy Bizzell made the motion, Matt McKay seconded.

5-Year Assessment: Emi Wyble

The federal government wants to ensure that the funds CJA receive aligns with the work that State DSS is doing for their Child and Family Services Review (CFSR).

3-Year Assessment Discussion, CJA Task Force (Attachment 2): Chair Sotolongo

New recommendations need to be submitted by the end of May 2020. The recommendations which were approved on April 26, 2018 were reviewed to see what adjustments were needed, especially in view of Covid-19 pandemic. Below were the recommended changes and comments.

Section A overall is about improving investigative, administrative and judicial handling of cases.

A.1. Transform the way children and families who enter the court system are treated, by creating a “trauma-informed” courthouse:

- Support the dissemination of best practices, including procedures to limit the number of people in a courtroom during each hearing.
- Support the creation of family friendly waiting rooms.
 - Partnership with local libraries to allow books to be checked out
 - Book donations
 - Age appropriate toys
- Support training on how a parent’s own trauma history impacts his/her experience with investigative and judicial systems and ability to engage in services.
- Support trainings on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and resiliency.

Recommendations/comments:

- A.1. was broad enough to cover things that may arise or become elevated risk due to the pandemic.
- Third bullet should read: “Support training, including online design and delivery, on how parent’s trauma history impacts access or experience as with investigative or judicial systems.”
- Whenever we see the word training, add qualifier to include online design and delivery and do a global update.

A.2. Support efforts to reduce trauma to children appearing in court proceedings:

- Develop trauma informed tools (video, booklet) to explain court processes and court preparation for the child victim and their adult support persons, including mental health providers.
- Ensure video testimony technology is easily available throughout the state and provide training for attorneys, judges and clerks on availability and use of video testimony technology.
- Support training for law enforcement, judges, clerks, and attorneys on issues specific to child testimony including identifying the intellectual, linguistic and emotional maturity of the child and identifying appropriate courtroom modifications for the child.

Recommendations/comments:

- Need to expand testimony technology. Prosecutors are encouraged to use it.
- For second bullet, recommend that video testimony be available to all parties not just children. Therefore, change “children” to “parties” in A.2. first sentence.
- The second bullet needs to be broadened. In the criminal context, there are very few instances where video testimonies are allowed in court; child testimony is very much it; other use is very limited.

A.3. Support improved integration and collaboration between Child Fatality Review Teams, Local Child Fatality Prevention Teams and Community Child Protection Teams, the State Child Fatality Prevention Team and the Child Fatality Task Force.

Recommendation/comments:

Change to read, “Support the efforts to strengthen the statewide Children Fatality Prevention System”.

A.6. Identify, support and promote agencies who provide training and classes on recognizing, responding to and reporting child abuse and neglect:

- Training for school personnel including school administrators and School Resource Officers (SROs) on child abuse signs and symptoms, including signs of maltreatment that may be overlooked and/or explained away and training on mandatory reporting laws.
- Peer counseling models that include child abuse and neglect signs and symptoms and understanding mandatory reporting laws.

- Training for likely reporters and responders around special population victims such as children with disabilities and LGBTQ+ youth.

Recommendation/comment:

Broaden third bullet to say, "Training for likely reporters and responders, including training around special population victims such as children with disabilities and LGBTQ+ youth."

A.8. Support the efforts of the multidisciplinary workgroup to standardize forensic interviews of children who have been abused or neglected through 1) Implementation of Forensic Interviewing Standards; 2) Implementation of Statewide Training and Peer Review System; And 3) Growth and Enhancement of CAC's and Local Child Welfare Capacity.

Recommendations/comment:

Change "Implementation" to read "Dissemination and training".

CACs grew from 35 to 47 but there are still large targeted, under-represented areas in need.

Section B dealt mostly with testing, innovative approaches and techniques.

B.3. Increase the use of data to improve judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

Recommendations/Comments:

Reporting responsibilities. New mandatory reporting to law enforcement from Safe Child Act. Due to the law changes, there have been lots of questions about this matter from law enforcement, child welfare and prosecutors.

B.4. Increase the use of technology to increase efficiencies in child abuse and neglect cases:

- Allow service by publication via internet.
- Allow court participation via internet (Skype, WebEx, etc.) for children, therapists, incarcerated parents.
- Allow parties to check upcoming court dates.

Recommendations/Comments:

- For bullet one, there is a big gap in people's interaction with paper exchange because courts require paper filing. E-filing is done in other parts of the courts just not in child welfare cases.
- Add a new bullet for e-filing in child welfare area to read, "Support efforts to allow e-filing in child welfare cases."

Section C dealt with procedures to provide comprehensive protection for children in a combination of jurisdictions.

C.3. Support legislation to mandate the use of the child advocacy centers for sexual abuse and severe physical abuse investigations when available.

Recommendations/comments:

It was pointed out that severe physical abuse should not be seen at a CAC but rather at a hospital.

C.5. Support the creation of a uniform training curriculum for School Resource Officers to include:

- Child abuse signs and symptoms, including signs of maltreatment that may be overlooked and/or explained away.
- Issues pertinent to special population victims such as children with disabilities and LGBTQ+ youth.
- Mandatory reporting laws.

Recommendations/comments.

SRO classes are now mandatory. The training should be extended to all law enforcement officers in Basic Law Enforcement Training not just SROs.

In the first sentence, change “creation” to “implementation”. It should read, “Support the implementation of a uniform training curriculum for School Resource Officers and Law Enforcement Officers to include: [keep the remaining bullets].

Old Business: None

New Business: None

The next meeting is scheduled for July 9th, 2020.

Adjournment:

Chair Sotolongo adjourned the meeting at 3:20 p.m.

Minutes taken by Annette Parchue.

Attachments:

1. 2020 CJA Scores
2. 2018 CJA Application and Three-Year Assessment Amended 7_25_2108