

CITIZENS REVIEW PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

Calendar Year 2021

Submitted by

Child Death Review Executive Committee

Children's Justice Act Task Force

*Clark County Department of Family Services
Citizens Advisory Committee*

To

Nevada Division of Child and Family Services

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Executive Summary

Public Law 104-234, Title I, Section 106, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides for a state grant program for the support and improvement of state Child Protective Systems (CPS). CAPTA requires that Nevada have at least three (3) Citizen Review Panels (CRP) to receive funding for child protection efforts. Citizen Review Panels are to review various aspects of the child protection system at the state and local levels and make recommendations for improvements. (See Appendix A).

Panels include members with expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect and have diverse membership, including but not limited to, representatives from:

- Community Advocacy and Non-Profit Organizations
- Public Child Serving Agencies
- Law Enforcement
- Parent and Youth Leaders
- Court Systems including Attorneys and Judges
- Mental and Physical Health
- Education
- Public Health

A list of each panel's members and their affiliations are provided in [Appendix B](#).

Nevada has designated three (3) standing committees to serve as CRP's. All Nevada CRP's meet at least quarterly, and meetings adhere to Open Meeting Law. Panels may make recommendations for training, policy or system improvements. Nevada CRPs include the:

- Child Death Review Executive Committee (CDR) which provides coordination and oversight of local child death review teams;
- Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJA), which is charged with developing, establishing, and operating programs designed to improve the assessment, investigation and prosecution of suspected child abuse and neglect;
- Clark County Department of Family Services Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) which identifies and communicates perspectives on services provided and how to best meet the needs of families that utilize the Clark County Department of Family Services; and

Panel Purpose and Activities

Executive Committee to Review the Death of Children (CDR)

Purpose

Nevada makes every effort to reduce the number of preventable child fatalities and near fatalities through prevention messaging, training, and other initiatives. Nevada's child fatality review process includes local multi-disciplinary teams reviewing most of the child fatalities, between ages 0-17 years of age, within their own communities and making recommendations to the Executive Committee to Review the Death of Children. The Executive Committee is established through NRS 432B.403-NRS 432B.4095. It is a multidisciplinary team, which provides coordination and oversight of local child death review teams. The committee meets quarterly, adopts statewide protocols for the review of child deaths and distributes a statewide annual report that includes statistics and recommendations to prevent child deaths as well as regulatory and policy changes. The multidisciplinary team is comprised of representatives from local child death review teams, law enforcement, mental health, child welfare, vital statistics, and the office of the attorney general.

In 2021, the Executive Committee to Review the Death of Children continued to collaborate with the Regional Child Death Review Teams, as well as other State Agencies, such as the Bureau of Health Care Quality and Compliance, in an effort to prevent further child deaths. The Executive Committee has continued to closely monitor the child deaths by suicide throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic and closely looked at the child homicide deaths and data in an effort to make a meaningful recommendation for this report. The Executive Committee has also worked to strengthen their capacity as a Citizen Review Panel by ensuring they are making recommendations based off of trends seen over the course of the year, reviewing the responses to the recommendations and the agency's progress of the implementation of the recommendations.

In 2003, Nevada passed a law placing a one-dollar tax on death certificates, which is used to fund prevention campaigns around the top four (4) causes and manner of deaths in Nevada. The Executive Committee awarded \$300,000.00 for SFY 2022 targeting prevention activities that focused on safe sleep practices and suicide prevention. The following projects were funded:

Activities

- **Community Chest:**

This agency provided an opportunity for children in their community to participate in the Community Chest's Comstock Kids program twice weekly for a year. This goal of the program is to increase children's protective factors and reduce the probability of participation in risk behaviors while lessening risk factors such as depression and suicide. The agency also provided the Cribs for Kids program to families in their rural area.

- **Crisis Support Services of Nevada:**

In 2011, Crisis Call Center established the Text4life campaign which allows clients to text the crisis call center. This is especially helpful to youth who are more comfortable texting than talking on the phone. This grant allowed expansion of this service, to include texting and a follow up call if youth agree.

- **Washoe County Human Services Agency:**

Washoe County Human Services Agency proposed to launch a multi-faceted Infant Safe Sleep Awareness Community Outreach campaign that was designed to educate the public about best practices when it comes to putting a baby safely to sleep, as well as to aid in connecting community members to resources for additional information and support. The campaign utilized outdoor media, digital media and television to create targeted messaging year-round, with an emphasis on Safe Sleep Awareness Month in October. Efforts focused on the greater Reno/Sparks region; however, through the use of local television and radio, as well as social media, messaging reached throughout Washoe County and beyond.

- **Children’s Cabinet:**

Children’s Cabinet and Marriage have partnered with Family Therapist, Dr. Steven Nicholas to access and train for living constructs of youth, with a focus on their emotional affect, energy, self-perception, and future-orientation prior to asking about specific suicidal intentions. This year, the grant expanded the training to include parents and expanded the program to Lyon County Schools.

- **Nevada Medical Center:**

Nevada Medical Center’s “Hope Mean Nevada” initiative and “#ask5” campaign were designed as a statewide effort to share digital and in-person mental health and wellness resources to raise awareness around mental health and child/adolescent (teen) suicide prevention. This year the grant was used to increase awareness of comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention via a mass media and technology campaign that targeted youth and their families, as well as ensuring access and information for community resources.

- **NyE Communities Coalition:**

NyE Communities Coalition partnered with Nye County School District, other partners, and local businesses to prevent the death of children in Nye, Esmeralda, and Lincoln Counties from unsafe sleep methods, and suicide.

- **Suicide Prevention Network:**

This agency aimed to reduce child deaths by suicide by using an upstream prevention approach that focused on reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors through town hall sessions.

CDR Recommendations:

- It is recommended that DCFS partner with sister agencies and other community providers as appropriate to enhance the Choose Your Partner Carefully campaign to ensure the language used in the brochure uses the appropriate, inclusive language and is on par with the current research, to help people identify when they may be in an unhealthy relationship that may impact their children, including placing the children in an unsafe situation.
- It is recommended that DCFS perform a statewide analysis of current programs that are working with children that may provide prevention around the top four causes/manners of death to identify where any systematic gaps may be so that preventative funding can be more precisely targeted.

Children’s Justice Act Task Force (CJA)

Purpose

The Nevada Children’s Justice Act Task Force was established in 1994 as a requirement of Section 107(a) of the Child Abuse and Protection Treatment Act (P.L. 111-320) to receive an annual grant to improve child protection services in the State. The CJA is a multidisciplinary team with 14 unique disciplines represented.

The CJA is charged with developing, establishing, and operating programs designed to improve the assessment and investigation of suspected child abuse and neglect cases with a special emphasis on sexual abuse and exploitation, child fatalities, and cases involving children with disabilities or serious health-related problems who are suspected victims of child abuse or neglect. The CJA grant funds multidisciplinary training, policy development, and pilot programs.

Activities

- **Maintenance of the Nevada Children’s Justice Task Force:**
To support and maintain the full multidisciplinary Task Force through member recruitment, training and provision of technical assistance/consultation and travel to attend meetings. Task Force members will develop and monitor the implementation of objectives for training and policy through approved activities. The Task Force will support interagency collaboration and Court Improvement Plan (CIP) collaboration implementing the intent of the CJA grant.
- **Professional Training:**
Provide child protection workers and/or stakeholders “front end” specialty, discipline specific and advanced training. Training will be prioritized, but not limited to, CSEC, sexual abuse, and forensic interviewing, all of which will support trauma-informed practice.
- **Support Implementation of CSEC Protocol:**
Support current CSEC efforts in Nevada, including work being completed by the CSEC Coalition subcommittees to further support the implementation of the CSEC Protocol. The CJA Task Force will collaborate with the DCFS CSEC Coordinator to identify ways that the CJA Task Force can support current CSEC efforts.
- **Support Child Advocacy Centers:**
Forensic interview trainings to be provided to CAC members and stakeholders. A rural CAC intends to develop a “soft interview” room to conduct forensic interviews. CJA Task Force to collaborate with the Nevada State CAC Chapter to discuss opportunities and develop a plan in which the CJA Task Force can further support Nevada’s CACs.
- **Support Use of latest technology:**
Provide funding for laptops and docking stations to rural “front end” child welfare workers to improve the investigation, assessment and prosecution of child abuse and neglect.
- **Support the Parent Court Process Guide:**
Provide funding for printing of the Child Welfare Court Process Guide for Families Handbook and Quick Guide Roadmap. These materials were created as part of Nevada’s Program Improvement Plan (PIP). These guides are provided to parents by the child welfare agencies, and sometimes by the courts, when a child welfare agency has taken legal custody of a child. Each child welfare agency will be developing a process for distribution of these guides.

- **Support Domestic Violence Training for Child Protection Workers:**
Provide child protection workers “front end” specialty, discipline specific and advanced training to expand basic understanding of the risk and protective factors for children living in homes with domestic violence. The subgrantee provided trainings to child protection workers in two of three child welfare jurisdictions in March and April 2021, with the final jurisdiction scheduled for training in June 2021. Once the final training is provided, the subgrantee intends to continue to provide this training, while making enhancements based on feedback from child protection workers that have taken the training. The training will be provided again to child protection workers throughout Nevada.
- **Support Domestic Violence Training for Child Protection Workers:**
Review and assess needed changes to legislation and/or policy that governs child protection, specifically addressing the “front-end” of the child welfare system. Assess policy and training needs of newly enacted laws and/or Program Improvement Plan (PIP) activities impacting the “front end” of the child welfare system.

CJA Recommendations:

- It is recommended that the DCFS continue to prioritize training for all child welfare staff and/or stakeholders in the State of Nevada to improve the investigative process and handling cases of child abuse and/or neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation. This training recommendation includes, but is not limited to, child protection model assessments, domestic violence, mandatory reporting, and trauma-informed practices.

Clark County Department of Family Services Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

Purpose

The Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) serves as a liaison between the community and Clark County Department of Family Services (DFS). The purpose of the Citizen's Advisory Committee is to identify and communicate to the DFS important social service issues and service requirements regarding client services. This committee offers perspective on services provided and how to best meet the needs of families that utilize the DFS. The Advisory Committee examines areas of focus along the full continuum of child welfare and initiates recommendations forwarded to DFS Administration.

Activities

- **Mental Health**

The CAC has identified ***Children's Mental Health Crisis in Foster Care*** as a priority that necessitates the active participation of both DFS and the Nevada Department of Children & Family Services Administrator at every CAC meeting to report out on what the State and County are doing to address this Statewide Crisis for our children, especially our most vulnerable population of abused and neglected children. The lack of an effective evidence-based mental health service array for children across the State is a problem that requires immediate attention by the State. DFS currently has a large gap for mental health services between Residential Treatment Centers and specialized foster care; there needs to be a step down of services to fill this gap. Clark County needs more mental health care facilities in general and facilities that can treat young children (under the age of 12) specifically. Medicaid approvals need to be expedited. There remain disruption concerns with children in care who are not receiving the treatment they need and concerns over an increase in prescribed medication for young children. Recognizing that these concerns are not limited to Clark County, and that the state of mental health lies in the hands of the Nevada Department of Children and Families Services (DCFS, aka the State), the CAC decided that DCFS Administrator Ross Armstrong and/or his Designee would be invited to attend every CAC Meeting and respond to questions from the CAC and community stakeholders about the state of children's Mental Health in Nevada. Administrator Ross Armstrong and/or his designee, Dr. Megan Freeman, attended approximately three CAC Meetings in 2021. They responded to questions from this CAC, along with questions from Clark County DA Gwynneth Smith and Children's Attorney Kim Abbott, about the dire need for Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs), step down services from the RTCs and an effective mental health service array of community-based services, to include expansion of the Mobile Mental Health Response, among other things. These meetings were helpful to begin the dialogue, but there is clearly much more work that needs to be done by DCFS in order to meet the dire mental health needs of our most vulnerable children and families. Considering Mr. Armstrong's departure from DCFS, the CAC recommends that the Interim DCFS Administrator and/or designee, along with Dr. Megan Freeman, continue to attend Clark County CAC Meetings until such time as this Mental Health Crisis for children has been resolved statewide.

- **Prevention**

The CAC identified Prevention as one of its initiatives, especially as it relates to the new federal Families First Prevention Services Act. One of the interventions DFS is evaluating and reporting on is the Thrive by Five program monthly.

- **Intervention and Accountability**

The CAC identified Intervention and Accountability as it relates to improved communication within DFS as another initiative. The CAC assesses DFS's internal and external communication strategies so as to ensure that the DFS is open, inclusive and transparent. The CAC expressed particular interest in how

DFS is helping staff to understand that with culture also comes accountability. DFS Culture Workgroups continue to meet, and the CAC is provided with monthly updates on their progress.

- **Transitional and Aging Out Youth (TAY) Supports**

The CAC identified TAY supports as an initiative especially as it relates to what DFS is doing to support youth transitioning out of care. We are tracking the implementation of Public Law 116 which extends Foster Care to age 26. The CAC continues to receive reports on providing emergency funds for those aged-out youth who haven't paid their rent due to the Covid 19 moratorium. The CAC is also receiving monthly reports out on the status of LifeSet program and how many youths have successfully completed the program.

- **Education**

The CAC identified Education as an initiative especially as it relates to children in care. Particular points of interest during the Covid Pandemic were distance learning/access, the Lifeline program and the status of SB347. The mental health of our students remains a concern and a priority for the CAC and to that end we have requested monthly reporting of the Education Stakeholder Meeting that DFS convenes with CCSD Administration, System Partners, Care Providers and Child Advocates to address the ongoing educational needs of our children in care.

- **Ombudsman's Report:** The Clark County Ombudsman has presented to the CAC and provides its monthly reports to the CAC for review and discussion. The Ombudsman provides an overview of the types of complaints that are being received to determine if there are systematic and ongoing issues that necessitate management intervention. The reporting also encompasses complaints that are received internally by DFS Supervisors/Managers, as well as complaints that are made directly to the Ombudsman. Currently, there is a high number of foster parents expressing concerns about calls and emails not being returned.

- **Policies and Procedures**

DFS will continue to update their policies and procedures, making them available on their website and will continue to update the CAC monthly on any changes or impending changes to policies and the communication plans.

CAC Recommendations:

The Clark County Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) serving as a Citizen's Review Panel (CRP) for the State of Nevada respectfully submits this Report and Recommendation for publication in the Statewide CRP with particular emphasis on the Children's Mental Health Crisis in Foster Care as a high priority item that necessitates official action and response from the DCFS Administrator &/or Designee.

The CAC herein incorporates the Recommendations that it submitted to DCFS in 2021, which were not published in the official CRP Report:

The CAC is evaluating and will be voting on recommendations for the DFS in the coming months. Recommendations will likely focus on children and youth receiving adequate services to meet their wellbeing needs (mental health, physical health, and educational needs) with corresponding benchmarks to:

- ***Increase quality engagement of children to assess their wellbeing.***
- ***Increase quality engagement of caregivers to assess their wellbeing needs.***
- ***Increase mental health screenings and assessments for children***
- ***Increase EPSDT's completed timely***
- ***Increase the number of NEIS referrals for children aged 3 and under.***
- ***Increase placement stability outside of RTC placements for SED youth.***

In addition to what was submitted in 2021, the CAC respectfully recommends that DCFS attend the CAC Monthly Meetings on the 3rd Thursday of every month at 8:30am via WebEx to report out on what DCFS is doing to address the Children's Mental Health Crisis in Foster Care; specifically:

- Present a Data Dashboard establishing the baseline of Mental Health Services offered across the State to include: 1) Qualified Residential Treatment Programs QRTP (i.e. number of fully staffed beds that are being utilized versus the number of fully staffed beds that are available and accessible), 2) Step Down Services from QRTP, 3) Community-Based Mental Health Services, 4) Mobile Mental Health Crisis Response, and 5) any other data points delineating the availability and accessibility of evidence-based mental health services for all children (including those under 12).
- Establish and expand an effective evidence-based Mental Health Service Array for all children ranging from Mobile Mental Health Crisis Response to Community based mental health services to Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTP) to step down services for children.
- Expedite Medicaid Approval for mental health services.
- Eliminate barriers to wrapping children (including those under the age of 12) in effective mental health interventions and services.
- Develop Innovative mechanisms to increase availability and accessibility to the mental health service array via data platforms and dashboards on the DCFS website so that providers can readily access and secure services for children (i.e., number of available fully staffed beds at a QRTP)

APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF NEVADA CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS

Federal Requirements

As outlined in Public Law 104-235, Title I, Section 106, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides for a state grant program for the support and improvement of state child protective services (CPS) systems. This law sets forth a variety of eligibility requirements, including the establishment of citizen review panels. The purpose of the panels is “to provide new opportunities for citizens to play an integral role in ensuring that states are meeting their goals of protecting children from abuse and neglect.”

The citizen review panel (CRP) system within a given state must meet certain operational requirements and meet a scope of responsibilities within the function of the panel. These are outlined as follows:

- **Scope of Responsibilities**

Each CRP is required to review the compliance of State and local CPS agencies in the fulfillment of their responsibilities with respect to the following:

- Work in accordance with the CAPTA State Plan;
- Examine state and local policies and procedures;
- Review specific cases, when appropriate; and
- Review other criteria the panel determines important to the protection of children, including the extent to which the state CPS system is coordinated with the Title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance programs and the review of child fatalities and near fatalities.

- **State Requirements**

As Part of the CAPTA requirements, states are required to codify CRPs through state law. In Nevada, this was completed with the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 158 during the 1999 legislative session. During 2001, NRS 432B.396 was amended as a result of AB 248 to establish civil sanctions for violations of confidentiality on the part of the CRP members. This amendment includes additional language highlighted in subsection two as follows:

- Establish a panel comprise of volunteer members to evaluate the extent to which agencies which provide child welfare services are effectively discharging their responsibilities for the protection of children.
- Adopt regulations to carry out the provisions of subsection1, which must include, without limitation, the imposition of appropriate restrictions on the disclosure of information obtained by the panel and civil sanctions for the violation of those restrictions. The civil sanctions may provide for the imposition in appropriate cases of a civil penalty of not more than \$500. The Division may bring an action to recover any civil penalty imposed and shall deposit any money recovered with the State Treasurer for credit to the State General Fund.

APPENDIX B: PANEL MEMBERS

Child Death Review Executive Committee

MEMBER NAME	AFFLIATION
Michelle Sandoval	Division of Public and Behavioral Health
Misty Vaughan Allen	Office of Suicide Prevention
Stephanie Herrera, Co-Chair	Department of Health and Human Services- Vital Statistics
Jennifer Spencer	State Attorney General's Office
Jessica Rogers	Detective, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department
Dr. Cindy Pitlock	Division of Child and Family Services
Tim Burch	Clark County Department of Family Services
Margarite DeSantos, Co-Chair	Southern Nevada Health District; Clark County CDR Team Member
Sheri McPartlin	Clark County School District; Clark County CDR Team Member
Amber Howell	Washoe County Human Services Agency
Christine Eckles	Washoe County Juvenile Justice; Washoe County CDR Team Member
Vickie Ives	Division of Public and Behavioral Health
Breanna Jenkins	Washoe County CDR Team Member
Kathie McKenna	Rural Region CDR Team Member
Lisa Sherych	DPBH Mental/Behavioral Health
Desiree Mattice	Department of Public Safety
Nancy Saitta	Co-Chair of Children's Commission

Children's Justice Act Task Force

MEMBER NAME	MEMBERSHIP DESIGNATION
Desiree Mattice	Law Enforcement
Master Massey Mayo	Criminal Court Judge
Master Michelle Rodriguez	Criminal Court Judge
David Gibson	Civil Court Judge
Jennifer Spencer	Prosecuting Attorney
Jennifer Rains	Defense Attorney
Janice Wolf	Child Advocate/Attorney for Children
Jane Saint, Vice-Chair	Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
Jonathon Slothower/Rachell Ekross	Health Professional
Jamie Wong	Mental Health Professional
Mari Parlade	Child Protective Services
Fran Maldonado	Individual Experienced in Working with Children with Disabilities
Allison Stephens/Kendra Gipson	Parent/Representative of Parent Group
Kimberly Mull	Adult Former Victim of Child Abuse and Neglect
Mari Parlade	CPS Agency/Clark County Department of Family Services
Laurie Jackson & Betsey Crumrine	CPS Agency/DCFS-Rural Region
Tammi Williamson	CPS Agency/Washoe County Health and Human Services

MEMBER NAME	MEMBERSHIP DESIGNATION
Salli Kerr, Chair	Individual Experienced in Working with Homeless Children and Youth

Clark County Citizens Advisory Committee

MEMBER NAME	AFFLIATION
Donna Smith (Chair)	Foster and Adoptive Parents
Dashun Jackson (Vice Chair)	Youth with Foster Care Experience
Andre Bailey (Deputy Chair)	General Public
Judge Frank Sullivan	Local Juvenile Probation Services
Rhiannon Foreman	Child Welfare Advocates
Matthew Cox	Child Welfare Advocates
Shelia Parks	Court Appointed Special Advocate
Alison Caliendo	Foster and Adoptive Parent/ Kinship Advocate