



B. J. Walker, Commissioner

Georgia Department of Human Resources • Division of Family and Children Services • Mark A. Washington, Assistant Commissioner
Two Peachtree Street, Suite 19-490 • Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142 • 404-651-8409 • 404-657-5105

April 20, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Citizen Review Panel Steering Committee Chairs

FROM: Mark A. Washington, Assistant Commissioner

RE: CAPTA Citizen Review Panel
Annual Report and Panel Recommendations

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requires that all states establish Citizen Review Panels to review the compliance of state and local child protective service agencies in the discharge of their duties. Georgia is fortunate to have three entities that have assumed this responsibility to satisfy this federal requirement, the Child Fatality Review Panel, Children's Justice Act Advisory Committee and the Child Protective Services Advisory Committee. The purpose of this communication is to acknowledge the work of the panels and to describe whether or how the state will incorporate the CRP recommendations to make measurable progress in improving the state and local child protection system.

The mission of Georgia's Citizen Review Panels (CRP) is to assure that children and families in the community are provided the best possible services within the framework of available resources and children are protected from maltreatment. This mission, which is shared by DFCS, can only be achieved when the broader community has a better understanding of and voice in:

- Evaluating and assessing the child welfare system
- Promoting quality child protective services practice
- Advocating for the strengthening of resources
- Recommending and advocating for policies and procedures that promote the highest practice standards, and
- Engaging in cross-system problem solving which involves both formal and informal support agencies, groups and individuals.

Georgia CRP Activity: 2007 Highlights and Accomplishments:

The activities and feedback from each panel have been helpful in improving interagency collaboration and services to children and families throughout the state. Highlights of your accomplishments include:

- Establishment of a Citizen Review Panel Steering Committee to facilitate open and timely exchange between CRPs and the child welfare agency. Establishment of this representative committee and the participation of child welfare specialists, administrators

and federal consultants in the quarterly meetings have promoted transparency and greatly improved communication, coordination and collaboration among the parties.

- The Child Fatality Review Panel continues to be a driving force in the expansion of Child Fatality Investigative Teams (CFI), a network of qualified professionals who investigate child fatalities, and advocate for legislative change to reduce child maltreatment and death. Activities in 2007 that supported the expansion and enhancement of the CFIT network included: the provision of statewide training and technical assistance to 26 CFI teams and local Child Fatality Review Committees, as well as, the development and delivery of targeted training to address abuse and neglect cases involving drug endangered, medically fragile children and children with autism.
- Georgia's Children's Justice Act Advisory Committee has taken the lead in co-sponsoring multidisciplinary training for individuals who advocate on behalf of abused children and those engaged in the investigation and prosecution of cases of child maltreatment. The CJA Advisory committee has increased membership to increase efficiency and support the advisory committee in its dual role of CJA Task Force and CAPTA CRP. The CJAAC continues to provide recommendations and oversight of CJA grants and projects including the pre-appointment training of 150 Guardian ad Litem (GALS), SAAG training for 120 attorneys responsible for DFCS representation in deprivation and termination proceedings and multidisciplinary training on interviewing techniques for 150 law enforcement and child welfare investigators.
- The activities of Georgia's Child Protective Services Advisory Committee, have focused on review of the current State CAPTA plan and assessment of the specific strategies identified to improve the assessment and case management of child protection cases and the delivery of training to those charged with carrying out those responsibilities. The CPS Advisory Committee undertook a fairly extensive review of Georgia's differential response system (Diversion) to determine what impact, if any, the lack of statewide policy, consistent practice model or minimum standards/guidelines had on the effectiveness of the strategy, ability of staff to assess family need and community awareness and perception of the practice as an alternative to CPS involvement. Preliminary findings support the need for a uniform statewide policy. The review is ongoing and results of the county and regional reviews will be presented to the state agency in 2009.

Key CRP Recommendations: The state has incorporated a number of CRP recommendations into ongoing efforts to make measurable progress in improving our state and local child protection systems. Panel recommendations and the state response follow:

CRP Recommendation #1: **Develop and implement statewide policy, consistent practice models and minimum standards/guidelines for an effective alternative response system that includes:**

- **Best practice family support and early intervention strategies**
- **An evaluation component to monitor outcomes, assess effectiveness and track results**
- **An allocation plan that provides for sufficient resources to support the array of services necessary to fully implement and support an effective alternative/early intervention response system.**

State Response to Recommendation #1

- *The state Policy and Program Development (PPD) Unit has developed draft Family Support/Alternative Response policy which has been shared with Divisional leadership for review and approval.*
- *Initial feedback from the field indicates a desire to retain flexibility in the local diversion protocols and strategies and a recommendation that policies should not be overly restrictive for the sake of uniformity.*
- *UGA Carl Vincent Institute has conducted a Diversion Study to assess Georgia's current Diversion protocols and practices and provide a set of recommendations for improvement. Findings from this study are being reviewed for incorporation into policy.*
- *Data Analysis and Reporting (DAR) is tracking the Number and Disposition of Child Abuse and Neglect Reports by month, including those screened out and diverted from CPS intervention. DAR is also tracking substantiated CAN reports that have been previously diverted.*
- *County Directors now utilize a Field Operations Review Guide (FORGE) which models the CFSR and includes a section specific to Diversion. The PEAS review helps to assure quality and monitors practice to assess alignment with county Diversion protocols.*
- *Findings and recommendations from a statewide prevention system assessment may inform current service array, gaps and recommendations for resource allocations.*

CRP Recommendation #2: Implement a policy development and review process that allows for consistent consultation with child welfare stakeholders prior to adoption and field implementation.

State Response to Recommendation #2

- *On the recommendation of the CRP the state has developed a protocol for policy development and review which provides an opportunity for staff and stakeholders to provide assistance in the assessment of policy impact as well as to recommend changes to policy purpose, language or process before it is approved for practice implementation. See Attachment: PPD Process Flow chart*
- *Q-TIP: The Division has also implemented a standing workgroup to facilitate policy coordination and review between program areas, SHINES, field operation and CFSR.*
- *The **Policy To Practice** (P2P) field level review is done electronically via Survey Monkey. State and Regional Staff as well as external stakeholders are consulted in the review of draft policy and have an opportunity to provide feedback electronically. External stakeholders included in the policy development and review process include CRP members, private providers, foster parents, current or former foster youth and birth parents.*

- *A representative group of CRP members have been asked to serve on this stakeholder policy review committee.*

CRP Recommendation # 3: Develop in collaboration with child welfare stakeholders a statewide child abuse prevention plan that includes:

- **Common prevention language**
- **Effective prevention strategies which include evidence-based models, promising and proven practice models as well as initiatives already making a difference**
- **A thorough assessment of existing and needed state and community based assets and resources necessary to successfully implement the plan**
- **A child abuse prevention awareness component**

State Response to Recommendation #3

- *The state is currently undertaking a prevention system assessment and analysis to document the current array of internal and external prevention and early intervention resources, review current policy, integrate strategies into practice and make recommendations for systems improvement in this area.*
- *It is our hope that this system assessment be developed in consultation with the CRP to engage a broad array of stakeholders in the assessment and planning process for prevention services and strategies statewide.*

CRP Recommendation # 4: Expand the scope of the statewide injury prevention plan developed in collaboration with Public Health and the CDC to include the full range of abuse and neglect related injuries.

State Response to Recommendation #4

- *While no immediate plans exist to expand the scope of the statewide injury prevention plan conducted last year by Public Health, DFCS and the CDC, the state is currently planning for full compliance with CAPTA requirements for public disclosure of serious injuries and child near fatalities. Stakeholder recommendations under consideration include reconstitution of the multi-disciplinary Child Death and Serious Injury (CDSI) review team, on-going trend analysis by this group and public disclosure of findings and recommendations.*

**CRP Recommendation # 5: Expand and enhance Mandated Reporter Training
Expand the distribution of existing MR training. Enhance or update current training tools and consider an annual renewal or refresher training requirement and provide training, education and information to parents, communities and individuals on all aspect of the CAN continuum with emphasis on the identification and reporting of abuse and neglect.**

State Response to Recommendation #5

- *A workgroup as been formed between PPD unit and Education and Training to develop a computer based MR training curriculum which offers users a certificate of completion.*

The use of training curriculum developed by PCA Georgia for staff and stakeholder training staff is under review and consideration.

CRP Recommendation # 6 – Developed a shared information system for the collection and analysis of child abuse and neglect data. Information system would improve collective efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of Georgia’s CAN and Treatment efforts.

State Response to Recommendation #6:

- *Data Analysis and Reporting is working on the development of a centralized data collection and reporting system to support the collection of all provider, service and outcomes data.*

As key stakeholders, your participation, observations and recommendations are critical to our efforts as we work to assess and improve our child protection service delivery system. Your analysis of our strengths and needs were reflected in the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) self-assessment and our planned program improvements. We look forward to our common work to providing you with regular updates on implementation of these recommendations.

It is our hope that together we can develop and implement strategies for improved collaboration, shared accountability, resources allocation and needed system change. On behalf of the children and families of Georgia, we thank you.

MAW/adp

cc: B.J. Walker, Commissioner
Ruth Walker Simpson, Region IV ACF Program Manager
Tracy Fava, Region IV ACF Program Specialist
Katherine Herren, Deputy Director DFCS Programs and Policy
Ann Pope, Program Director
Deb Farrell, CRP Program Coordinator.