

Pennsylvania Citizen Review Panels' 2020 Annual Report

Collaboration Statement

The Citizen Review Panels' Annual Report was produced in collaboration with individual citizen review panels, the Department of Human Services' Office of Children, Youth, and Families, the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center, and the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators, Inc.

The Mission and Vision of the Citizen Review Panels

Mission: To facilitate citizen participation and provide opportunities for citizens to evaluate state and local child protection systems to ensure that these systems: provide the best possible services; prevent and protect children from abuse and neglect; and meet the permanency needs of children.

Vision: Children will be safe; placed timely in stable, permanent living arrangements; have the opportunity for continuity of relationships; and have the opportunity to develop to their full potential.



CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL TABLE OF CONTENTS

Citizen Review Panel Annual Report Cover.....	1
Deputy Secretary Letter.....	3
Pennsylvania Introduction.....	4
Pennsylvania and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.....	6
Citizen Review Panel Recruitment.....	7
Northeast Citizen Review Panel Report and Recommendations.....	8
South Central Citizen Review Panel Report and Recommendations.....	13
Southwest Citizen Review Panel Report and Recommendations.....	18
Statewide Youth Advisory Board Report and Recommendations.....	22
Attachment A.....	26



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

MAY 25, 2021

Dear Citizens,

Thank you for taking a moment to read the Pennsylvania Citizen Review Panels' 2020 Annual Report. The Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are represented by a wide array of citizen volunteers, including those with lived experience in the child welfare system. CRP members join together to review policies, procedures, and practices in our child welfare system and to collaboratively offer solutions to challenges. On a yearly basis the panels offer recommendations for change. By doing so the CRPs play an important role in efforts to promote positive child welfare outcomes for children and families.

The 2020 CRP Annual Report contains an update on the CRPs' work throughout 2020 and their recommendations for enhancements to policy, procedure, and practice within the Commonwealth's child protection system. The CRPs' recommendations and the Department of Human Services' Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) responses to these recommendations are contained in this report.

2020 was a year like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented disruptions to the lives of many Pennsylvanians. The dedication of panel members during this time was unwavering. Volunteers continued to work virtually with their fellow members with passion and vigor. Panel members joined with the OCYF staff virtually for the CRP New Member Orientation, the Spring and Fall All Panel Meetings, as well as several YAB Statewide meetings. Members continued to submit information requests to OCYF staff and OCYF staff continued to fulfill those requests.

OCYF believes that working together to strengthen families leads to safe, nurturing, and healthy environments for children. By improving our child welfare system, Pennsylvania will be better prepared to support families as they strive to achieve their personal goals and dreams. OCYF expresses great appreciation to the CRP members for their ongoing work and dedication in these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Rubin".

Jonathan Rubin
Deputy Secretary

OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Pennsylvania Introduction

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania consists of 67 counties covering 44,817 square miles and is home to approximately 12.7 million residents. The city of Philadelphia is the largest metropolitan area within the six-county Southeast region which includes Philadelphia, Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties and encompasses approximately 35 percent of the total statewide population. Allegheny County is the second largest metropolitan area and includes the city of Pittsburgh and its surrounding suburbs. The diversity across Pennsylvania's urban, suburban, and rural areas creates the need for both flexibility and consideration of regional, county, cultural, and other differences in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Structure of Child Welfare

Pennsylvania is one of nine states that operates a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system. The county-administered system means that child welfare and juvenile justice services are organized, managed, and delivered by 67 County Children and Youth Agencies (CCYA), with staff in these agencies hired as county employees. Each county elects its county commissioners or executives who act as the governing authority. Pennsylvania has a rich tradition of hundreds of private agencies delivering the direct services and supports needed by at-risk children, youth, and their families through contracts with CCYAs. The array of services delivered by private providers includes prevention, in-home, foster family, kinship care, permanency, and congregate care. A variety of related behavioral health and education programs are also provided.

The DHS, OCYF is the state agency that supports the provision of quality services and best practices designed to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of Pennsylvania's children, youth, and families. There are some intrinsic differences in operating a state-supervised, county-administered system, which impacts statewide outcomes for children and families. Within this structure, Pennsylvania provides the statutory and policy framework for delivery of child welfare services and monitors local implementation. Given the diversity that exists among the 67 counties, this structure allows for the development of county-specific solutions to address the strengths and needs of families and communities. Each county, through planning efforts, must develop strategies to improve outcomes.

This structure also presents challenges in ensuring consistent application of policy, regulation, and program initiatives and has impacted Pennsylvania's performance on federal outcome measures. These federal measures require county-specific analysis to determine the factors that influence statewide data. Because of the variance in county practice, it is challenging to identify statewide solutions that would have the most impact on improving county outcomes.

To address those challenges, the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Council (Council) was formed to provide shared leadership and guidance to support collaborative, strategic visioning for Pennsylvania's child welfare system. The Council is comprised of multidisciplinary members who are broadly representative of the child welfare system and reflect the Commonwealth in geographic, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Efforts of the Council are aligned with OCYF's mission, vision, values, and Pennsylvania's Child Welfare Practice Model. The Council utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to guide the establishment of priorities related to federal, state, and locally driven

improvement efforts through the use of a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process/framework. CQI serves as the vehicle to guide the achievement of Pennsylvania's child welfare goals. The Council exists to:

- Help build a sustainable structure to support collaborative strategic visioning for Pennsylvania's child welfare system;
- Foster a unity of effort to achieve common and shared goals by sharing ideas/expertise in guiding priorities for the child welfare system, sharing data to identify priorities/monitor achievement of goals, and considering how best to ensure the system has the capacity/resources to support achievement of common goals;
- Enhance communication based on shared values of respect and honesty by reinforcing clear and transparent communications regarding the strengths/challenges of the system;
- Increase proactive responses to address systemic issues and concerns; and
- Enhance capacity to use data to drive decision-making.

The Council identified that purposeful, active, and effective implementation work should be carried out by individual subcommittees. Each subcommittee focuses on one of four distinct areas of child welfare practice, which are: Safety, Permanency, Well-Being, and Resources/Cross-Categorical work. While the subcommittees are accountable for implementation, the Council is charged with establishing priorities and expectations, providing necessary support, and helping identify and secure resources to support strategies for improvement.

The Council provides the means for key stakeholders to come together to provide shared leadership, purpose, and accountability to enhance our ability to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. By gathering feedback from the subcommittees and others, the Council takes steps to be more proactive in response to system needs, is more responsible in the use of resources, and enhances and supports the system's ability to function more efficiently. This leads to more strategic and effective efforts to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan focused on improving outcomes for the children, youth, and families served by the system. The Council and the subcommittees were instrumental in the development of Pennsylvania's federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP) and serve as the primary stakeholder forum for development and ongoing monitoring of Pennsylvania's federal Child and Family Services Plan.

Because the CRPs are so closely tied to the work of ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in Pennsylvania, OCYF invites all panel members to participate in the subcommittees and requests that, at minimum, the CRPs be represented in each subcommittee by at least one panel member. This ensures that information and resources are shared between the two groups. By having direct involvement with the Council, panel members have greater access to information at the state level including data and current priorities within the child welfare system.

Pennsylvania and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

The key federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect is the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) (Public Law (P.L.) 93-247), originally enacted in 1974. This Act has been amended several times and was most recently amended on January 7, 2019, when the Victims of Child Abuse Act Reauthorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-424) went into effect. For a full legislative history of CAPTA see: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/about-capta-a-legislative-history>.

CAPTA provides federal funding to states in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities. CAPTA also provides grants to public agencies and non-profit agencies for demonstration programs and projects as a means of promoting innovation and disseminating best practices. Additionally, CAPTA identifies the federal role in supporting research, evaluation, technical assistance, and data collection activities; establishes the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect; and mandates the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. CAPTA sets forth a minimum definition of child abuse and neglect. Some of the changes Pennsylvania adopted to become compliant with CAPTA required amendments to the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) and the Adoption Act. Other changes only required administrative implementation for which no legislation was needed. Pennsylvania is compliant with CAPTA.

Pennsylvania Legislation

To support compliance with CAPTA in Pennsylvania, House Bill 2670, Printer's Number 4849 was signed into law as Act 146 on Nov. 9, 2006 by then Governor Edward G. Rendell. Act 146 amended Pennsylvania's CPSL (23 Pa.C.S. Chapter 63) to address the establishment, function, membership, meetings, and reports as they relate to CRPs in Pennsylvania. Act 146 required that DHS establish a minimum of three CRPs and that each panel examine the following:

1. Policies, procedures, and practices of state and local agencies and, where appropriate, specific cases to evaluate the extent to which state and local child protective system agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities under Section 5106 (a) of CAPTA.
2. Other criteria the panel considers important to ensure the protection of children, include:
 - i. A review of the extent to which the state and local child protective services system is coordinated with the foster care and adoption programs established under part E of Title IV of the Social Security Act (49 Stat. 620, 42 U.S.C. § 670 et seq.); and
 - ii. A review of child fatalities and near fatalities.

Act 146 also set the following requirements for the composition and function of the panels:

- Membership – The panel shall be composed of volunteer members who represent the community, including members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.
- Meetings – Each Citizen Review Panel shall meet not less than once every three months.
- Reports – DHS shall issue an annual report summarizing the activities and recommendations of the panels and summarizing DHS's response to the recommendations.

Citizen Review Panel Recruitment

Regional CRP recruitment is held every year from April 1st to June 15th. After receiving 28 applications for membership this year, DHS was excited to welcome 12 new members to the regional CRPs in August 2020. New members participated in a one-day orientation, where they had the opportunity to meet one another, discuss their interests, learn about their responsibilities as volunteer members, and hear from OCYF staff on departmental priorities as well as ways DHS supports the CRPs. New members joined the existing panels for the Fall All-Panel Meeting in September.

The Statewide Youth Advisory Board (YAB), which serves as a Citizen Review Panel, is comprised of youth and alumni of the child welfare system ages 16 to 23. Recruitment for the YAB occurs at the regional and local levels. There are six regional boards, as well as local boards, whose members form the membership of the Statewide YAB. Youth leaders attending the YAB Statewide meetings volunteer or are appointed by their peers to represent their respective regions. The YAB membership fluctuates due to the transitory nature of this population.

2020 Citizen Review Panel Annual Report
Northeast Citizen Review Panel Report and Recommendations

**Introduction:**

The Northeast (NE) CRP serves 11 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Although the NE CRP had six members leave the panel in 2020 (due to either term limits or voluntary resignations), four new members were added to maintain membership numbers within the optimal range. The NE CRP now has a panel of ten members to begin 2021. The NE CRP is dedicated to ensuring that the needs of Pennsylvania's children are being met within the current system. If you are interested in joining our effort, e-mail the CAPTA Program Development Specialist at pacrp@pitt.edu.

Overview of the Focus Area:

In 2019, the panel focused on updating resource parent training requirements with an emphasis on trauma-informed care. While researching that topic area, the panel was regularly reminded that children who are removed from their homes as a result of abuse or neglect experience trauma and that trauma only escalates as children experience an extended amount of time in placement, multiple placements, and/or re-entry into placement after a return home. Consequently, the panel decided to explore a program that impacts children faced with such trauma in 2020.

The NE CRP decided to focus on the impact and support of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Programs. A CASA is an individual appointed by the court to participate as an advocate for a child who is dependent or alleged to be dependent. Pennsylvania Court Appointed Special Advocates Association (PA CASA) is the statewide, non-profit organization that develops new programs, advocates for local programs, provides training, and supports the network of local CASA programs and volunteers. Local CASA programs are organized for a specific juvenile court jurisdiction. Pennsylvania currently has 21 local programs serving 27 of its 67 counties.

Also, in selecting a focus area, the panel was mindful of Pennsylvania's initiative to become a 'trauma-informed' state, having recently created the Office of Advocacy and Reform that recognizes children and youth who suffer abuse and neglect as one of the most vulnerable populations. Aligned with Pennsylvania's trauma-informed initiative, a goal of CASA programs is to ensure that every child who has experienced abuse or neglect can be safe, have a permanent home, and have the opportunity to thrive.

Summary of Work Completed:

In February of 2020, Governor Wolf recognized the work of CASA programs when he included \$1.345 million for CASA programs in his [2020/2021 Executive Budget](#). This was the first-time state funding had been allocated for CASA programs in a governor's budget. Pennsylvania is only one of three states that does not provide funding for CASA programs. Unfortunately, most likely as a result of COVID-19, CASA program funding was removed from the budget. Throughout the year it became apparent to this panel that CASA programs have a significant, positive impact on children in the child welfare system.

To conduct a thorough review of the impact of CASAs in Pennsylvania, the panel sought to review any data that DHS collects regarding CASAs. Although DHS did not have data specific to CASAs, the panel was able to review statewide data for length of stay, re-entry rates, and per diem placement costs for children in out-of-home care. The panel also received some basic data from PA CASA regarding program specific re-entry rates, the number of CASA programs throughout the state, and the number of CASA volunteers.

The panel reviewed the [2020 State of Child Welfare: Protecting Children and Promoting Stable Families in PA](#) Report and learned that the statewide rate of re-entry for children into placement averages 23%, or approximately 2,200 children, annually. However, the panel also obtained information from PA CASA that the re-entry rate for children with a CASA is less than 3%. The panel also looked at data associated with a youth's length of stay in care to determine if there were any differences between counties that have a CASA program and those that do not. However, the panel was not able to draw conclusions based upon the data that was received.

The panel also utilized the re-entry rates and per diem rates to determine what the panel believes to be potential savings on placement costs for those youth who are appointed a CASA.

	Daily Cost of Placement*	Annual Cost of Placement*
Statewide Re-entry Rate (21% or 2,200 youth)	\$330,000	\$120,450,000
CASA Re-entry Rate (3% or 314 youth)	\$47,100	\$17,191,500
Potential Cost Savings	\$282,900	\$103,258,500

*With placement per diem rates ranging from \$53-\$300, these calculations were made using a per diem rate of \$150

After a thorough review of the data provided by DHS and PA CASA along with information obtained from the [Pennsylvania Office of Advocacy and Reform](#), the 2020 State of Child Welfare Report, [Statewide General Protective Services \(GPS\) Referrals](#) Bulletin, [Complex Case Planning for Children and Youth Under Age 21](#) Bulletin, the [Certification as a Specialized Setting for Children and Youth](#)

Bulletin, Section 6342 of the [Pennsylvania Juvenile Act](#), and Governor Wolf's 2020/2021 Executive Budget, the panel recognized the disparity of the re-entry rates for youth who were appointed a CASA versus those that did not. The panel discussed and concluded that not only do CASA programs mitigate childhood trauma but additionally offer substantial cost-savings resulting in improved outcomes of safety, well-being, and permanency for youth in care.

There is a need to expand the number of local CASA programs in the state and support existing local CASA programs.

Key activities in 2020:

Due to COVID-19, limited activities outside of panel meetings were scheduled or available for panel members to participate in. Members of the NE CRP attended and participated in the following:

- Video Conference with Jennifer DeBalko, Executive Director of Pennsylvania CASA;
- Spring 2020 All-Panel Meeting; and
- Fall 2020 All-Panel Meeting.

Northeast Citizen Review Panel Recommendations for 2020:

Recommendation 1:

Pennsylvania should fund CASA programs as outlined in Governor Wolf's original budget in the amount of \$1.345 million (February 2020).

Recommendation 2:

DHS should develop a task force inclusive of juvenile court judges, OCYF, Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA), the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC), and PA CASA to begin collaboration for the development of new CASA programs as well as the support of existing CASA programs. PA CASA should also have a seat at the Statewide Dependency Roundtable.

Recommendation 3:

DHS should coordinate with PA CASA to develop a CASA data collection system which should include:

- The number of youth assigned a CASA;
- The number of youth who qualify for a CASA but one isn't available;
- Types of cases CASAs are assigned;
- The point during the placement when a CASA was assigned (the adjudication hearing, a permanency review hearing, after a specific number of months in care, etc.); and
- Placement data specific to youth who are assigned a CASA:
 - The number of months in care;
 - The average length of stay; and
 - Rate of reentry into care.

DHS Response:

DHS appreciates the NE CRP's focus on this topic. In some counties across the Commonwealth administrative costs for CASAs are already partly funded by OCYF through the Needs Based Plan and Budget (NBPB) process. The OCYF NBPB process provides CCYAs with the opportunity on an annual basis to request additional funding. CCYAs can request state funding for programs, services, and resources that meet the needs of those being served, while committing to a local match. DHS invites CCYAs interested in supporting the development of new CASA programs or supporting existing CASA programs to submit a NBPB request if they have not already done so.

In accordance with the Juvenile Act ([42 Pa C.S. § 6342](#)) the court may appoint or discharge a CASA at any time during a proceeding or investigation regarding dependency. Each judicial district determines, based on their local needs, whether to utilize CASA volunteers in their courtrooms. DHS encourages CCYAs that do not have CASA programs but believe the children and families they serve would benefit from a CASA program, to engage in conversations with their local courts.

In addition to the NE CRP recommendations, DHS acknowledges that the Pennsylvania Auditor General Report entitled [Fixing PA's Child Abuse Courts](#) endorses the use of CASAs for child abuse hearings and appeals in three of its seven recommendations. The recommendations can be seen below:

- The General Assembly, particularly the Pennsylvania Senate and House of Representatives Children and Youth Committees, should consider legislation to protect the rights of all children being questioned about abuse in all hearings before the courts, as well as during administrative agency hearings before the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals (BHA). See Senate Bill 980, P.N. 1439, which proposes to assign children testifying at BHA with designated child advocates and would provide for alternative recording of a child's testimony if testifying in front of the defendant or in an open hearing will cause emotional distress.
- DHS and the General Assembly should consider working with the nonprofit PA CASA to develop a program for volunteers to support children required to provide testimony before BHA.
- DHS and the General Assembly should work closely with the newly appointed Child Advocate and the new [Council on Reform](#) for the protection of vulnerable populations to ensure they have the opportunity to provide input on the proposed CASA legislation.

To read full the Pennsylvania Auditor General Report see:

https://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Print/RPT_BHA_FINAL_011221.pdf.

DHS looks forward to continued collaboration with the panel.

Northeast Panel Proposed Focus Area/Activities for 2021:

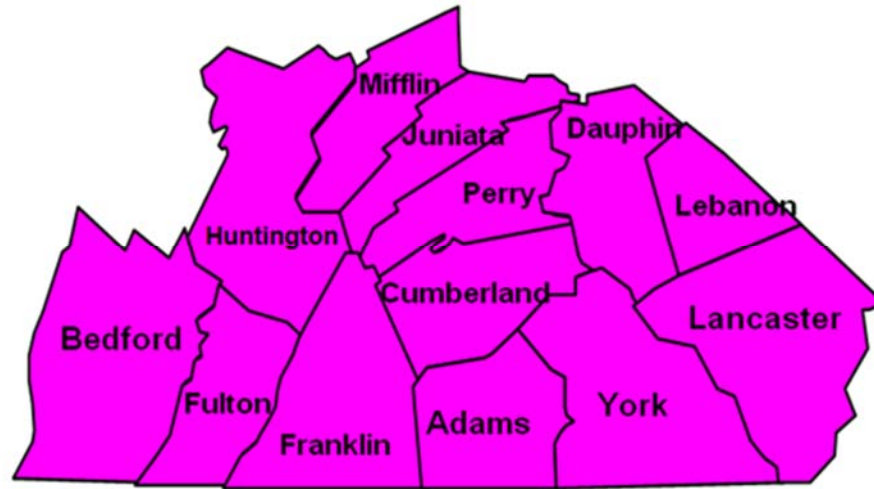
During the November 2020 meeting, the NE CRP began discussing possible focus areas for 2021, however, the panel decided that a final decision would not be made until the January 2021 meeting.

Northeast Citizen Review Panel Current Members

John Aciukewicz – Luzerne
Megan Boettcher – Lackawanna
Roberta Daniels – Wyoming
Laura DeCosmo – Luzerne
Kathleen Donson – Pike
Shelly Fairclough-Gumbs – Lehigh
Kerrie Fitzsimmons – Wayne
Laura Giannetti – Northampton
Steven R. Guccini – Pike
Marilyn Johnson – Monroe
Kelly Langan – Lackawanna
Susan Lucrezi – Northampton
Jason Raines – Lehigh
Mary Lou Scarf – Lehigh
Stephanie Simon-Dowling – Susquehanna
Lorrie Whitfield – Monroe

Biographies for each member can be found on the CRP website at the following link: <http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/CRP/NorthEast.htm>. Information regarding the panel's current focus area and meetings can also be found by following the same link.

2020 Citizen Review Panel Annual Report
South Central Citizen Review Panel Report and Recommendations

**Introduction:**

The South Central (SC) CRP serves 13 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Although the panel had three members resign this year, there were also three new members added to the panel for a total of 10 members. The SC CRP is dedicated to ensuring that the needs of Pennsylvania's children are being met within the current system. If you are interested in joining our effort, e-mail the CAPTA Program Development Specialist at pacrp@pitt.edu.

Overview of the Focus Area:

During the Fall 2019 All-Panel Meeting, the SC CRP determined that the previous topic of trauma-informed care had been satisfactorily covered. During the January 2020 panel meeting, the SC CRP openly discussed future topic areas and several ideas were presented. The panel unanimously approved a focus on children impacted by undocumented status issues. The panel's concerns were informed by their shared experiences and observations within the field of child welfare. The panel saw that there is a lack of access to services for undocumented children and youth and their families. The panel also noted other problems children and youth served by the child welfare system face related to their undocumented status as well as a lack of support and resources for CCYA staff that serve this population.

The SC CRP decided to focus efforts in 2020 on undocumented children and youth that are served by CCYAs. The panel was not focusing on refugee or unaccompanied children and youth.

The panel requested from DHS available information on their target population including any data from the Office of Refugee Resettlement, current policies and practices, current training for caseworkers, and the number of undocumented children in foster care and the school system. After reviewing information from DHS, it was apparent that there is a lack of data. DHS did provide links to laws that might be applicable to this topic.

Summary of Work Completed:

The panel decided to move forward, even with limited data, and to reach out to key personnel in six states relating to this topic in order to obtain information and guide the panel's recommendations. Panel meetings were held on the following dates: January 13, March 30, April 15, May 15, May 29, September 21, and November 2.

The panel developed a survey with key questions around funding sources, service provisions, and eligibility. DHS and the Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) initiated contact with the other states. During the COVID-19 period, contact with these states yielded no response.

The panel also contacted 13 counties in the South Central region. Later, with the assistance of DHS, 24 total counties were contacted with 21 counties responding to the survey. The survey outlined questions related to the number of undocumented children and youth served and barriers faced when seeking services, costs, training for CCYA workers, and needed supports (see [Attachment A](#)). The following results from the survey helped guide the panel's recommendations:

- Eight of the 21 counties served undocumented youth by providing either in-home or placement services for a total of 13 children served;
- Counties that reported serving children indicated that medical costs were the number one expense;
- Reports from the 21 counties indicated that there were over \$461,000 in unreimbursed county expenses for 13 children;
- At the time of the survey, the average length of stay for children and youth in foster care that were undocumented was approximately 16½ months.
- From the perspective of the child and family, counties reported needs not being met due to a lack of documentation and fear of governmental contact resulting in deportation:
 - Independent Living (IL) needs are delayed, or resources are unavailable;
 - Permanency needs are delayed;
 - There are complex issues surrounding maintaining connections to family and culture; and
 - There are complex issues regarding provision of medical and behavioral health services for these often highly traumatized children.
- From the perspective of the CCYA agency, counties reported issues impacting resources:
 - "Navigation" was a key word in describing the additional amount of time required to assist these children and families;
 - Funding issues as described above stretch limited fiscal resources;
 - There is a need for training for staff to understand the intricacies of communicating with the immigration system and using legal resources to assist these children and families; and
 - "A designated service/agency at the state level that is focused on this (population)" was suggested by one county.

SC CRP findings suggested the following:

- Inconsistent practice among counties;
- Instances of undocumented children and youth engaged in the child welfare system involved significant financial burdens to CCYAs as well as significant time devoted by CCYA staff to these complicated situations;

- Youth were served in out-of-home placement as well as through in-home services; and
- Data to support best practice is lacking.

Information provided by DHS yielded the following:

- A 2015 report estimates that 38,000 Pennsylvania children are undocumented and do not meet the citizenship requirements of the Social Security Act (<https://www.pccy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PCCY-DreamCareReport-June2015.pdf>);
- OCYF does not collect data on the immigration status of children; however, it is not a requirement for the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) or any other reporting requirements;
- The Office of Refugee Resettlement in conjunction with the Office of Income Maintenance only collects data from County Assistance Offices, not CCYAs;
- Undocumented individuals are generally not eligible for federal assistance programs (except in emergency medical situations); and
- Six states use state-only funds to cover medical insurance for eligible undocumented children.

Key activities in 2020:

Due to COVID-19, limited activities outside of panel meetings were scheduled or available for panel members to participate in. Members of the SC CRP attended and participated in the following:

- Spring 2020 All-Panel Meeting; and
- Fall 2020 All-Panel Meeting.

South Central Citizen Review Panel Recommendations for 2020:

Recommendation 1: (Data)

DHS should work with CCYAs to have a consistent method of collecting data about services to undocumented youth.

Recommendation 2: (Supports)

DHS should designate a state-wide liaison for CCYAs to access when working with undocumented youth and their families.

Possible activities for a liaison could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Examine best practices in other states;
- Determine reporting requirements;
- Support counties with unique funding requests and advocacy for needs;
- Create a liaison with Immigration and Naturalization Agencies to support safety, well-being, and permanency in a timely fashion; and
- Consider advocating for legislation regarding policies/practices to improve access to care.

Recommendation 3: (Funding)

DHS should support CCYAs in their utilization of a fiscal tracking system, which tracks undocumented youth expenses reported in the county's annual budget:

- Counties work with OCYF to delineate costs for undocumented youth in all service areas; and
- Consider advocating to make costs for undocumented children reimbursable under Act 148.

Recommendation 4: (Training)

DHS should work with CWRC to develop training and written resources for child welfare staff regarding services to undocumented youth.

DHS Response:

DHS appreciates the SC CRP's research into this topic. DHS believes that the health, safety, and well-being of all children is of utmost importance regardless of a child or a family's citizenship status. Furthermore, DHS, in collaboration with CCYAs, is dedicated to supporting the needs of the CCYA workforce. DHS will continue to explore this topic and the SC CRP's recommendations with its system partners. DHS looks forward to continued collaboration on this topic with the panel.

DHS would like to provide updates to information previously provided to the SC CRP on undocumented immigrant child eligibility for Medical Assistance. Although undocumented individuals are generally not eligible for federal assistance programs, a child who has been granted Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS) or has a pending SIJS application is considered lawfully present and can qualify for Medical Assistance benefits in PA as a qualified non-citizen. In order to qualify for this status an individual must have applied to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and must have a qualifying court order. The court order must include the following three findings:

- The child has been declared dependent by the court, or the court has placed the child in the custody of a state agency, individual, or entity appointed by a state or juvenile court;
- The child's reunification with one or both parents is not viable due to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law; and
- It would not be in the child's best interest to be returned to the child's parent's country of origin.

More information on this topic can be found at [Title 55, Pa Code § 3140.112](#), [CFR 435.406\(a\)\(2\)\(i\)](#) and [US Code 1641\(c\)\(3\)](#).

DHS would also like to provide updates to information previously provided on collecting immigration status data. Although the Federal Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (Children's Bureau) does not currently require states to collect and report data related to immigration status for AFCARS reporting, requirements for AFCARS reporting are changing. Federal regulations regarding AFCARS reporting were updated through the Final Rule published in May 2020 ([85 FR 28410](#)). Data elements required by the final rule are referred to as AFCARS 2020 data. A number of new data elements will need to be collected by states. One of the new elements to be collected is whether a child in out-of-home care's parent is or was detained or deported by immigration officials. States will have until October 1, 2022 to prepare their data systems to collect and report AFCARS 2020 data. States will need to submit AFCARS 2020 data to the Children's Bureau by May 15, 2023. DHS is currently working with CCYAs and consultants to coordinate system changes for the collection of the additional data elements. More information on the AFCARS 2020 data elements can be found here:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/technical-bulletin-20-data-elements-out-home-care-adoption-and>.

Proposed Focus Area/Activities for 2021: Expand inquiry about services to undocumented youth served by the child welfare system across the country in order to inform best practice recommendations for Pennsylvania.

South Central Citizen Review Panel Members

Whitney Barbusca – Lancaster
Erich Batra – Lebanon
Lynn Carson – Dauphin
Jessica Crouse – Franklin
Kait Gillis-Hanna – Cumberland
Wendy Hoverter – Cumberland
Lisa Kennedy – York
Kurt Miller – Lancaster
Robin Nickel – Dauphin
Sabrina Valente – York
Robin White – Mifflin

Biographies for each member can be found on the CRP website at the following link: <http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/CRP/SouthCentral.htm>. Information regarding the panel's current focus area and meetings can also be found by following the same link.

2020 Citizen Review Panel Annual Report
Southwest Citizen Review Panel Report and Recommendations

**Introduction:**

The Southwest (SW) CRP serves 16 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. The SW CRP added four new members during the 2020 recruitment period, bringing the panel to 15 members. The SW CRP is dedicated to ensuring that the needs of Pennsylvania's children are being met within the current system. If you are interested in joining our effort, e-mail the CAPTA Program Development Specialist at pacrp@pitt.edu.

Overview of the Focus Area:

In 2020, the SW CRP decided to focus on the area of complex cases. For the purpose of this report, the panel defines complex case as 'an individual or a family served by the child welfare system who is identified as being at risk with a multitude of needs, more than three providers involved with the family, and the issues within the case have been ongoing for more than 12 months in duration.'

The panel recognizes that complex cases can be extremely hard to manage at the county level. There is often one agency or provider with all the responsibility to manage the case and little-to-no interaction or consultation with other agencies or providers involved. This can lead to confusion and/or a lack of appropriate services. The panel chose this topic to further explore these concerns and determine if there is a way to improve complex case management for all agencies involved to produce better outcomes for children and families.

Summary of Work Completed:

The SW CRP began their work by reviewing the [DHS Complex Case Planning](#) bulletin, issued in 2010, to determine what guidance counties currently have for managing complex cases. The panel

identified multiple gaps where DHS could improve its guidance, specifically regarding county-level planning. The bulletin states that DHS “expects that a joint county team approach that treats each child with complex needs as a member of the community rather than as a child served by specific agencies in the county will enable the county to resolve the many challenging issues at that level,” but provides no mandates for building that team or guidance for how that team should operate.

Following the review of the 2010 Complex Case Planning bulletin, the panel was informed by DHS that a steering committee was formed to look at statewide challenges and solutions after national and statewide research and data collection were completed to ensure that a comprehensive and quality service array is available to children and youth with complex mental and behavioral health needs and their families in Pennsylvania. That steering committee shared its [recommendations](#) with the panel, as well as its intent on issuing an updated bulletin.

Once the steering committee’s recommendations were received, the panel took a step back to ensure there was no duplication of work. The panel took the time to review other guidance that has been provided to counties for implementing regulations and bulletins. More specifically, the panel reviewed the [Critical Thinking Guide for Implementation of Regulations and Bulletins](#) that was developed by the Paperwork Reduction Committee in 2013. This document provides a framework for best practice standards counties should utilize when implementing new practices and policies.

In August 2020, the SW CRP was granted the opportunity to review a draft of the [Complex Case Planning for Children and Youth Under Age 21 bulletin](#) (Complex Case Bulletin) (14-Bul-109) prior to its official release. The updated bulletin addressed many of the panel’s initial concerns regarding the handling of complex cases. The panel acknowledges that the bulletin was created with enough flexibility to be integrated within the State’s 67 different county systems. Therefore, the panel’s focus began to shift from developing recommendations for improving the complex case process to the implementation of the Complex Case Bulletin. The panel identified multiple areas where specific suggestions/guidance needs to be considered as counties begin writing their system-specific policies and procedures. Some of these areas include:

- Building a trauma-informed team;
 - Clearly outlining each member’s role and responsibility within the team structure to ensure accountability.
- Creating a clear communication plan for all system partners;
 - This plan should help team members to work together for a common goal without being “siloesd” within their own discipline.
- Universal treatment/service planning; and
 - This would include orienting team members outside of Children and Youth Services to Transition Planning for youth aging out of care.
- Training and orientation for team members to the county’s newly developed policy and procedure protocols.

As the panel began outlining the above guidance, it realized that writing policies and procedures for each of the above-mentioned areas was a much bigger task than it originally thought. Therefore, the panel decided that it is unable to produce recommendations related to the above bullet points to DHS for 2020 and would like to utilize its time in 2021 creating an implementation guide that can be issued to counties.

Key activities in 2020:

Members of the SW CRP attended and participated in the following:

- Due to COVID-19, limited activities outside of panel meetings were scheduled or available for panel members; and
- Spring 2020 All-Panel Meeting and Fall 2020 All-Panel Meeting.

Southwest Citizen Review Panel Recommendations for 2020:Recommendation 1:

DHS should encourage the use of the “[Critical Thinking Guide for Implementation of Regulations and Bulletins](#)” that was released in 2013 as a result of the work of the Paperwork Reduction Committee.

DHS Response:

The Critical Thinking Guide for Implementation of Regulations and Bulletins (Critical Thinking Guide) created by the Paperwork Reduction Committee is a useful resource. The Critical Thinking Guide provides simple and versatile guidance to CCYAs for the implementation of any new regulations or bulletins. It provides easy to follow steps for each part of the process that includes information gathering, assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring. The guide highlights that review, gathering feedback, and revision are needed throughout the process in order to successfully implement a regulation or bulletin and to reduce unnecessary duplication of paperwork.

DHS continues to encourage the use of this document by CCYAs because the advice that it conveys can be utilized to implement the Complex Case Bulletin as well as any other new laws, regulations, policies or procedures that need to be carried out. Because the Critical Thinking Guide was released eight years ago, DHS is currently assessing the need to update this document. The Critical Thinking Guide is available on the CWRC website at:

<http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Resources/Critical%20Thinking%20Guide%20for%20Implementation%20of%20Regulations%20and%20Bulletins%2052113.pdf>.

DHS appreciates the panel’s work on this topic and has encouraged the SW CRP members to participate in the review of a training curriculum called Complex Case Planning for Children and Youth Under Age 21 that addresses the implementation of the Complex Case Bulletin. Several members participated in the review providing substantive feedback. When the training is finalized it will be found on the DHS website here: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Children/Pages/Complex-Case-Planning.aspx>. DHS looks forward to continued work with the panel on the topic of complex cases.

Proposed Focus Area/Activities for 2021:

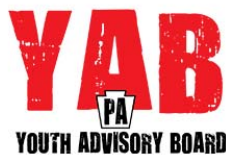
The panel will continue its work on complex cases by creating an implementation guide that can be provided to counties as they write policies and procedures for building/developing their Complex Case Teams.

Southwest Citizen Review Panel Members

Bob Brinker – Westmoreland
Jessica Clark – Indiana
Paula Eppley-Newman – Somerset
Cheryl Hilliard – Indiana
Suella Himes – Jefferson
Phillip Huggins – Beaver
Jo Ann Jankoski – Fayette
Jennifer Kalie – Westmoreland
Patricia Parenti – Mercer
Carrie Richardson – Washington
Carla Smith – Cambria
Emily Snow – Butler
Gwendolyn Steiner – Allegheny
Ronallynn Tebay – Lawrence
Richard Wynn – Allegheny

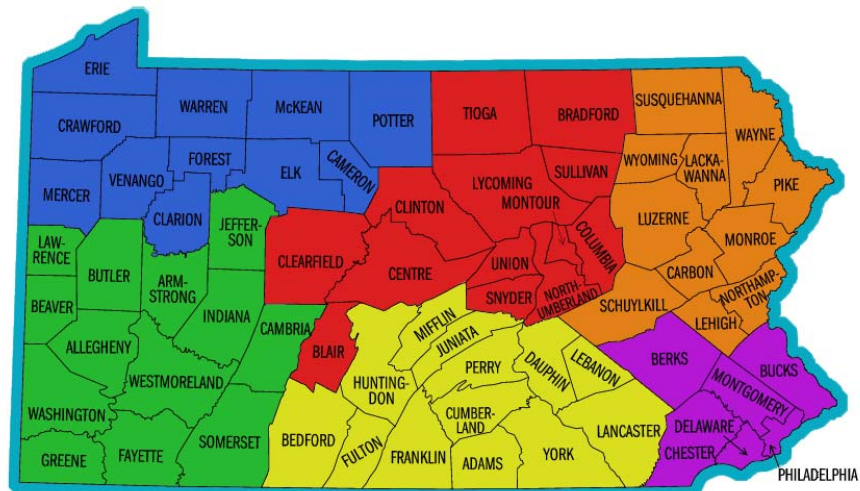
Biographies for each member can be found on the CRP website at the following link: <http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/CRP/SouthWest.htm>. Information regarding the panel's current focus area and meetings can also be found by following the same link.

2020 Citizen Review Panel Annual Report
Statewide Youth Advisory Board Report and Recommendations



REGIONS/BOARDS

STATEWIDE
NORTHWEST
SOUTHWEST
NORTH CENTRAL
SOUTH CENTRAL
NORTHEAST
SOUTHEAST



Introduction:

The mission of the Pennsylvania YAB is to educate, advocate, and form partnerships to create positive change in the child welfare system. Regional YABs and the Statewide YAB meet every other month. The meeting schedule for the Statewide YAB can be found under the “Events” section of the YAB website here: <http://www.payab.pitt.edu/Statewide.htm>.

Overview of the Focus Area:

As the YAB discussed ideas for its 2019 annual project, youth acknowledged that they were not familiar with permanency goals and their hierarchy. Permanency goals are goals that are collaboratively developed and worked towards throughout the time a child or youth is in out-of-home care, for what will happen when a child or youth exits out-of-home care. Permanency goals, as outlined in the Pennsylvania Juvenile Act (42 Pa. C.S. §6351 (f.1)) include the child or youth’s: return to parent, adoption, placement with a permanent legal custodian, permanent placement with a fit and willing relative, and Another Planned Living Arrangement (APPLA), which may only be used in rare situations. Most of the youth, however, were only familiar with APPLA. As a result of this issue, the Statewide YAB wanted to develop a youth-friendly resource to teach youth about permanency goals. The YAB redesigned the Permanency Game, which was originally used as a teaching tool for new caseworkers, to give youth a hands-on experience about the challenges and benefits on the road to permanency. The game was intended to help stakeholders educate youth in person about permanency goals in a youth-friendly and engaging manner. This year, while meeting virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the YAB acknowledged that the Permanency Game could assist many more youth to understand permanency goals if it were more easily accessible. The YAB decided to

recommend that the Permanency Game be made available on an online platform where youth can interact and play the game together virtually.

The YAB continues its collaboration with stakeholders and system partners. In 2019 and 2020 YAB partnered with the Juvenile Law Center (JLC) to make updates and revisions to the Know Your Rights (KYR) guide. The updates were necessary due to significant legislative changes that occurred since the original guide was written. KYR provides youth in Pennsylvania with information about their legal rights in the substitute care system and how they can best advocate for themselves. The guide is presented in a question-and-answer format and covers many crucial issues for older youth in care. It is also a valuable resource for individuals who work with youth in the foster care system. Over 20 youth from the Statewide, Regional, and local YAB reviewed the manual's sections and shared their feedback with JLC. The revised KYR guide was posted in an online format that provides a user-friendly search option. The guide was also rolled out and shared with participants during the 2020 Youth Summit in June. The YAB acknowledged that the KYR guide could assist more youth if it were more easily accessible to those whose primary language is not English. The YAB decided to recommend that the KYR guide be made available in Spanish. The revised English language KYR guide can be found here: <http://www.payab.pitt.edu/KnowYourRights.htm>.

Additionally, the YAB continues to look for ways to expand its reach to ensure that youth, stakeholders, and system partners have access to information and resources that support foster families interested in fostering older youth. The YAB created a video to accompany the Resource Parent Brochure that they created last year. The video outlines the Top 10 Tips to help engage foster parents and youth in conversation about realistic roles, responsibilities, and expectations. The goal is for the brochure and video to be incorporated into existing training for resource parents, caseworkers, stakeholders, and system partners working with older youth in transition. Along with other YAB resources, these products were featured as part of the 2020 SWAN/IL Fall Quarterly opening session. The YAB realized the Top 10 Tips resources did not accommodate their Spanish-speaking peers and their families and, therefore, is looking to create an additional video and brochure to accommodate that population. The English language Top 10 Tips video and Resource Parent Brochure can be found here: <http://www.payab.pitt.edu/Top10Tips.htm>.

Summary of Work Completed:

The YAB held statewide meetings in January, March, May, and September. The January and March meetings took place in person. The remaining Statewide meetings were held virtually via Zoom due to COVID-19. Despite this turn of events, the YAB leadership continued to attend and participate in the Statewide meetings. Highlights of the work are included below.

The YAB held its annual Leadership Summit in June. Sixty participants attended the Summit, including 30 youth representing each of the six YAB Regions. The one-day event provided a platform for youth to share and address concerns about COVID-19 and the racial unrest occurring across the nation. Participants received a welcome from Teresa Musser, the IL Program Specialist at OCYF and a keynote from Evan Thornburg, Deputy Director of the Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs for the Kenny Administration in Philadelphia. Ms. Thornburg and the youth had an open, candid discussion about race, implicit bias, and her experiences growing up as a bi-racial youth. Following the keynote presentation, breakout sessions were held where the youth participants could continue their discussion about the challenges they were experiencing as a result of COVID-19 as well as the racial

unrest and climate surrounding the “Black Lives Matter” movement. As a way of transitioning from such heavy topics, the youth also took time to play a friendly game of Jeopardy.

In September, the YAB Leadership provided a space for youth to talk about the plight of black and brown people in America. Youth Voice Amplified was a facilitated conversation about the racial unrest across the county with youth to hear what change means to them, how they are pushing for change, and what they wish allies knew/did to support their causes. The goal was also to hear from youth about their concerns and experience as youth of color involved in the foster care system and to elevate their voices to child welfare leadership, stakeholders, and system partners. An audio recording of Youth Voices Amplified can be found here:

http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Youth_Voices_Amplified.htm

The YAB also held its official 20/21 kickoff meeting in September with welcome and opening remarks from Teresa Musser. Information was shared about the Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program which provides a waiver for tuition and the mandatory fees charged by postsecondary institutions located in the Commonwealth for youth and alumni in foster care and the extension of Aftercare IL services to youth until age 23. Both resources were recommendations supported by the YAB. The youth also shared their 2020 CRP recommendations and received feedback from the OCYF CRP Liaison. The Youth Ambassador also led a well-being check, allowing YAB participants to discuss challenges they were confronting because of COVID-19 and the racial unrest taking place across the country. Additionally, the youth discussed their ideas and tentative proposals for the Statewide 2020/2021 annual project.

Key activities in 2020:

- The YAB presented products such as the Top 10 Tips Video and the Permanency Game, that they developed to support older youth with permanency at the 2020 SWAN/IL Fall Quarterly opening session;
- Regional YAB members helped facilitate Zoom sessions with peers to address the challenges youth have experienced due to COVID-19 and the racial unrest occurring across the county;
- YAB Leadership met with Lynn Johnson, Assistant Secretary of The Administration for Children and Families; Jon Rubin, Deputy Secretary of OCYF; Brian Bornman, Esq., Executive Director of the PA Children and Youth Administrators Association; and other DHS management staff for a Youth Leadership Roundtable discussion about the challenges and barriers they have experienced in the foster care system; and
- The YAB had a brainstorming session to provide recommendations for a program name for the University of Pittsburgh’s on-campus support program for former foster care youth.

Youth Advisory Board Recommendations for 2020:

Recommendation 1:

The Permanency Game should be accessible to all youth through an online platform where youth can interact and play the game together.

Recommendation 2:

The KYR manual should be made available to foster youth in Spanish.

Recommendation 3:

The Top 10 Tips brochure and video should be made available in Spanish.

DHS Response:

DHS applauds YAB's interest in expanding accessibility to YAB created learning resources. DHS concurs that youth in out-of-home care should have easy access to information about permanency. DHS also agrees that having the KYR manual available in Spanish would be a benefit for Spanish speaking youth in out-of-home care. Furthermore, DHS believes that having the Top 10 Tips brochure and video available in Spanish for all county and private provider agencies would be a benefit for Spanish speaking youth and families.

DHS and the Independent Living Project through the CWRC are collaborating to evaluate the feasibility to make the Permanency Game accessible to youth through an online platform. If the Permanency Game can be developed for use on an online platform, a link to the game will be distributed through listservs maintained by OCYF and CWRC as well as posted on the YAB website at <http://payab.pitt.edu/> for distribution by county and private providers.

The KYR manual was recently updated and is located on the Juvenile Law Centers' website at <https://jlc.org/resources/know-your-rights-guide-introduction>. The online version is organized by chapters making it easy for youth to locate information related to specific issues. Both the Top 10 Tips brochure and video are excellent resources that can be incorporated into trainings for kinship/resource families working with older youth. Links to the KYR manual, and Top 10 Tips brochure and video are currently available on the YAB website at <http://payab.pitt.edu/>. The Independent Living Project through the CWRC is currently seeking estimates to convert the updated KYR manual, the Top 10 Tips brochure and video into Spanish. DHS and CWRC will evaluate the feasibility of translating these items into Spanish. If the KYR manual, the Top 10 Tips brochure, and video are able to be translated into Spanish and will be distributed through listservs maintained by OCYF and CWRC as well as posted on the YAB website at <http://payab.pitt.edu/> for print and distribution by county and private providers. DHS looks forward to continued collaboration with the YAB.

Proposed Focus Area/Activities for 2021:

The YAB proposed focus area for 2021 centers around providing COVID-19 health and wellness packets to include kits with a mask, thermometers, and hand sanitizer, in addition to tips on staying healthy mentally and physically. The YAB would also like to create youth Bill of Rights coloring books for youth ages 5-7 (K-2nd grades), 8-10 (3rd-5th grades), and/or youth with intellectual disabilities who are too young or unable to comprehend the KYR manual.

Additionally, the YAB will start a campaign to educate youth about voting. The YAB will focus on educating youth about how voting works, how to be an informed voter and how to research candidates. The YAB will also focus on the differences between national and local elections, as there may be youth who know about the presidential election, but not elections for judges, school board members, and local officials.

Attachment A
South Central Citizen Review Panel
Undocumented Youth in the Child Welfare System Survey

1. How many undocumented youth did you serve in FY19/20?
 - In what capacity?
2. What barriers are you facing when working with undocumented children?
3. What has been your experience with undocumented children (in-home and placement)?
4. How many county dollars were spent on undocumented children in the child welfare system?
5. Placement Services:
 - If you placed an undocumented youth in foster care:
 - What has been the average length of stay in placement?
 - When exiting placement, what was their discharge plan? (*i.e. – reunification, placement with a relative, emancipation, etc...*)
6. Besides financial assistance, what supports do you feel would be helpful in working with this population?
7. If needed, in what ways have you secured services outside of the county or state for any of these children?
8. What training is provided to direct care staff regarding undocumented youth?
9. How many requests were made to the state for assistance for funding?
 - What happens when the State doesn't approve services/funding for the child on a case-by-case?
 - *Example: an extremely medically needy child and the county was struggling to meet the needs and the state approved a waiver for funding*
10. Do you have any stories that you can think of that indicates the amount of work/time involved in getting services for these families?