



# NH OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE

A monthly update of work and advocacy for New Hampshire's children

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## OCA Advocacy Updates in Brief

**COVID-19 Response.** The OCA meets regularly with DHHS leadership and community partners to monitor the incidence of abuse and neglect during COVID-19 and develop strategies for protecting children in these unprecedented times. On July 10, 2020 the OCA released Issue Briefing [COVID-19 Quarantine for Children in the Custody of DCYF: A Community-based Solution.](#)

**Reducing Exposure to COVID-19.** Recognizing the heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19 in congregate settings, the OCA advocated successfully for clear and formal guidance for all field staff to assess children for opportunities to safely release them from congregate settings to their homes or foster homes where the risk of viral exposure is minimized. [The directive](#) was released April 24, 2020. The OCA has also conducted individual child record reviews to assist in informing decisions about best placement and service access for children.

**Infants and New Parents.** The OCA, in consultation with DHHS and other regional experts on safe infant sleep practices called attention to risk of increased incidence of infant deaths. Pandemic related routine disruption, family stress, and increasing use of substances may all contribute to risk of death or injury. The [OCA's media statement](#) called attention to this problem and prompted a statewide conversation on ways to educate parents and protect infants.

Babies are still being born in New Hampshire in the pandemic, and families need clear and supportive guidance to keep them safe.

**Juvenile Justice.** The OCA is reviewing cases involving children in the juvenile justice system who are placed at the Sununu Youth Services Center and other residential programs to ensure proper care and protection. An initiative is underway to engage young people with lived experience to elevate their voices in the dialogue on juvenile justice reform.

**Child Protection.** The OCA's case and critical incident reviews, including the personal experiences of children and families, serve to support DCYF in making the best, most helpful decisions to care for and protect children.

### OUR WORK

325 cases in process

2700 cases closed

### OUR IMPACT

3100+ cases

Since our inception

## Policy Watch



**HB 1162** - AN ACT relative to adoption and parentage. In a creative and effective response to the pandemic-related disruption of legislative processes, the NH Senate amended HB 1162, creating a child protection omnibus bill. The bill includes important legislation to children and families, including relief from reimbursement of court ordered services; adequate legal representation of children; access to early intervention services for children born exposed to substances and authority of DCYF to intervene on behalf of their safety; clarity on the best interest of children; authority for DCYF to assess children's safety when abusive parents refuse; assistance for kinship caregivers; attention to missing children; and expanding OCA services to more children and families. The OCA advocated in support of the individual bills and the omnibus bill. New Hampshire has demonstrated impressive support and commitment to children in 2020. HB 1162 awaits Governor Sununu's signature in the best interest of children.

## Upcoming Events & Trainings

July 13-14

**NAMIcon 2020**- A no-cost, virtual event that will deliver the latest in mental health research, workshops on early intervention, and more. [Register here.](#)

July 15

**CWLA Webinar- They've Seen Fire, They've Seen Rain: Helping Youth Weather the Storms of Grief.** [Register here.](#)

July 21

**New Futures' CBHP- Paper Tigers Documentary Screening and Panel Discussion.** This film chronicles a year in the life of Lincoln High School that has radically changed its approach to disciplining its students. [Register here.](#)

July 29

**Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE) - Introduction to the 10 Best Practices for Contraceptive Counseling.** This free 2-hour webinar is an introductory overview of an evidence-based protocol to improve access to information about women's health and birth control options. [Register here.](#)

Aug 19

**Mitchell Hamline School of Law- Trauma Informed Advocacy Certificate program.** [Learn more here.](#)

## Contact us

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## A message from the Child Advocate:

I am pleased to announce that the NH Office of the Child Advocate will host the 41<sup>st</sup> United States Ombudsman Association (USOA) Annual Conference in September 2021. The USOA is a national organization for public sector ombudsman professionals with members from offices in local, state, and federal governments. It is worth noting that children's ombudsman offices, like the OCA, are the fastest growing sector in state governments as reflected in the growing membership of the USOA Children's Chapter. The conference will bring visitors to NH from across the country and around the world. In addition to valued education and networking, we look forward to sharing our beautiful state and the infusion of business and tourism the event will bring.