



# State of New Hampshire

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Office of the Child Advocate

Moira O'Neill

Director

## **SYSTEM REVIEW BRIEFING BRIEFING EXTENSION**

System Review 2018-01

Enhanced Response: Substance Exposed Infants

September 4, 2019

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## 2. OCA Infants Exposed

### *Mission*

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The mission of the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is to provide independent and impartial oversight of the New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), the state agency responsible for child welfare and juvenile justice services, and to promote effective reforms to assure that the best interests of children are being protected. The OCA has independent access to all DCYF records that are not otherwise available to the public. This allows the office to objectively review and investigate concerns, and use the information learned to make informed recommendations for system reform.

### *Jurisdiction*

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RSA 170-G:18 is the OCA's guiding statute. Under RSA 170-G:18, III(i), the OCA shall "[u]pon its own initiative or upon receipt of a complaint, review and if deemed necessary, investigate actions of the division for children, youth and families, or any entity that provides services to children under contract with and at the direction of the division, and make appropriate referrals. Findings of all investigations and responses to all complaints received shall be summarized in the annual report of the office of the child advocate."

The OCA does not have the authority to:

- Investigate allegations of abuse or neglect
- Review or investigate complaints unrelated to DCYF
- Overturn any court order or DCYF decision
- Offer legal advice

### *System Review Summary*

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The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) will periodically conduct system-wide reviews to identify opportunities for system strengthening. As such, these reviews are systems focused, not individual case-focused.

The OCA is currently reviewing DCYF's response to children born exposed to illicit substances and occurrences of subsequent incidents involving this population of children. This review includes interviews with DCYF staff and numerous relevant stakeholders, reviewing DCYF policies as well as relevant state and federal laws, and examining a sample of cases of children exposed to substances at birth, warranting an enhanced assessment, and subsequently brought to the attention of DCYF by the occurrence of a critical incident. The purpose of this review is to identify possible trends in risk and opportunities for improvement in agency response. In addition to conducting an examination of federal and state law and state policies, the review also includes an examination of other state laws and practices regarding substance exposed infants.

### *Reason for Extension of System Review*

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It is the goal of the OCA to provide timely system reviews. The length of time for a system review will vary depending upon internal OCA resources, the complexity of the issues and the nature of the review, as well as the length of time needed to obtain accurate and up-to-date reports and relevant information.

The OCA requires additional time to complete this system review. The OCA opened this system review in December 2018, and issued a System Reviewing Briefing on this review on March 25, 2019 with an

### 3. OCA Infants Exposed

anticipated completion date of July 1, 2019. Subsequently, the OCA anticipated completion of the System Review by September 1, 2019. The OCA has completed its interviews and research, and is currently finalizing its review. Due to the competing needs of the OCA's work load and a substantial response from stakeholders with additional information requiring review and analysis, the OCA requires additional time to complete the final report.

**The OCA expects to complete the System Review Report for System Review 2018-01 and submit it to DCYF, the Oversight Commission on Children's Services and any other related agencies or providers involved in the review by October 4, 2019. Should the OCA fail to adhere to this timeline, an updated briefing explaining the need for additional time will be posted.**

#### *V. Conclusion*

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This System Review Briefing Extension, and the subsequent System Review Report, will be posted on the OCA's website. The OCA is appreciative of the patience, cooperation and commitment to system improvement of DCYF, agencies, providers, and any other persons involved in this system review.

With Regards,



Moira O'Neill, PhD  
Director