



State of New Hampshire

Office of the Child Advocate

Moira O'Neill

Director

SYSTEM REVIEW BRIEFING BRIEFING EXTENSION

System Review 2018-01

Enhanced Response: Substance Exposed Infants

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Mission

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

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

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 examination of 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 continuing 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

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 anticipated completion date of July 1, 2019. The OCA has completed a substantial amount of research,

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conducted numerous interviews of relevant stakeholders, and reviewed a number of assessments and cases involving infants who were substance exposed. However, due to the complexity of the system review and the difficulty in scheduling interviews with multiple stakeholders within and outside of DCYF, the OCA requires additional time to complete the review and draft a 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 no later than September 1, 2019. Should the OCA fail to adhere to this timeline, an updated briefing explaining the need for additional time will be posted.

V. Conclusion

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 cooperation and commitment to system improvement of DCYF, agencies, providers, and any other persons involved in this system review.

With Regards,

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Director