

# Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate ("OCYFA")

**BBF Child Outcomes Accountability Team**

**July 18, 2024**

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Advocate and Deputy Advocate**



# Agenda

1. OCYFA: What is it?
2. Duties and Authority
3. Access to Information, Facilities, Children & Youth
4. Required Reports from DCF to OCYFA
5. OCYFA Annual Report
6. Our Goals
7. Discussion
8. Contact info and conclusion

# OCYFA Statutory Goals, Purpose, Jurisdiction (33 VSA § 3202)

- **Advance the interests and welfare** of Vermont's children and youth.
- **Advocate for the welfare** of children and youth:
  1. receiving services from the Department directly, or through funds provided by the Department
  2. those involved in the child protection system
  3. those involved in the juvenile justice system

# OCYFA Duties and Authority (§ 3203) (OCYFA “Shall”)

- 1) Work in collaboration to strengthen services for children, youth, families
- 2) Analyze and monitor developments in federal, state, and local law and policy, “recommend changes when appropriate”
- 3) Receive and respond to “complaints” / referrals
- 4) Inform children, youth, and families re their “rights and responsibilities”
- 5) Provide systemic information concerning child, youth, and family welfare to the public, the Governor, State agencies, legislators, and others
- 6) Submit an annual report... [more below]

# Access to Information and Facilities (§ 3207)

- (a) OCYFA shall “have timely access, including the right to inspect and copy, to records necessary to carry out the provisions of this chapter, including relevant records produced and held by State entities and third parties.”
- (b) OCYFA may: (1) communicate privately and visit with any child or youth who is in the custody of the Department; and...

# Access to Children and Youth (§ 3207)

- b) OCYFA may... (2) upon first obtaining the consent of a child or youth's parent or guardian, communicate privately and visit with a child or youth who is not in the custody of the Department.
  
- c) Facilities and providers delivering services to children and youths shall permit the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate or the Deputy Advocate to access their facilities.

# Required Reports from DCF to OCYFA (§ 3206)

1. all incidents of actual physical injury to children or youths in the custody of the Commissioner or at significant risk of such harm; and
2. instances of restraint or seclusion of any child or youth in custody of the Commissioner.
3. The Department shall notify the Office within 48 hours of any fatality of a child or youth in its custody.

# OCYFA 2023 Annual Report (33 VSA § 3203)

Each December 1, OCYFA shall submit to Governor and General Assembly, “A report addressing services provided by the Department, including:”

- (A) the conditions of placements for Vermont’s children and youths;
- (B) findings related to services for and assistance to children, youths, and families within the child protection and juvenile justice systems;
- (C) recommendations related to improving services for children, youths, and families; and
- (D) data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, disability status, and any other categories that the Advocate deems necessary.



# 2023 Annual Report TOC: “Conditions of Placement for Vermont’s Children and Youth”

- 1.1 Homes of Origin
- 1.2 Children Experiencing Homelessness
- 1.3 The Impact of Disability on Child Welfare Involvement
- 1.4 Homelike Settings: Kin, Foster Homes, Hidden Foster Care
- 1.5 Transition-Aged Youth Settings
- 1.6 “Staffings”
- 1.7 Residential, Psychiatric, and Hospital Settings
- 1.8 Raise the Age Placements
- 1.9 Flooding Displacement

# 2023 Annual Report TOC: “Findings and Recommendations:”

- 2.1 The Cost of Child Protection: Legislative Response to Crisis
- 2.2 Economic Supports For Families
- 2.3 Prevention Services Through Title IV-E and FFPSA
- 2.4 Youth and Family Voice in Court Matters
- 2.5 Juvenile Justice
- 2.6 DCF’s Data Systems / CCWIS

# Report Highlight: What Could VT do with Title IV-E / FFPSA? Legal Supports

Replace millions in General Fund dollars with federal money for:

- Legal support *for what we are already doing*
  - Cost of CHINS and delinquency attorneys
  - Training and other supports for GALs
- Innovative new programs:
  - “multidisciplinary representation,” including social work support, peer navigators, investigators, experts, and interpreters.
  - Related “civil legal services” for families: housing, public benefits, RFAs
- A new CCWIS for Vermont: [childadvocate.vermont.gov/datasystem](http://childadvocate.vermont.gov/datasystem)

# Themes Related to Children Prenatal to 8

- Economic supports & SSA/SSI benefits
- Young people in care and having DCF involvement for own children
- Importance of Summer Programming for Children
- Parent/child visitation and the use of child voice
- PCP and psychiatry waitlists impact during transitions
- Kin rules
- Mandatory reporting

# Goals: Listen Listen Listen

- Elevate youth voice
- Tour state to: Community organizations, facilities and placements, DCF offices, Probation and JJS, Foster homes, Courts, and more...
- Collaborate with DCF and three branches on systemic improvements.
- Website that provides clear information to the public.
- Expand office: Request 3 new positions (lead investigator, legal and policy counsel, admin and communications).
- Work with nationwide experts to support maximization of IV-E funding, expand youth voice in court.

# Goals and Ideas

- Emphasis on Visiting Youth in Group & Staffing Settings
- DCF Missing Children Analysis
- DCF Staffing Analysis with Casey Family Services
  - Casey doing this in AZ already; has offered to help DCF
- Bring federal money to VT through robust FFPSA implementation
- Support keeping kids out of care whenever possible
- Help relieve court backlogs
- Bring more innovation to the field: annual child welfare conference? Fellowships? Community events.

# Discussion

- What do you think?
- What do we need to know?
- How can we help?

# Thank you!

- Please don't hesitate to reach out:
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- Referral information for the public:
  - [Make a Complaint / Contact Us | OCYFA](#)
  - 802-828-2828 (confidential voicemail)
  - [OCYFA@vermont.gov](mailto:OCYFA@vermont.gov) (confidential shared email)
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