




B. J. Walker, Commissioner

Georgia Department of Human Resources • Division of Family and Children Services • Mary Dean Harvey, Director  
• 2 Peachtree Street, NW • Suite 19-472 • Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142 • Phone: 404-651-8409 • Fax: 404-657-5105

January 30, 2007

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Citizen Review Panel Members

FROM: Mary Dean Harvey, Director 

RE: CAPTA Citizen Review Panel  
Annual Reports and Recommendations

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requires that all states establish Citizen Review Panels to review the compliance of state and local child protective service agencies in the discharge of their duties. Georgia elected to utilize three existing entities, the Child Fatality Review Panel, Children's Justice Act Advisory Committee and the Child Protective Services Advisory Committee, to satisfy this federal requirement. The purpose of this communication is to acknowledge the work of the panels and to thank you for your collective and individual recommendations for continued child welfare improvement.

### Common Mission

The mission of Georgia's Citizen Review Panels (CRP) is to assure that children and families in the community are provided the best possible services within the framework of available resources and that children are protected from maltreatment. This mission, shared by DFCS can only be achieved when the broader community has a better understanding of and voice in:

- Evaluating and assessing the child welfare system
- Promoting quality child protective services practice
- Advocating for the strengthening of resources
- Recommending and advocating for policies and procedures that promote the highest practice standards, and
- Cross-system problem solving which involves both formal and informal support agencies, groups and individuals.

### Activity Highlights:

The activities and feedback from each panel has been helpful in improving interagency collaboration and services to children and families throughout the state. Highlights include:

- The Child Fatality Review Panel has been the driving force for the expansion of Child Fatality Investigative Teams (CFI), a network of qualified professionals who investigate child fatalities, and advocate for legislative change to reduce child maltreatment and death.

- Georgia's Children's Justice Act Advisory Committee has taken the lead in co-sponsoring multidisciplinary training conferences for individuals who advocate on behalf of abused children or who are engaged in the investigation and prosecution of cases of child maltreatment.
- The activities of Georgia's Child Protective Services Advisory Committee, have focused on the review of the State CAPTA plan and assessment of the specific strategies identified to improve the assessment and case management of child protection cases and the delivery of training to those charged with carrying out those responsibilities.

### **Key Recommendations:**

Analysis of the annual reports submitted by all three Citizen Review Panels revealed common themes and four key recommendations. The following strategies are recommended by all panels as key to improving the quality and effectiveness of Georgia's child abuse prevention and treatment policies, practices and outcomes for families.

1. Support legislative, policy, and practice change to improve child abuse prevention and treatment;
2. Provide training, education and support to staff, parents, communities and individuals on all aspects of the child abuse continuum with emphasis on mandated reporting and the identification of abuse or neglect.
3. Collaborate with child welfare stakeholders to develop a statewide Child Abuse Prevention plan;
4. Develop shared information systems for the collection and analysis of child abuse and neglect data. A shared information system would improve collective efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of Georgia's child abuse prevention and treatment efforts.

### **State Response:**

As key stakeholders, your participation, observations and recommendations are critical to our efforts to assess and improve our child protection delivery system. The Division shares the common recommendations made by the panels and is currently implementing the following strategies:

1. Policy and Practice Change to improve child abuse prevention and treatment include:

The development and implementation of a new risk assessment model, institution of the practice of differential response (diversion) and pilot of a Family Preservation model for CPS services. These family centered service strategies have been supported by simplified policy, training for new and veteran staff and a centralized hiring initiative.

Clearer policies related to diversion, better coordination and referral to community based resources and increased allocation of staff positions has enabled the agency to reduce caseloads by 30 percent statewide and 51 percent in targeted urban counties over the past two years. The reduction in caseloads is a major accomplishment in the reform of child welfare in Georgia.

The Division, in collaboration with Public Health, is developing an *Integrated Family Support Model* that will be implemented in areas of the state with the highest incident rates of child abuse and neglect. These and other family centered practice models will allow staff to provide services that enhance the safety, stability and well-being of children and families.

2. Provide training, education and support to staff, parents, communities and individuals on all aspects of the child abuse continuum with emphasis on mandated reporting and the identification of abuse or neglect.

New and Veteran Staff Training: A revised new worker training sequence entitled *Keys to Child Welfare Practice* was rolled out statewide in April 2006. Enhancements to the curriculum include a focus on safety and risk assessment, family centered practice, increasing relative placements and permanency for children and youth. New supervisor training entitled *Tools of the Trade: Preparation for Supervision* began in November 2005 and equips new DFCS supervisors with the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to supervise case managers in the delivery of child protection services to children and families. *Professional Excellence*, the Division's on-going professional development program for social services case managers and supervisors offers advanced skill enhancement applicable to daily practice. Courses focus on the specific information and skills necessary to meet the challenges of today's child welfare practice including the systemic impact of methamphetamine, cultural competence and rural social work practice.

Multidisciplinary Team Training : The Division, along with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Georgia Child Fatality Review Panel and Office of the Child Advocate for the Protection of Children co-sponsored the 7<sup>th</sup> *Annual Multidisciplinary Child Fatality Conference* in April 2006. The Conference was attended by over 800 professions from the fields of child welfare, law enforcement, education, public health and the judiciary. Georgia currently has multidisciplinary teams in twenty-three judicial circuits. A multi-disciplinary team approach to investigations is critical for accurate identification of child abuse and/or neglect and in the successful prosecution of perpetrators.

Developing and facilitating training protocols for individuals mandated to report child abuse or neglect.

The Governor's office of Planning and Budget; Planning, Research and Evaluation Division, convened a workgroup at the request of Mrs. Sonny Purdue, Georgia's First Lady to produce a video and training materials for school personnel. The purpose of the project was to provide accurate, comprehensive and consistent training about child abuse and neglect to all school personnel. As mandated reporters, school system personnel must be informed of their recognize and report child maltreatment, as well as understand the process in place for child protection in Georgia. The video, "*Kids Count on You*" was distributed to school personnel across the state.

The Division is giving consideration to two recommendations made by the Child Protective Services Advisory Committee at the January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007 meeting to expand the scope and distribution of this mandated reporter training resource. Recommendation was made to develop a web-based version of this training video to allow for wider distribution to all school personal and child-care personnel. Further suggestions centered on use of this tool as part of a broader public awareness campaign to increase public awareness of the roles and responsibilities of mandated reporters and promote the community's role in the identification and prevention of child abuse and neglect.

The Division is currently working in partnership with the Children's Trust Fund Commission (CTFC) and Prevent Child Abuse Georgia (PCA) to expand community education regarding child abuse recognition, reporting and prevention to public health and child care providers.

The *Early Childhood Initiative-GA*, initiated by the Trust Fund Commission produced a video based curriculum to be used in the early care and educational system. The training provides accurate, comprehensive and consistent training about child abuse and neglect from the Strengthening Families Initiatives (SFI) protective factors framework perspective for use in centers and homes as well, for in-service trainings for veteran staff and administrators. Partners in this endeavor include Bright from the Start, CTFC, Department of Family and Children Services, Office of the Child Advocate, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia and Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers. With support from a grant from the Hedge Funds Care program, PCA Georgia, has partnered with the Division and Public Health to expand its community education program and train public health professionals on child abuse recognition, reporting and prevention.

3. Collaborate with child welfare stakeholders to develop a statewide Child Abuse Prevention plan;

The state is required by federal law to enhance collaboration among state Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF), Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and Child Welfare grantees. Region IV of the Administration on Children and Families has hosted a series of networking meetings, conferences and conference calls to help the state strengthen its prevention and intervention efforts and improve outcomes for children and families in Georgia and our communities.

A major emphasis of these activities was to facilitate broader stakeholder input into the process and identify barriers to effective collaboration. Trust and turf guarding were identified as potential barriers to healthy collaborative partnerships between state and external stakeholders. To address those barriers and improve collaborative processes, the Division will convene a state Prevention Workgroup made up of representative stakeholders and prevention grantees, to map out shared populations, identify funding sources for prevention, agree on common language and outcome indicators for prevention and what role each collaborating partner plays in the service continuum.

4. Develop shared information systems for the collection and analysis of child abuse and neglect data. A shared information system would improve collective efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of Georgia's child abuse prevention and treatment efforts.

Work is ongoing to develop a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) system in Georgia. This statewide automated system will help improve communication and enhance the states capacity to collect, analyze and report case specific data. In consultation with the state Citizen Review Panels, the state Evaluation and Reporting Unit will work to ensure that relevant child abuse and neglect data is made available to facilitate the review and assessment of Georgia's child abuse prevention and treatment efforts.

We look forward to our continued work over the coming months as we develop strategies for improved collaboration, resource allocation and needed system change. Your analysis of our strengths and needs, as well as your recommendations for improvement will be reflected in the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) state self-assessment and the annual progress report for the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment (CAPTA) state plan. Again, on behalf of the children and families of Georgia, we thank you.

MDH/adp

cc: B. J. Walker, Commissioner  
Ruth Walker Simpson, Region IV ACF Program Manager  
Kunle Baoku, Region IV ACF Program Specialist  
Bobby Cagle, Project Leader DFCS Programs and Policy