



STAFFING AND OVERSIGHT REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Suzanne Kreie, Chair
Lisa Chapland, Co-Chair

“In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, notice of this meeting was given by way of notice filed with the Secretary of State, the Trenton Times and the Newark Star Ledger and posted at the Department of State, 125 West State St., 1st Floor, Trenton, New Jersey.”

**Please note the meeting was recorded for the transcription of minutes.*

Meeting Minutes
December 9, 2025

Attendance:

Marygrace Billek, Public member
Lisa Chapland, Relative Resource Parent
Suzanne Kreie, Coordinated Family Care
Christine Beyer, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families
Laura Jamet, Department of Children and Families
Elizabeth Sherwood, Division of Law
Amanda Melillo, NJ Legislature
Gina Hernandez, Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey
Linda Porcaro, Somerset County Department of Human Services
Mary Coogan, Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Mary Hallahan, Resource Parent
Garnet Roberts-Batson, DAD's Council
Traci Telemaque, Office of the Public Defender

Guests:

Emily Douglas, Montclair University
Svetlana Spiegel, Montclair University
Wendy Zeitlin, Montclair University
Susan Livio, NJ.Com

Staff:

Bethany D'Amelio, Department of Children and Families

I. Key Discussion and Updates

1. Welcome and Introduction:

- A public guest was welcomed to the meeting and provided with an invitation to comment at the end of the meeting.

2. Commissioner's Operations Update

- DCF has been exploring plans to consolidate Essex County local offices for many years due to a decrease in caseloads while giving consideration to the possibility of adding additional offices in other counties. It is important to note that the Newark County local offices are located in one building, therefore, families continue to access visitation and other services at the same consolidated location; no service disruption was reported.
- Employees were given the option to remain in Essex County or to move to other locations. Approximately 86% of employees chose to stay in Essex while only 14% of employees requested to transfer to a new location.
- DCF will monitor caseloads as a result of this closure and reported that currently intake caseload averages in Essex County are at 9 primary families. Caseworkers can carry a max of 12 primary families, however, permanency caseloads average 7. While the law permits caseworkers to carry 15 cases, DCF has been trying to keep cases closer to 7 due to the complexities of each case. DCF believes 7 cases is an optimal workload for caseworkers.

3. Committee Membership and Composition

- Members discussed filling vacancies strategically before the end of the current administration, emphasizing diversity of expertise beyond legal backgrounds and prioritizing perspectives with deep understanding of division operations. The conversation highlighted that statutory seats designated for attorneys should be balanced with other professionals to broaden insights.
- The committee underscored retaining institutional knowledge while creating a “glide path” for new members to ensure continuity and fresh perspectives.
- To align membership with 2026 priorities, participants suggested recruiting individuals with lived experience, including a young adult who transitioned from care and an additional parent voice, to strengthen analysis of youth outcomes and family engagement metrics.

4. 2026 Work Planning — Draft Pillars, Data Needs, and Timeline

- The research team previewed two materials to be sent to the committee: (a) a refreshed introduction section (purpose, charge, membership and data sources), and (b) a draft set of “pillars” to organize the 2026 report. Members were asked to provide structured, page-specific feedback on these PDFs.
- Feedback request and deadline: The committee was asked to return comments on the upfront material and the pillars by Monday, December 15, 2025; members needing additional time were instructed to notify the research team.
- Access and versioning: The team committed to confirming access to either PDFs or Google Docs by the following day so members would have the weekend to review all files.
- Forthcoming materials: A foundations section is scheduled to be delivered to leadership on Friday, December 19, and then shared with the subcommittee in advance of the next large-group meeting in January.
- Scope alignment: The 2026 roadmap updates and, while overlapping with a prior 2025 work plan, reflect shifting priorities; members were encouraged to compare work plans and confirm whether to incorporate previously identified topics. The committee also noted federal context (e.g., CFSR) as an external factor that may influence priorities.

5. Substantive Priority Areas Identified for 2026

- Transition-age youth outcomes: deeper analysis of education, employment, and related outcomes, leveraging available datasets.
- Educational stability and performance: broader focus on educational indicators for all children in care, not only those aging out, with acknowledgment of current data gaps.
- Family engagement: closer examination of declining engagement metrics to understand drivers and improvement strategies.
- Implementation roadmap and data coordination: to avoid last-minute requests, the committee supports an upfront map of data needs, sequencing requests to the division to facilitate timely analysis and an earlier report completion target (before December 2026).

6. Process Improvements for 2026

- Work groups: Members proposed forming topic-focused work groups aligned to the recommendations to conduct work between plenary meetings,

surface issues earlier, and bring decisions/recommendations back to the full committee.

- Meeting frequency and onboarding: Participants discussed adjusting the cadence of full meetings and developing an onboarding practice to better equip new members, given the volume and complexity of materials.
- Dashboarding and executive reporting: Members suggested reinstating a monthly commissioner-level dashboard to anchor recurring statistics and orient the group's review.

7. Reflections on Contractor Transition and Research Partnership

- The current research team onboarded in late April/early May and spent a significant portion of the summer validating data. With the current contract concluding in December, the upcoming period presents an opportunity to plan earlier and work more deliberately in 2026.
- Members commended the team's ability to translate complex data into accessible language, remain responsive to committee suggestions, and align analyses with policy questions. The team will attend the Society for Social Work and Research Conference in January to integrate the latest research into the 2026 report.

VI. Public Comment

- No formal public comment

This memo aims to maintain transparency and provide the public with an overview of the task force's recent deliberations. The committee values community input and engagement as we collectively strive to enhance the welfare of children and families across New Jersey. This meeting report was prepared, in part, with the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

For further information or queries, the public can reach out via the contact channels provided by the Department of Children and Families.