



## 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 public posting on the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect website: [DCF | New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect \(NJTF CAN\)](#).”

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

Meeting Minutes  
April 14, 2026

### Attendance:

Marygrace Billek, Public member  
Lisa Chapland, Relative Resource Parent  
Suzanne Kreie, Coordinated Family Care  
Laura Jamet, Department of Children and Families  
Elizabeth Sherwood, Division of Law  
Linda Porcaro, Somerset County Office of Youth Services  
Lynette Rente, Office of the Public Defender  
Angie Waters, CASA of New Jersey  
Mary Coogan, Advocates for Children of New Jersey

### Guests:

Svetlana Spiegel, Montclair University  
Wendy Zeitlin, Montclair University  
Mahnoush Vaziri, Department of Children and Families  
Brandi Harding, Department of Children and Families

### Staff:

Bethany D’Amelio, Department of Children and Families



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### **Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order with the reading of the Sunshine Law. A transition on the agenda was noted to prioritize a scheduled presentation regarding statewide resource family recruitment and retention efforts. Participants were advised that questions could be raised during or after the presentation.

### **Presentation: Resource Family Recruitment and Retention**

#### **Departmental Structure and Scope of Work**

A high-level overview was provided of how resource family work is organized across the child welfare system. It was explained that resource family functions are embedded across local offices, area offices, and central office operations. Central office staff provide statewide oversight, guidance, policy support, and monitoring related to recruitment, licensing, support, and retention of resource families. The presentation emphasized that the overall goal is to improve the safety, protection, and care of children who require out-of-home placement.

#### **Trends in Licensed Resource Homes**

The presenters reviewed the change in the number of licensed resource homes and available bed capacity from December 2020 through December 2025. It was acknowledged that the total number of homes has declined significantly over that period. Several factors were identified as contributing to this decline:



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- The COVID-19 pandemic reduced willingness among some households to participate in the licensing process or accept children into their homes.
- Beginning in 2020, recruitment efforts shifted to focus more intentionally on families willing to care for children and youth with the highest placement needs, including teenagers, youth with complex behavioral, mental health, and developmental needs, large sibling groups, and legally free youth.
- Earlier counts of available homes did not always reflect true placement capacity, because many families were interested only in infants or single-child placements and were not available for the children most often in need of placement.
- Broader changes in child welfare practice have also affected the landscape, including greater emphasis on kinship placement, reunification, prevention efforts, and maintaining family connections.

It was noted that these system changes are consistent with a more family-centered approach and are intended to improve outcomes for children and families. At the same time, these changes have altered what it means to serve as a resource parent, including the expectation that family connections be preserved and that placement may remain temporary while kinship options continue to be explored.

### **Recruitment Pipeline and Drop-Off Challenges**

The meeting included a detailed explanation of the recruitment and licensing process. Prospective resource parents begin by submitting an inquiry through an online portal, are connected to local recruitment staff, attend an information session, and, if they wish to continue, submit an application. This is followed by background checks, an inspection, a home study, and final licensing. Once licensed, a home is generally valid for a three-year period.



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A major point of discussion concerned the gap between initial inquiries and completed licensure. It was reported that many individuals express interest but do not move through the full process. Contributing issues include:

- Limited public awareness of the need for non-kin resource families.
- Restricted funding for large-scale marketing campaigns.
- Heavy reliance on grassroots outreach, internet searches, and word-of-mouth referrals.
- Hesitation among prospective families who feel intimidated by the possibility of caring for youth identified as having “complex needs.”

The presenters explained that many people enter the process in an exploratory stage and do not necessarily intend to proceed immediately to licensure. It was also noted that public perceptions about fostering have not fully caught up with current practice realities, particularly the expectation that resource families support reunification efforts, maintain connections with birth families when appropriate, and remain open to changes in placement if kinship options emerge.

### **Expansion of Recruitment Strategy**

The meeting highlighted a strategic adjustment in recruitment efforts. While targeted recruitment for teenagers, sibling groups, and youth with complex needs remains in place, the department has expanded its efforts to include younger children in counties where data show significant need.

This adjustment was based on statewide and county-level placement data. Participants heard that the largest age group entering care was children ages 0 to 5, and that many counties were experiencing difficulty finding homes even for younger children without



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highly specialized needs. As a result, recruitment expansion was introduced to improve local placement availability, reduce out-of-county placements, reduce emergency placements, and strengthen placement stability.

A pilot conducted in one county in late 2023 was cited as encouraging. Presenters stated that expanded recruitment efforts led to more inquiries, more licensed resource homes, and more newly licensed homes accepting placements across a wider age range, including teenagers. However, it was also stated that the statewide expansion is still too recent for full evaluation, because both recruitment and licensing require time and broader public awareness efforts must continue.

### **Retention and Support for Resource Families**

The discussion then shifted to retention. Participants were advised that recruitment and retention are closely linked, and that retaining existing resource families is essential to increasing overall system capacity. Several retention strategies were described, including:

- Ongoing support from resource family support workers assigned to licensed homes.
- Collaboration between statewide and local resource staff.
- Annual symposiums, town halls, and recognition events for resource families.
- Feedback loops designed to identify concerns and improve support.
- Statewide resource parent surveys and additional surveys at different points in the resource family experience.
- Continued engagement with advisory groups composed of individuals with lived experience.



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The meeting emphasized that families need not only recruitment outreach but also practical support after a child enters the home. Participants noted that placement sustainability depends on whether caregivers feel supported by caseworkers, service systems, and community partners. There was discussion of the need for stronger coordination with behavioral health, advocacy, educational, and family support resources so that resource families and kinship caregivers do not feel isolated after placement.

The presenters also described a continued effort to incorporate lived experience into recruitment and retention work. Examples included the use of experienced resource parents as adjunct recruiters, participation by youth and caregiver advisory bodies, and prior initiatives in which youth with foster care experience spoke during training and recruitment events to address myths and misconceptions.

### **New Tools and Communications Approaches**

The meeting included mention of several efforts underway to modernize recruitment strategy and improve outreach. These included:

- Use of public service announcement materials, with interest in expanding foster care-specific video content if such materials become available.
- Development of geographic information system mapping tools to better understand where resource families are located, where children are entering care, and which family characteristics may be associated with sustained and successful placements.
- Use of local data to identify where recruitment should be intensified and what types of outreach may be most effective.



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Presenters described these efforts as part of a broader attempt to use data more effectively and to better align recruitment messages with actual placement needs.

### **Discussion of Public Concerns and Service Capacity**

Following the presentation, the meeting revisited the news article that published last month regarding reports of children and youth sleeping in DCPD offices and temporary settings such as motels. Additional concern was raised regarding the closure of independent living housing options for young adults ages 18 to 21 in Somerset County. A request was made for follow-up regarding the status of those specific programs and the reasons funding had ended.

Participants also discussed how negative experiences spread quickly and can undermine future recruitment if current caregivers do not feel supported. There was broad agreement that quality of support after placement is as important as the initial recruitment message.

### **Update on 2025 Report Development**

The meeting concluded with an update from the research team regarding the next report cycle. It was explained that planning is underway in two phases:

1. Replication of the 2024 report using updated data; and
2. Expansion into five new focus areas identified through prior recommendations.

The research team advised that updated data requests have already been submitted and that, beginning with the next meeting, the group should start receiving portions of the new analysis section by section rather than waiting for a near-final product. This change was described as a direct response to prior feedback requesting earlier review of data.



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The team also discussed using additional data sources where needed, including federal and youth transition datasets, and reviewing professional literature to help identify which measures may best inform deeper analysis. Examples discussed included permanency outcomes, number of placements, caseworker continuity, and placement stability across demographic groups.

A status update was also provided on final production of the 2024 report. The report remains in layout and design review. Revisions have focused on improving readability, refining placement of tables and figures, and ensuring that photographs reflect a broader range of families and communities. The team expressed hope that a version would be available to share at the next meeting.

Meeting Adjourned. Next meeting May 12, 2026.

*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.*