

Child Advocacy Center – Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board

Nydia Monagas, Chair
John Esmerado, Vice-Chair

October 2, 2020
1:30 p.m. – 3:30 P.M.
Virtual Meeting

Minutes

In Attendance:

Christine Beyer
Jacquelynn Duron
John Esmerado
Martin Finkel
Nydia Monagas
Brenda Pollack
Debbie Riveros
Maria Savattiere
Javier Toro
Elahna Strom Weinflash

NJ Department of Children and Families
Rutgers School of Social Work
Attorney
CARES Institute
New Jersey Children’s Alliance
Joint Base MDL
Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office
Deirdre’s House
Hudson County Prosecutor’s Office
Office of the Law Guardian

Guests:

Joseph Pargola
Pete Boser

NJ Department of Children and Families
New Jersey Children’s Alliance

Staff:

Daniel Yale

NJ Department of Children and Families

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order and the Open Public Meetings notice was read.

II. Approval of Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes from the August 7, 2020 meeting. Jacqueline Duron made a motion to approve the minutes. Christine Beyer seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the minutes without edit. John Esmerado abstained from the vote to approve the minutes.

III. New Business

Review and vote on completed Annual Progress Reviews

Mercer County

Nydia reminded the Board that there were concerns during the last review due to a potential lack of progress and lack of commitment to moving forward. NJCA engaged in some outreach after the previous meeting. Pete Boser explained that the Assistant Prosecutor in charge of the Special Victims Unit (SVU) sent them a draft of their application for accreditation with the National Children’s Alliance (NCA). The application showed that they have been making a substantial effort to compile their protocols, agreements, and paperwork reflecting a commitment to address the issues that have been lacking. Pete stated that it appears as though they are ready to begin the process of accreditation.

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Maria asked about law enforcement buy-in. Pete stated that the issue is the commitment to communicating in advance of the MDT meetings from the investigative staff and local law enforcement. Pete felt that it is really the follow-up case review needing information and a lack of communication. The new leadership is working on the issue.

Maria also asked about the lack of mental health or medical linkage agreement. Pete stated that they have a functioning relationship, but don't have recently updated paperwork. They are currently working on updating their paperwork. Maria Savattiere made a motion to approve Mercer County. John Esmerado seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Mercer County.

Ocean County

Pete explained that Ocean County has been substantially disrupted by COVID-19 but they are regularly meeting. They are at the last stages of their re-accreditation process. They have their virtual site review in the coming weeks. Maria stated that they are understaffed and that their MDT Coordinator is stretched very thin. Maria felt that they cannot reach their full potential because they do not have enough staff.

Pete stated that the Ocean County prosecutor has given approval to apply for funds to pay for additional staff so they will be submitting a proposal once an RFP is released. The Board discussed that a local physician has been designated as the medical director. Pete stated that there is no compromise with the RDTC connection, that this is just a supplement. Dr. Finkel stated concerns that the medical director for the CAC is not a child abuse pediatrician. Nydia stated that the sexual abuse examinations are held at the RDTC.

Maria also raised concerns about lack of access to mental health counseling because St. Francis Center is on Long Beach Island. It is a large area and may not be accessible if people have transportation issues. Debbie informed the Board that they are also working with Catholic Charities which has a location in Whiting. They also have a few other agencies that they work with besides St. Francis.

Maria Savattiere made a motion to approve Ocean County. John Esmerado seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Ocean County.

Passaic County

The Board discussed the low number of MDT case reviews that were held in Passaic County. Pete explained that at times, children served can be counted multiple times for different services. The fact that there is a close correlation between the number of children served and the number of forensic interviews suggest that they are counting complete involvements. Maria also mentioned that they are outgrowing their space. John explained that this is a very strong center that was opened approximately 25 years ago. The Board discussed whether they needed a new space or whether they can expand their current space. Pete explained that they are in a one-story space and there was some talk about adding a second story but it is very cost prohibitive.

The Board also discussed the RDTC involvement in Passaic County. They have representation from St. Joseph's. Nydia stated that they have a doctor rotating through so that there is medical representation at each of the MDT reviews in their region.

Maria made a motion to approve Passaic County. Debbie Riveros seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Passaic County.

Discussion regarding future RFP funding

Nydia informed the Board that when NJCA created the campaign to the Legislature to restore funding, they made it clear that the funding would be for programs and services as well as things that facilitate programs and services and that capital funding would not be part of the RFP for 2021. The funds will be used for staff and technology that might facilitate services, i.e. tablets and laptops for virtual forensic

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interviews, telehealth, etc. This funding can also be used for those counties that need to hire a CAC Coordinator. John felt that counties need to have a plan to fund staff that they hire through these RFP funds so that there is permanency beyond the funding cycle. This needs to be brought to the County Freeholder level to establish that these are basic needs of children within their counties.

As to timing of the RFP release, the goal is to have the RFP released by the end of the year so that funds can be released as soon as possible. Maria informed the Committee that some of the CACs already have proposals mostly complete as they prepared a proposal for the previous RFP that was ultimately canceled. However, the timeframe for submission of proposals cannot be truncated as some counties that did not previously apply may want to apply for this round of funding.

The Board also discussed whether those applying for funding to hire staff would be able to offer a one-year contract. As these funds expire on June 30th and funding cannot be guaranteed after that date, a contract can only be offered until the end of the fiscal year, June 30th. Any funds granted through this RFP must be used by the end of the fiscal year.

The Board discussed whether a cap should be placed on the amount of funding that each county can apply for. The Board decided to put a \$250,000 cap on the amount of funds for which each county can apply.

Goals of the Data Workgroup

The Board decided to create a data workgroup as there are a lot of discrepancies on how counties collect data and what the data means when it comes to this Board. Nydia explained that although the Board discussed this subgroup at a previous meeting, she wanted to put it on the agenda to see if any members had anything to add to the discussion prior to the first meeting. Maria mentioned that, for NCA accreditation, they will need community assessment data. Commissioner Beyer informed the Board that she will identify a staff member from DCF's Research, Evaluation, and Reporting (RER) Unit to attend the subgroup meetings. Regarding community assessment data, any requests for data from RER will be prioritized based on workload. John reminded the Board that DCF already publishes a large amount of data through the Data Hub. The focus needs to be on common definitions among counties on what constitutes a case, what happens to a case in terms of medical and mental health services, and, most importantly, what happens in the court system.

Nydia stated that she will be a part of the workgroup along with John, Jacquelynn, Maria, and a representative of DCF. John felt that once the workgroup gets a little further along, they made need a representative from the AOC as well.

IV. Announcements

No announcements.

V. Adjourn

Next meeting Friday, December 4, 2020.