

## Subcommittee Meeting for Change to CHINS legislation

### Present at Meeting:

Karen, Senator  
Amanda, BC GSSW Intern  
Erin, Policy Advisor  
Maureen, Best Practices  
Susan, Chair  
Robert, Co-Chair Subcommittee  
Janet, Department of Education  
Members of Department of Probation  
Members of Division of Social Services  
Parents involved in CHINS  
Members of Department of Youth Services  
Members of Social Justice Academy  
Representative from PAL

### Pre-Meeting: Purposes and Expectations

This meeting was to review research and recommendations on reports that will hopefully give support and background to the change in CHINS legislation. The ultimate purpose of the meeting was to bring together the subcommittee individuals to discuss best practices and the necessary changes for the legislation, as well as learning the research from one another in order to make recommendations for those changes. There was also a lot of paperwork to copy and hand out for the appropriate preparation of the meeting.

### Meeting

- Discussion:

Karen gave a brief introduction and had everyone introduce themselves, as well as the introduction of the new intern. She also reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting and what is on the agenda for this meeting. Erin passed out the copies of the research performed by the separate agencies to everyone and the recommendations that they had for the new legislation.

The members discussed how it is very difficult to come up with data for the research because the only records that are still on file are for children still in the system, not for those children who performed well under the current program. They mentioned that there are no mechanism to describe kids or families in need of services, nor did they know what the costs are which is important for legislation. It was mentioned that they need a better idea of services that are offered to kids and that data somehow needs to be captured. A member suggested that there is an accountability issue to look at what's working, not working, and is or is not being offered. Everyone at the meeting appeared to agree with that statement. Karen mentioned that the legislation needs to know where there are gaps in the current system and when the funding needs to go. Someone mentioned that there needs to be more common elements of the data collected and to keep track of where everything is filed and the reports should be done at least on an

annual basis. A member of DYS recommended that there is a computer program designed that can interface between state agencies in order to get the information to all appropriate people. An attorney spoke out that there could be privacy issues that would make that problematic. Karen mentioned that there definitely needs to be more research done about the interfacing and the privacy issues.

A probation officer mentioned that he found discrepancies between the different research done by his agency and DSS. He felt that DSS was not representing how CHINS are being counted, that the numbers of children in the system are incorrectly being carried over from the previous year. The DSS representative mentioned that they did take the research from a yearly perspective, but that it was necessary to make the research work better than what the probation office had developed. DSS stated that he did not want his research to be misleading, but that that it is difficult to find the total number of kids in the system with a CHINS, and that needs to be changed. He mentioned that it's embarrassing not to know more about the system and where the money is going. Another representative from DSS mentioned that the admission system of CHINS leads to some discrepancy, and that DSS worked really hard at tabulating the numbers and really tried hard not to mislead anyone at the meeting. Another meeting member brought this discrepancy discussion to a close by stating that the primary conclusion is that there are a lot of kids involved in CHINS, they don't know the data, and that they need better data. He also told Karen that they will need a better budget in order to get better resources to collect correct data. Karen said that she understood and would work at finding ways to correct the problems.

A parent who had a child in the CHINS system mentioned that parent's don't always know about the possibility of their children going into DSS custody. She also mentioned that it was unfair how much inconsistency there was between the judgments offered by the different judges in each CHINS case. She felt like there was more that should be made available to parents because most parents love their children and this needs to be kept in perspective when forming the new legislation.

Karen agreed with the mother and asked to move to the agenda item discussing best practices. Maureen performed the research section on best practices. She mentioned that she found there nothing that is state-wide for kids not in the system. The biggest recommendation is to lower the age for children who should receive CHINS or the new legislation is age six. She felt like diversion programs should offer rapid services and lifelong connections. State-wide training is a huge leap, but will also require enormous state funding. She felt that if children are not attending school regularly by age six, it should be called "failure to send". She mentioned that the subcommittee members need to remember that the kids, who are not performing, are the ones not going to school, so the schools need to be a part of the intervention. She recommended that the fine for parents who are not sending their children to school should be increased from twenty dollars to closer to two hundred dollars, and parents should be required to meet with guidance counselors and principals. She also recommended that other agencies like DMH and DMR need to be involved in most cases. Karen stated that she appreciated her research and would like everyone to think about it when they think about the legislation.

The representative from PAL talked to sister organizations in other states about their programs. The key themes she found were 1.) A real worry about funding (goes to the biggest city; 2.) real problem with outreach to families and status change; 3.) Providers and families had different ideas about how to offer services (local vs. central conflict); 4.) Children need to be involved, not just parents. She mentioned that Rhode Island has the ability to suspend driver's licenses.

The "Front End" Project Summary was mentioned, and one of their representatives discussed their findings. They found that it's important to hold individual stakeholders responsible, there needs to be identifiable goals, they need to develop a process to aid families, use the courts for appropriate help, and change that the courts don't support just one entry. Janet recommended that the main focus should be getting the kids back in school ASAP.

The Research Subcommittee discussed statutes and how they are very complicated (easy to see how lay can be interpreted in different ways). They recommended that you need to get rid of obsolete terms. Right now parents have no rights, so they need to find a way to get parents involved. Consistency between DSS offices is necessary and that there are differences between policy and practice.

- Decision Making:

Decisions were made collectively by the group with Karen facilitating. Karen recommended that everyone think about the recommendations and bring new thoughts to the next meeting. They also discussed and made a decision to figure out how to collect research so it was consistent among all involved agencies.

- Positions and Strategies:

Positions on research and recommendations were taken and it was decided to keep in mind these recommendations for the next meeting. Everyone agreed that changes need to be made, but there did not appear to be a consensus as to the strategies necessary to undertake these recommendations. They all agreed that consistency around the entire process will help with the legislation.

- Participation, Leadership, & Group Dynamics:

Karen facilitated the meeting and seemed to help guide the group through the agenda. Everyone participated and felt comfortable discussing their findings. There was some contention from the probation officer who was unhappy with the DSS research, but once DSS mentioned that they tried their best with what they had, he calmed down. The parents offered the group a different perspective than the one they operated under, and that brought in a nice discussion and more information to everyone.

#### Analysis of Meeting:

Everyone was given a chance to express their opinions and it seemed appropriate. Karen facilitated the meeting, but there was not one person who seemed to have a major influence over anyone else. Karen would have the most influence out of anyone in that group, but she did not exercise it during the meeting. There were no real decisions to make at this meeting it was just a formal gathering to discuss their research and

recommendations. It will lead up to a more important meeting where the decisions are necessary to make, but that was not the purpose of this particular meeting. Everyone at the meeting accepted that changes are necessary, but there weren't any particular changes discussed, so there were no reactions to read. There might be conflict among the different agencies in the future, but really it seems that everyone is trying to make this work.

Follow-Up and Prediction:

The group decided to meet again on November 15 and some will also meet on November 28. The next meeting will discuss the subcommittee proposals in more depth. I think that there is a lot of work ahead for this group, but if they keep in mind how it's necessary for Massachusetts children, it will be worked out well. I think that the research and recommendations discussed during this meeting are going to be more thoroughly worked out and that could cause contention amongst those who don't want every change to be accepted. There were not any significant events after the ending of the meeting, everyone finished up the coffee cake and brownies and left. Someone recommended to remember to bring coffee to drink at the next meeting.