

**SOUTH CAROLINA
CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL**

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



Compiled by:

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Engaging citizens to improve the outcomes for South Carolina's children and families affected by child abuse and neglect.

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Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) are federally mandated mechanisms for citizen participation in child protection, through evaluation and public outreach. Each state is required to have at least one CRP. Volunteer panel members assess their state and local child protective services (CPS) agencies and collect public opinion on CPS policies and services. In South Carolina, there are three panels located in different geographic areas of the state. The Upstate Panel alternates meeting in Greenwood and Greenville counties; the Midlands Panel meets in Richland County; and the Lowcountry Panel meets in Charleston County. Panels review policies, procedures, and practices of the CPS system and make recommendations annually to the South Carolina Department of Social Services. These recommendations intend to help improve the CPS system and make a difference in the lives of children who are abused or neglected. Citizen Review Panels offer volunteers an effective way to share in the community's responsibility to protect the children of South Carolina.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to sections 106(c)(4)(A)(i) and (ii) of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), each Citizen Review Panel is charged with evaluating the extent to which the State is fulfilling its child protection responsibilities in accordance with its CAPTA State plan by: (1) examining the policies, procedures and practices of State and local child protection agencies, and (2) reviewing specific cases, where appropriate. In addition, consistent with section 106(c)(4)(A)(iii) of CAPTA, a Panel may examine other criteria that it considers important to ensure the protection of children, including the extent to which the State and local CPS system is coordinated with the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Programs of the Social Security Act. *This provision also authorizes the Panels to review the child fatalities and near fatalities in the State.*

In order to assess the impact of current procedures and practices upon children and families in the community and fulfill the above requirements, citizen review panels must provide for public outreach and comment (section 106(c)(4)(C) of CAPTA). Finally, each Panel must prepare an annual report that summarizes the activities of the Panel and makes recommendations to improve the CPS system at the State and local levels and submit it to the State and the public (section 106(c)(6) of CAPTA).

Source/Date: ACYF-CB-PI-99-09 (6/2/99); updated 12/20/10

Legal and Related References: Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 5101 et seq.) - section 106(c).

LETTER TO READERS

Dear Reader:

According to the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus, “the only thing that is constant is change.”

Such was the state of the world during the Covid-19 pandemic that began in earnest in 2019. For approximately two (2) years, everything that we held as “normal” in our everyday lives, such as travel, work, and interactions with families and friends, changed, drastically and dramatically. With each change in the novel Covid-19 strain that became more contagious and deadly, our lives changed. Some of the most immediate changes related to schools closing and children learning from home, employment, be it losing a job, dealing with worker shortages, or working from home while balancing childcare, being an at-home teacher, as well as, staying safe from infection, caring for stricken loved ones, and mourning the loss of neighbors, friends, and/or loved ones. With all these issues occurring at the same time, initially, felt overwhelming and made us long for the monotonous days when we knew what to expect and knew the routine. But, as the days turned into months and months turned into a year, we adjusted to our “new” normal. We “found our groove” and established new routines. New apprehensions arose when we were informed that we would return to the “pre-pandemic” normal. Those concerns were universal.

When I was hired in July 2021, South Carolina, like most of the United States, was slowly and cautiously coming out of the gripes of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Panels opted to meet virtually in order to continue their work on behalf of the state’s children and families. With that goal in mind, the Panel Chairs decided to focus on their internal structure, processes, and recruitment and retention strategies.

Like the adjustment to life, “post-Covid 19,” the reporting period of June 2022-May 2023 proved to be somewhat challenging for our Panels. The Upstate Panel experienced multiple changes in leadership and the Lowcountry Panel struggled to find its footing. The Midlands Panel stayed the course and was able to select and investigate a topic and make recommendations for the South Carolina Department of Social Services to consider.

During that same time, the SC CRP did achieve significant goals. First, the Panel Chairs adopted the Bylaws which were amended in 2021 and an annual timeline of activities to allow for better guidance and more efficient structure for the Panels as a whole. Secondly, a procedure for orienting new members of the Panel was developed and our first Onboarding meeting occurred on October 28, 2022. Our second will occur in early May 2023 which will satisfy our goal of scheduling Orientations twice during the reporting year. And, perhaps, our greatest achievement is our development of the fourth (4th) Citizen Review Panel- for the Pee Dee region. This allows the Citizen Review Panels to align with the Department of Social Services’ regions. (See the enclosed map and regional breakdown.)

With an invigorating sense of purpose and a renewed spirit, the SC CRP Coordinator has set the following goals for the Panel:

- (1) increase the presence and work of the SC CRP and the panels on social media by frequently updating the SC CRP Facebook page and creating a SC CRP Twitter account;
- (2) scheduling at least one (1) Community Input event or activity within each of the four (4) Panel locations;
- (3) creating a Recruitment and Retention committee; and
- (4) re-establishing meetings between the Panel Chairs, CRP Coordinator, and the Department of Social Services Administration beginning in June 2023.

In closing, I would like to offer my sincerest appreciation to **Carolyn Morris**, who recently retired and served as my mentor and advisor for the Panels, **Portia Hawkins**, who served as the Department of Social Services Administration liaison to the Panel, **Tamra Scott-Wilson** who provided updates to the Panel regarding kinship caregivers, **Michael Gaskins** and **Angela Pruitt**, our outgoing Chairs **Donna Xenakis**, **Sharon Britz**, **Nina Spinelli**, and **Brooke Wymer Ellis**, and most importantly, our dedicated and amazing **Panel members**. Without them, we would not be able to do the work that we have been charged to do.

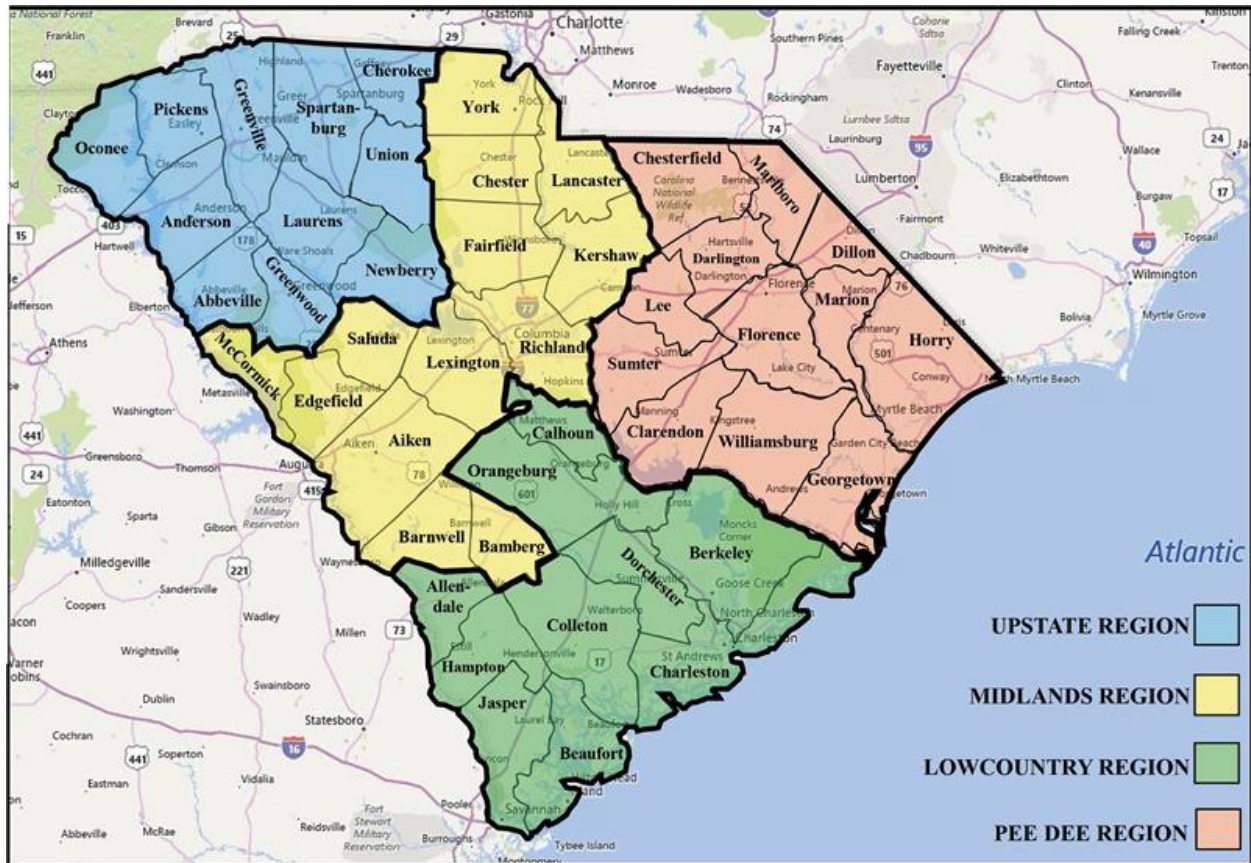
Please find enclosed the SC CRP 2022 activities and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Sharon D. Walker

Sharon D. Walker
SC CRP Coordinator

SC DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES REGIONAL MAP



SC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL REGIONAL DIVISION

UPSTATE

Abbeville	Newberry
Anderson	Oconee
Cherokee	Pickens
Greenwood	Spartanburg
Greenville	Union
Laurens	

MIDLANDS

Aiken	Lancaster
Bamberg	Lexington
Barnwell	McCormick
Chester	Richland
Edgefield	Saluda
Fairfield	York
Kershaw	

LOWCOUNTRY

Allendale	Colleton
Beaufort	Dorchester
Berkeley	Hampton
Calhoun	Jasper
Charleston	Orangeburg

PEE DEE

Chesterfield	Horry
Clarendon	Lee
Darlington	Marion
Dillion	Marlboro
Florence	Sumter
Georgetown	Williamsburg

- *regional grouping is flexible upon the agreement of the Panel Chairs*

2022 SC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- (1) SC Citizen Review Panel 2022 Mid-Year Retreat ~ March 24, 2022
Leslie B. Price Aiken Senior and Youth Center
Aiken, South Carolina

- (2) National Citizen Review Panel Conference ~ May 23- 25, 2022
Asilomar Hotel and Conference Grounds
Monterey, California

- (3) SC Citizen Review Panel Onboarding for New Members ~ October 28, 2022
Virtual

- (4) University of South Carolina School of Law Children's Law Center Annual
Conference ~ November 4, 2022
Cooperative Conference Center
Columbia, South Carolina

NATIONAL CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL CONFERENCE



(Representing the South Carolina Citizen Review Panel at the 2022 National CRP Conference are *Nina Spinelli, Midlands Panel Co-Chair* and *Sharon Britz, Upstate Panel member.*)

Sharon Britz, Upstate Panel member, and Nina Spinelli, Midlands Panel Co-Chair, made up the South Carolina delegation at the 2022 National Citizen Review Panel Annual Conference which was held in Monterey, California from May 23-25, 2022. The Conference's theme was All Together Now- Citizens Making a Difference for Children and Families.

On Monday, May 23, 2022, the Conference opened with Welcome addresses from Stuart Oppenheim from the Child and Family Policy Institute of California, Debra Samples of the Children's Bureau Regional Program, Chief Deputy Jen Troia from the California Department of Social Services, and Deb Farrell of the National Advisory Committee. The Plenary session – All Together Now: Finding Shared Fate in a Changing (and Divided) America- was delivered by Dr. Manual Pastor. The morning Breakout Sessions consisted of the following topics: (1) Building Community Pathways; (2) Hope is More than a Feeling: Using Brain Science Concepts to Shift Fatality Review; (3) Closing the Gap:

Familial Needs Identified Through Multidisciplinary Collaboration; and (4) California's Response to Child Trafficking. The Eyes See, The Mind Knows and the Heart Feels: Reimagining Child Well-Being Systems was the subject of the midday Plenary Session. The afternoon Breakout Sessions consisted of (1) FASD and the Juvenile Justice System: A Crime, (2) Working Together: Understanding the Civil and Criminal Legal Frameworks for Child Protection, (3) Using Social Capital to Address the Behavioral Health Needs of Rural Youth in Foster Care; and (4) CRP 101.

Day Two (2), Tuesday, May 24, 2022, began with Blake Jones from the University of Kentucky informing the participants of the Best Practices for CRPs and National Updates which was followed by a Plenary session entitled Calling all Hope Dealers delivered by Hasan Davis, Founder of the Hasan Davis Solutions, L.L.C. The morning Breakout Sessions consisted of (1) Child Maltreatment Costs, Prevention Pays, (2) Devilish Data Details in the Epidemiology of Child Maltreatment, (3) Manifesting a Child and Family Well-Being System, and (4) Hope Dealers: A Continuation of the Keynote Presentation. National CRP Advisory Committee Presentation was the subject of the afternoon Plenary Session. The Case for Mandatory Reporting Reform, Raising the Future: Empowered Diverse Parents, Children, and Youth, Using Fatality Review Data to Minimize the Impact of Emerging Issues, and Hope Dealers (repeated) were the topics of the afternoon Breakout Sessions. The day concluded with a CRP Cross- Pollination Discussions.

The final day of the 2022 National Conference started with Acclaimed Writer and Activist Melissa Chadburn's Plenary session entitled Regarding the Pain of the Other. California Participants, the Advisory Committee, and the Planning Committee closed out the conference by facilitating a National CRP Conversation/ Activity.

At the upcoming 2023 Mid-Year Retreat, panel members can expect to hear more from Sharon Britz and Nina Spinelli regarding the information they learned from their attendance at the National CRP Annual Conference.

CHILDREN’S LAW CENTER ANNUAL CONFERENCE



(Nina Spinelli, Midlands Panel Co-Chair (center) with the Children’s Law Center Staff, from left to right: Lauren Marsh, Program Assistant; Michelle Dhunjishah, Director; Daniel Ford, Training Assistant, and Shelandra Black, Finance and Human Services Director)

On November 4, Nina Spinelli with the Midlands Board of the Citizen Review Panel attended the annual Children’s Law Conference hosted by the University of South Carolina.

After a welcome by Director Michelle Dhunjishah, Melissa Roshan gave the Opening Address. Ms. Roshan’s started by her sharing her personal experiences with intergenerational foster care. Her story began with her own mother’s entry into foster care and how she was born into that world. She detailed with extraordinary care the people and places that shaped her experiences and offered heartfelt advice for working with teens navigating trauma.

Ms. Roshan’s first point focused on reminding attendees that the negative actions of youth in care are often a means of expressing their trauma. As we work in the field, we often read reports of children displaying “unhealthy coping mechanisms.” Her remarks re-emphasized to attendees that without proper support and care, youth will act out their feelings. That conversation led to Ms. Roshan’s second point- to help youth tell their story from a strength-based approach.

(Left to Right: Maryann Burgess, Executive Director, Child Advocacy Center of Aiken County; Melissa Roshan, Ohio CASA; Nina Spinelli and Gabrielle Hearly, Aiken County Department of Juvenile Justice)



Ms. Roshan shared that physical abuse left a permanent scar on her hand that she tried for years to hide. She reminisced about not having a trusted adult to turn that pain into a strength. Her advice: listen and talk in a strength-based way. Rather than ignoring the scar or simply saying that the incident could have been worse, Ms. Roshan expressed how having an adult acknowledge that her scarred hand wrote beautiful poetry and produced dynamic drawings would have impacted her. She ended by encouraging everyone in the child welfare field to turn, “wounds into wisdom” and help youth remember that they are more than their lived experiences.

The Power of Father Engagement was the subject of the afternoon session. It was led by Marc Himes from the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Mr. Himes focused on the invaluable roles of fathers in the lives of their children. Without a father figure, families often have fewer financial resources, social supports, and positive male engagement. The Midlands Fatherhood Coalition works to help fathers thrive in their families to be present for their children. His organization provides child support resources, job assistance and life skills. As Mr. Himes shared from the book *The Boy Crisis*, “the absence of dad equals the presence of government.”

The Conference provided a wonderful opportunity to meet and learn from child welfare professionals from across the state and nation to increase our shared understanding of helping youth and families in care.



(Nina Spinelli, Laurie Harmon and Amanda Whittle, State Child Advocate and Director of the South Carolina Department of Children’s Advocacy)

MIDLANDS CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL REPORT

The Midlands Citizen Review Panel is co-chaired by Brooke Wymer Ellis and Nina Spinelli. During the 2022-23, the panel welcomed the return of member Ralphielle Green and added new member Aaliyah Simon and non-voting DSS liaison Lakieba Brooks-Leach.

The Midlands Citizen Review Panel held meetings on August 15, 2022, September 26, 2022, February 7, 2023, March 8, 2023, and April 12, 2023.

Kinship Care has been a topic of interest to this Panel for several years. The Chairs and members wanted to continue to focus on kinship and set out to explore issues that arise as a result of a child or children being placed with kinship caregivers. As a result of the information members received at the 2022 Citizen Review Panel Mid-Year Retreat regarding the lack of legal authority of a Department of Social Services Safety Plan, Midland Panel members wondered what issues related to the Care Coordination for kinship caregivers. Specifically, the Panel contemplated the issues that kinship caregivers encountered when attempting to enroll in, transfer, and seek to obtain educational records and/or information regarding the child or children placed in their homes.

The Panel Chairs met with Brenda Myers who was previously employed as the McKinney-Vento Coordinator at the South Carolina Department of Education to gain background information on how the McKinney-Vento Act addressed children in foster care. There are specific guidelines that school districts must follow for foster children; however, there is no guidance for children who are placed with kinship caregivers. Technically, children who are placed with kinship caregivers are not in the custody of the Department of Social Services and are, therefore, not considered foster children. Although these children do not live with their parents due to the existence of safety risks, these parents retain legal rights to their children. The legal relationship of the parents to their children and the lack of legal authority by kinship caregivers, potentially, creates a conflict between the parties as it relates to educational information and/or services for the children; particularly, if the parents and the kinship caregivers disagree on educational decisions. As a result of this

information, it appeared that children who are placed in kinship caregiver homes via a Safety Plan are in limbo.

The Panel members contacted several school districts within their region to determine how they addressed educational issues related to children placed in the homes of kinship caregivers. As expected, there was a lack of uniformity across districts and counties.

Birley Wright is the current McKinney-Vento Coordinator. The Panel requested if Ms. Wright or anyone from her staff could attend their March 8, 2023, meeting to discuss how the state of South Carolina was or was not addressing educational issues for children placed as a result of a Kinship Caregiver agreement. Due to their attendance at a scheduled conference, the Panel was not able to meet with anyone from the Department of Education; however, Ms. Wright did express her interest in this issue and coordinating a meeting between the Panel and staff members.

As a result of the Midlands Citizen Review Panel investigation on the Coordination of Care for children placed in the homes of kinship caregivers via a Department of Social Services Safety Plan and the difficulty of accessing educational services, the Panel has offered the following recommendations:

- 1. The SC Department of Social Services and the SC Department of Education should partner or collaborate to create a policy to streamline the process of kinship caregivers enrolling children in schools.**
- 2. Language in the SC Department of Social Services Safety Plan should include that parents provide the kinship caregiver with records within a certain number of hours post-placement. (Records would include the long form of the SC birth certificate, immunization records, social security cards, Individualized Education Plans, 504 Accommodation Plan, etc.)**
- 3. The SC Department of Social Services create an education liaison position to address kinship care cases.**

- 4. Create a universal form or letter signed by the SC Department of Social Services given to kinship caregivers when children are placed in their homes for the kinship caregivers to provide to the school district as proof of placement and to allow the kinship caregiver to participate in addressing educational issues related to the child/children in the kinship caregiver's home.**

- 5. Create a timeframe to ensure that the Department of Social Services case managers provide kinship caregivers needed documentation.**

While the Midlands Citizen Review Panel explored how Safety Plans do not allow kinship caregivers to address educational issues for children placed through a kinship care agreement, a Panel member noted that this issue reaches beyond the educational realm and affect the kinship caregivers ability to seek and/or obtain medical, psychological, psychiatric, and/ or counseling services and/ or treatment for the children in the care of kinship caregivers.

UPSTATE CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL UPDATE

Due to changes in the leadership of the Upstate Citizen Review Panel, the Panel was unable to determine a project or topic to investigate; although there were preliminary discussions about exploring a previous topic- how the relationship between the county offices of the Department of Social Services and guardians ad litem affect the services provided to families.

2023 SC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

(1) SC CRP Onboarding for New Panel Members ~ May 2023

Virtual

(2) SC CRP 2023 Mid-Year Retreat ~ May 23, 2023

SC Main Library

Wagener, South Carolina

(3) SC CRP Fall Retreat ~ October 2023

Location To Be Determined

(4) Children's Law Center 2023 Annual Conference ~ November 2023

Location To Be Determined