

**SOUTH CAROLINA  
CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL**

# **2023 ANNUAL REPORT**



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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 utilizing 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:

In the 2022, I began this report by quoting the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus who was reported to say that “the only thing that is constant is change.”

With the pandemic and quarantine being in our past, it was time to move forward in our post-Covid world which remarkably felt very similar to our pre-Covid world. There were, however, several observable changes in the workforce. Some workers retired, retired early, or left the profession. For those who remained, vacant positions either remained unfilled or the duties were assumed by current workers.

While the Panels navigated changes, I was greatly impacted by similar changes that many of our members experienced. I took on additional and new responsibilities that required more of my time due to their frequency and periodic necessary changes. Furthermore, personnel changes resulted in my current roles expanding which left me with little time to interact, guide, and support the Panels beyond their first meetings.

With nearly a year of experience with these additional tasks, I feel as if I am better able to manage all my responsibilities, especially with respect to the Citizens Review Panels. I have been troubleshooting solutions to address any future conundrums and I will begin to implement these at the upcoming Annual Citizen Review Panel Retreat in May 2024.

Despite these challenges, I am most proud of the members of the individual Panels for continuing to meet throughout the year and for remaining committed to the mission of the Citizen Review Panels. This belief is what makes each one of you outstanding advocates for the children and the families in the state of South Carolina.

With that being said, it is time to get to work!

Please find enclosed the SC CRP 2023 activities and summary.

Sincerely,

*Sharon D. Walker*

Sharon D. Walker  
SC CRP Coordinator

## **2023-2024 SC CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

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

Virtual

(2) SC Citizen Review Panel Onboarding for New Members ~ July 2023

Virtual

(3) SC Citizen Review Panel Mid-Year Retreat ~ October 17, 2023

Children's Law Center Training Center

Columbia, South Carolina

(4) Children's Law Center Annual Conference ~ November 3, 2023

Columbia Conference Center

Columbia, South Carolina

(5) SC Citizen Review Panel Onboarding for New Members ~ January 2024

Virtual

(6) National Citizens Review Panel Conference ~ May 20- 22, 2024

Empowering Communities to Lead Change

Paradise Point Resort

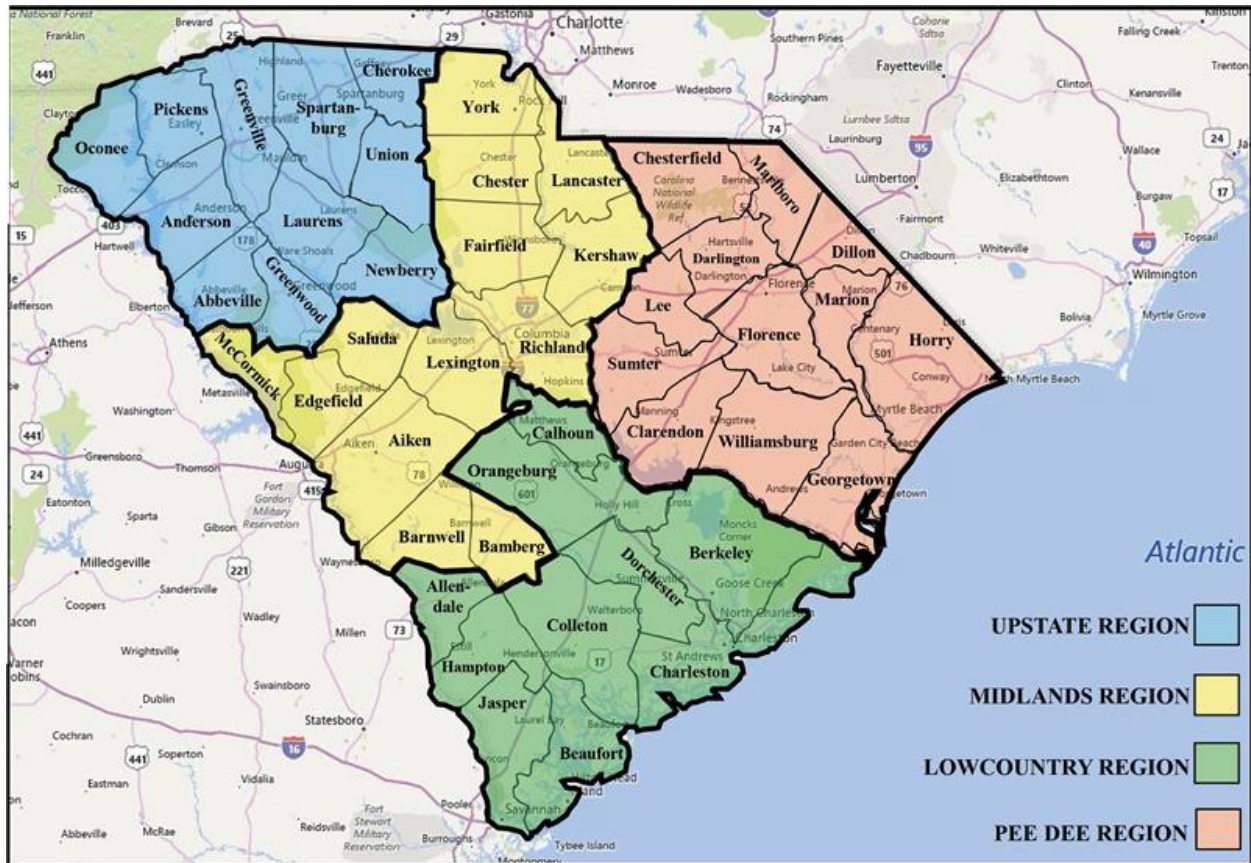
San Diego, California

(7) SC Citizen Review Panel Annual Retreat ~ May 24, 2024

George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics

Spartanburg, South Carolina

# 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*

## Panel Members and Chairs

### **UPSTATE**

*Jodie Martin, Co-Chair, 2023-25*  
*Paula Reed, Co-Chair, 2023-25*  
Ashley Hairr  
Betsy Manning  
Dawn Salveson  
Gissell Cravener  
Martie Solesbee

### **MIDLANDS**

*Brooke Wymer Ellis, Co-Chair, 2023-25*  
*Nina Spinelli, Co-Chair, 2023-25*  
Deborah DePaoli  
Ralphie Green  
Meredith Hardage  
Dr. Kimberly Janha  
Dr. Stephanie Payne  
Chris Whitaker

### **LOWCOUNTRY**

*Robin Haggard, Co-Chair, 2024-25*  
*Allison Hilton, Co-Chair, 2024-25*  
Robert Ellington  
Debbie McKelvey

### **PEE DEE**

*Jennifer Danford, Co-Chair, 2023-25*  
*Nicholas Lee, Co-Chair, 2023-25*  
Jennifer Gray  
Michele Moore  
Meryl Nesbit

## Spotlight on Midlands Citizen Review Panel Member Dr. Kimberly A. Janha



(Picture of *Dr. Kimberly Janha* standing in her office at Kindred Hearts of SC)

An office dedication was held for Kindred Hearts of SC on Friday, September 1, 2023. Dr. Kimberly A. Janha is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Kindred Hearts which was formed to serve kinship caregivers and their families by addressing the gaps in services and resources available to caregivers not involved in the child protective services system, while being inclusive of families with both formal and informal placements. The organization's mission is to serve persons who are taking care of their kin by building a community of collaborative organizations that are intentional in providing services to meet the needs of caregivers and the persons who are being provided care.

This mission is personal to Dr. Janha. At an early age, she witnessed her relatives act as caregivers for younger family members and observed her own parents serve as support systems for those relatives. She has also fulfilled those roles in the lives of her own relatives.

Dr. Janha's participation in the SC Citizen Review Panel also played a significant role in the development of Kindred Hearts. She along with three (3) Panel members devised a service initiative to hear from caregivers and provide them with resources and support. Upon realizing how extensive the need was for kinship caregivers, Dr. Janha sought to create a more robust and comprehensive plan to better serve kinship communities. Kindred Heart utilizes a collaborative approach in its Kinship Navigation program. By working with community partners, it provides support initiative, designed by current and former SC Citizen Review Panel Members, containing three (3) key components- Volunteer-Driven Case Management, Kinship Care Circles, and Community Outreach/ Education, with the last two components being the primary activities. At the present time, Kinship Care Circles are hosted in Chesterfield, Clarendon, Dorchester, Laurens, Lexington, Marlboro, and Richland counties on the last Tuesday of each month.

The SC Citizens Review Panel is extremely proud of Dr. Janha and her accomplishments. It is humbled that an organization that serves so many families and children within the state was created to expand on one of its initiatives. We look forward to its continued growth.

For more information about Kindred Hearts of South Carolina, please visit their website at <https://www.kindredheartssc.org>



## CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER ANNUAL CONFERENCE

On November 3, 2023, South Carolina Citizen Review Panel members, South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) attorneys, South Carolina Guardian ad Litem programs, and other juvenile and/or child professionals and/or advocates attended the 2023 Children's Law Conference sponsored by the Children's Law Center at the University of South Carolina School of Law.

Director Michelle Dhunjishah welcomed participants and the program opened with the keynote speaker Peter Mutabazi who spoke about ***The Kindness of One***. Mr. Mutabazi is the founder of Now I Am Known, which is an organization that provides resources to support vulnerable children. He also serves as "Dad" to his adopted children as well as numerous foster children.

There were two (2) morning breakout sessions. The first was ***It Takes a Village*** which was hosted by Mr. Mutabazi which provided strategies and advice for those who work for the best interest of the children- case managers, families, lawyers, and guardians ad litem.

The second session was ***Emerging Substance Use Trends and The Impact on the Family Regarding Safety and Risk to Children and Parents*** which was presented by Linda Brown and Margaret Garrett. This information was compiled from the trends that the South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services was observing with the presenters discussing their impact on the entire family as that relates to safety and risk to children and parents.

Shealy Riebold provided participants with an update on the passage of laws from the last legislative year and the status of current legislation before the South Carolina House of Representatives and Senate.

In the afternoon, there were three (3) breakout sessions. The first was ***The Adverse Impact of Secondary Trauma on Mental Health***. Presenter Jean Popowski shared information related to the signs and sources of secondary traumatic stress and strategies for addressing secondary traumatic stress. She also discussed the importance of mental health training and education on this topic. Lastly, attendees learned about initiatives for the development of additional educational resources related to mental health, wellness, and self-care to enhance their knowledge of their duties of competence, diligence, and honesty in the practice of law.

The second session was ***Cultural Competencies, Writing, and Cultivating Community*** presented by Dr. Deidre Anne Evans Garriot. This workshop was designed specifically for attorneys, agency staff, guardian ad litem, and child-serving professionals. The participants considered how their language use either invited or included people from their services and space and were able to practice cultural competence by evaluating and revising sample texts, researching, and using resources to inform their writing and knowledge, and sharing resources to demonstrate how cultural competence is a community practice. By the end of the workshop, the participants were able to understand a superficial history and the current meanings of cultural competence; articulate their own reasons why cultural competences matter in their field and roles; consult various resources to continue their knowledge about cultures and cultural competence; and read, reflect on, evaluate, and revise their own writing.

The third session, which was presented by Stephen Scoff and Jenah Cason was ***Family Engagement: Increasing Our Effectiveness When Working with Families***. The presenters recognized that working with families in the child protection and/or juvenile justice systems is often challenging and offered principles of family engagement, along with explaining the family-engaged case planning model.

The Conference concluded with members from the ***Youth Engagement Advocates (YEA)*** who discussed their lived experience in foster care and the juvenile justice systems. The Panel was joined by LaQuana Lee, the State Youth Engagement Coordinator- Chafee/ ETV Program, who coordinates the YEA program.

## **SOUTH CAROLINA CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL SUMMARY**

In May 2023, the Pee Dee Citizen Review Panel came into existence. It began with a group of five (5) dedicated and energized individuals who were ready to begin their work in earnest.

The Upstate Panel experienced changes in leadership due to employment changes for their previous Chair and Vice Chair. The person who was the acting Chair for the remainder of the time was subsequently relocated for employment purposes and an effort was made to contact all known members of the Panel to determine their interest in remaining on the Panel. Based on that communication, only one current member expressed her interest in remaining, and new members were recruited. The Panel currently has seven (7) members, although one member has recently resigned due to her current work obligations.

The Low Country Panel was the smallest and seemed to have the most difficulty recruiting members. In 2022, the Panel was somewhat defunct. The same effort was made to reach out to the known members to determine their level of interest in remaining on the Panel. Only one member responded and indicated her interest; however, at the time she was overextended. The effort was made to recruit new members with the assistance of current Panel members. There are currently four (4) members who were onboarded in January 2024.

The Midlands Panel's membership remained stable. As a result of the Panel's familiarity with one another and supportive guidance from prior leadership (Dr. Kimberly Janha), it was able to function with little direction from the Coordinator. That was solidified with the re-election of Co-Chairs Brooke Wymer Ellis and Nina Spinelli.

At the Annual Retreat in April 2023, the Midlands Panel discussed the former Independent Living program the Department of Social Services (DSS) previously had. During its existence, the program had case managers who were specifically assigned to work with foster children who were part of the Independent Living (IL) program. Those case managers ensured that children who qualified for IL received the services they were entitled to under Chafee, were prepared for college or technical school, had life

skills if they were going to leave the custody of DSS. Typically, the IL case managers had less cases than foster care case managers which allowed them to work more closely with IL children. In or around 2019 or 2020, the designation of IL case managers went away, and foster care case managers had a mixture of children- some who were IL eligible (ages from 14 to 18, and in some instances, up to age 21) and those who were too young for IL services (below the age of 14). The Panel decided to examine this issue to learn why it went away, what replaced it, and what are the results of such a system. Additionally, it was also interested in the retention rates of workers and thought that it might be something that all the Panels might want to investigate as well.

The Pee Dee Panel decided to examine the provider process in its area. Each member was already uniquely familiar with the lack of resources available for children and was interested in determining the process for applying and becoming a DSS approved provider, receiving information from DSS, and provider and customer satisfaction rates.

The Upstate Panel selected Trauma Informed Training and Communication Skills for DSS Case Managers as their topic. They began some initial research but did not receive guidance on the topic or what to research.

In January 2024, it appears that a decision was made to change the overall topic to Independent Living with each Panel exploring some aspect of it.

The Midlands Panel attempted to do this by looking at the law. On April 25, 2022, South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster signed H.3509 Voluntary extension of foster care; jurisdiction; transition plan which became known as Extended Foster Care which provided the following:

“(A) Before a child's eighteenth birthday, the child may provide written authorization to remain under the placement and care responsibility of the department after the child attains age eighteen and the court may conclude that it is in the child's best interests to remain under the placement and care responsibility



of the department after the child's eighteenth birthday. In such cases, the court's jurisdiction shall continue until the court issues an order terminating its jurisdiction. In no case may the court's jurisdiction pursuant to this article continue beyond the child's twenty-first birthday.

(B) Subject to eligibility criteria established by the department, after attaining age eighteen, a child may enter into a voluntary placement agreement with the department to remain under or return to the placement and care responsibility of the department. The department must develop a transition plan for a child who remains in or returns to the placement and care responsibility of the department.

(C) A voluntary placement agreement terminates within one hundred eighty days after it is executed, unless the court determines that it is in the child's best interests to remain under the placement and care responsibility of the department." (SC Code § 63-7-2730, 2022)

DSS is currently implementing its Extended Foster Care program.

**As a result, the South Carolina Citizen Review Panels do not have any recommendations to offer at the present.**



(Amanda Whittle, Executive Director of the Department of Children's Advocacy, Steven Ferruffino, SC Department of Social Services, SC Citizen Review Panel Members, and Sharon Walker, Coordinator of SC CRP at Mid-Year Retreat, October 17, 2023)



HENRY McMASTER, GOVERNOR  
MICHAEL LEACH, STATE DIRECTOR

June 17, 2024

Ms. Sharon Walker  
SC Citizen Review Panel Coordinator and Child Welfare Trainer  
Children's Law Center, Joseph F. Rice School of Law  
1600 Gervais Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29208

Dear Ms. Walker and members of the Citizen Review Panel,

On behalf of the South Carolina Department of Social Services, I would like to thank you for your continued dedication, support, and overall partnership. We believe that the feedback provided by the Panel and its respective members is essential for guiding our efforts to strengthen our system and improve services and outcomes for the children and families we serve.

We look forward to our continued partnership with the Citizen Review Panel and sincerely appreciate your unwavering support. Your commitment to excellence and community well-being is inspiring and a shared vision. Together, we can and will achieve meaningful progress, and look forward to what this new year will bring.

Again, thank you for your partnership and valuable contributions to the Department and the children and families we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Leach', written in a cursive style.

Michael Leach, State Director