

# Wisconsin Citizen Review Panel (CRP) 2023–2024 Statewide Report

Wis. Stat. § 48.47(9)

**Division of Safety and Permanence**  
*December 2024*



Wisconsin Department of  
Children and Families



A Letter from the Administrator ..... 3

Structure of Child Welfare in Wisconsin ..... 4

Overview of Citizen Review Panels ..... 5

Wisconsin Citizen Review Panels ..... 6

Overview of Panel Reports and Activities

    Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel ..... 8

    Langlade County Citizen Review Panel ..... 10

    Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council ..... 12

    Citizen Review Panel Serving Outagamie County..... 13

    Polk County Citizen Review Panel ..... 18

    St. Croix County Citizen Review Panel..... 20

    Youth Advisory Council..... 22

# A Letter from the Administrator



Thank you for taking the time to read the Wisconsin Citizen Review Panel 2023–2024 Statewide Report. Our Wisconsin Citizen Report Panels (CRPs) are represented by a wide array of citizen volunteers, including those with lived experience in the child welfare system. Our CRPs partner with local child welfare agencies to ensure that the needed support systems provide the best possible services, prevent and protect children from abuse and neglect, and meet the permanency needs of children. Furthermore, the CRPs play an important role in efforts to promote positive child welfare outcomes for children and families.

The 2023–2024 CRP Statewide Report contains an update on each panel's work throughout 2023 and 2024 and their recommendations for enhancements to policy, procedure, and practice within Wisconsin's child protection system. Each panel's recommendations and the Department's responses to these recommendations are contained in the report.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF), Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP) welcomes the panel's collaboration, including recommendations for improvement. DCF recognizes each member for their passion, time, and dedication to ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families. DCF believes that working together to strengthen families leads to safe, nurturing, and healthy environments for children. By improving our child welfare system, we are closer to realizing our shared vision that all "Wisconsin children and youth are safe loved members of thriving families and communities". DCF expresses appreciation to the CRP members for their ongoing work and dedication in these efforts.

John Elliott

Division of Safety and Permanence Administrator  
Wisconsin Department of Children and Families



Wisconsin Department of  
Children and Families



## Structure of Child Welfare in Wisconsin

Wisconsin is one of eleven states that operates a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system. Specifically, Wisconsin's child welfare system is "hybrid", meaning that child welfare services are partially administered by the State, and partially administered by counties. Child welfare services in Milwaukee County, the state's most populous county, are administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS). Child welfare services, including child protective services (CPS) and youth justice (YJ), in the balance of the state (BOS) are administered by local child welfare agencies.

The Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP) is the state agency within DCF that supports the supervision of quality services and best practices designed to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families in Wisconsin. There are some intrinsic differences in operating a hybrid state-supervised, county-administered system that impacts statewide outcomes for children and families. Within this structure, Wisconsin provides the statutory and policy framework for delivery of child welfare services and monitors local implementation. Given the variation that exists among the 72 counties, this structure allows for the development of county-specific solutions to address the strengths and needs of families and communities. Each county, through planning efforts, must develop strategies to improve outcomes. This allows for local flexibility to identify unique solutions to local problems. While there are many benefits to this local flexibility, this structure can also present challenges in ensuring consistent application of policy, and program initiatives. Because of the variance in county practice, it is often challenging to identify statewide solutions that would have the most impact on improving local child welfare service outcomes.



## Citizen Review Panels & the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) ([Public Law \(P.L.\) 93-247](#)), originally enacted in 1974, is the primary federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect. CAPTA provides federal funding to states in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities, as well as sets forth a minimum definition of child abuse and neglect.

Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) were developed in response to a requirement set forth in the 1996 reauthorization of CAPTA, [section 106 \(c\)](#). As such, CAPTA requires each State to establish a minimum of three CRPs. States, however, have the flexibility to implement the CAPTA requirements in ways that best meet their needs, so long as the panels meet the requirements. Panel members must be volunteers and include those who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. Panel members may include adult former victims of child abuse or neglect. Panels are charged with the review of policies, procedures, and practices. They are required to meet once every three months, at a minimum.

Nationally, CRPs vary in design, function, and child welfare system impact. CRPs serve to promote positive child welfare outcomes at the local, state, and national levels. Panels are very diverse in terms of the support received, how membership is appointed, and the composition of the annual report. Some panels do not receive public funding, while others receive funding via the CAPTA dollars that are received by a state. Members may be elected or appointed by state child welfare systems or legislative bodies. The CRP annual report may be written by group members or a designee, and responses to the report from the state vary widely around the nation.

## CRP Functions

The primary purpose of Citizen Review Panels is to assist state and local child protection systems in improving services through evaluation, public outreach, and advocacy. CRPs may also examine other factors that it considers important to ensuring the protection of children.

Specific CRP functions include:

- Examining state and local child welfare agency policies to evaluate the extent to which agencies are effectively fulfilling child protection responsibilities.
- Reviewing specific cases, including child fatalities and near fatalities, where appropriate.
- Making policy and practice recommendations for system improvement.
- Advocating for relevant actions that help improve the child protective services system.
- Providing opportunities for public outreach and comment, as necessary.
- Prepare and submit an annual report summarizing the activities of the panel, including recommendations to improve the CPS system. The state child welfare agency is required to respond to this report within six months.

Panels are comprised of volunteer community members broadly representative of the community in which the panel is established. Panels represent a partnership among community members, local child protection agencies and the state child welfare agency.

In Wisconsin, CRPs represent a partnership among community members, local child welfare agencies, and DCF. Wisconsin first established panels beginning in 2001. There are currently seven panels operating across the state:

1. Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel
2. Langlade County Citizen Review Panel
3. Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council
4. Citizen Review Panel Serving Outagamie County
5. Polk County Citizen Review Panel
6. St. Croix County Citizen Review Panel
7. Youth Advisory Council



Each panel functions autonomously and independent of DCF. Panels have their own CRP chairs and coordinator. They recruit and select their own members. Additionally, panels determine their own activities and efforts based on the needs of the communities and people they serve.

DCF provides oversight and technical assistance to Wisconsin’s panels. This includes regular communication, such as facilitating quarterly meetings with the panel coordinators and chairs. The DCF CRP coordinator is also responsible for planning the Statewide CRP Meeting each year. This meeting is open to all CRP members throughout the state. The DCF CRP coordinator assists CRPs in recognizing how, where and when recommendations are connected to the Putting Families First Framework, which is described in further detail below.

### Citizen Review Panel Reporting Process



Each panel is required to prepare an annual report summarizing their activities throughout the year and provide recommendations to improve the child protection system at both the state and local level. Upon receiving the reports, DCF drafts and submits written responses to the recommendations to describe whether or how the Department will incorporate the recommendations of the panels.

In prior years, reports have been completed on a calendar year basis. However, beginning in 2022, the reporting period shifted to align with the fiscal year and panel contracts.

The following report covers a 12-month timeframe from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, aligning with the fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

### Wisconsin Legislature

In 2022, the Wisconsin state legislature passed [Wisconsin Act 147](#), a new statute requiring the transmission of the CRP annual reports and DCF responses to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature. This requirement took effect on January 1, 2023.





## Wisconsin Vision and Focus

Since 2018, Wisconsin has been working toward transforming the child welfare system to become more family-focused, collaborative and to support children and families in their homes. These efforts to Put Families First were bolstered by federal legislation such as the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).

## Vision

*All Wisconsin children and youth are safe loved members of thriving families and communities.*

Putting Families First aims to dramatically reduce the proportion of child protective services (CPS) and youth justice (YJ) children and youth who are placed into out-of-home care, especially those that are served outside of their community or in congregate care settings. This shift in the system began when research indicated that children and families served by both the youth justice and child protection system have better results when supported in their family homes. This transformation is focused on keeping families and children together by serving them in-home with resources and services.

### Three Transformation Priorities

- 1 Strengthening local communities and building services to support families in their homes.
- 2 Keeping children in family settings whenever possible.
- 3 Supporting the workforce with solutions and improvements.

## Wisconsin CRPs are Putting Families First

In 2022, DCF began working with Wisconsin's Citizen Review Panels to align each panel's efforts with the statewide Putting Families First initiative. These efforts include advocating for the needs of their communities, assisting in meeting those needs, incorporating and elevating lived experience voices, and serving as a connection point between families and services, as well as communities and agencies. In serving as this connection point, Wisconsin's CRPs are working to spread awareness of Putting Families First, removal trauma, and the importance of children remaining with their families. Some panels have also worked to support Wisconsin's child welfare workforce.



## Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel

The Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel is in the southeastern part of the state in Jefferson County.

### Key Activities

#### Public Outreach

The panel provides for public outreach via the distribution of brochures and through sponsoring local events and initiatives. The panel is planning on creating a 1-page handout about the panel's mission, projects sponsored, as well as who to contact to provide feedback.

#### Case Reviews

The panel did not conduct any case reviews.

#### Other Panel Activities

- Supporting events for the Children in Crisis Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) including training for CPS and YJ staff by the Drug Task Force Unit; sponsoring officers and CPS staff to attend the Children in Crisis (Drug Endangered) National Conference.
- Sponsoring staff networking, goal celebration and staff appreciation events. Purchase of books for supervisors to support their teams in compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.
- Community education and awareness efforts: Mandated Supporter Project printed desk guides and resources.
- Sponsored the co-chairs to attend the National Citizen Review Panel Conference in San Diego, CA.

### Panel Recommendations



- 1 The suggestion is that DCF and the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System update the Mandated Reporter Online Training to align the information and language used with the updated Department of Public Instruction video for mandated reporters. All mandated reporters (supporters) in Wisconsin should get the same information and have the same language used about mandated reporting that highlights the tenets of the Putting Families First strategic transformation.
- 2 The suggestion is that DCF create a one-page infographic and handouts that can be disseminated throughout the state by local Human Services agencies to mandated reporters during mandated reporter trainings, meetings with community partners and other local events. The infographics and handouts should use language consistent with the Mandated Reporter Online Training and the Department of Public Instruction video for mandated reporters. To truly realize the shift to mandated supporting throughout the State of Wisconsin, it is important that mandated reporters in each community are getting consistent messaging that aligns with the tenets of the Putting Families First strategic transformation. Many people like having materials that they can reference when they are wondering whether they should make a CPS report and it is believed that handouts could be quite beneficial in that regard, especially if they remind the mandated reporter of what they learned and the spirit of the mandated reporter videos. It is important to emphasize for mandated reporters that CPS does not need to be the gateway to services in the community and that we all play a part in connecting families with the supports they need.





## DCF Response

DCF appreciates the panel's recommendations related to mandated reporting. Due to the similarity of these recommendations, we will address both in one response.

Mandatory reporting is an area of focus both nationally and in Wisconsin and we are aware of the significance mandatory reporting has in our child protective service system and understand the desire for families, agencies, and communities to have clarity and consistency regarding guidance and training related to this important topic.

DCF was asked to collaborate with Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on updates to their mandatory reporter training that is required for educational personnel and is committed to continuing this partnership. DCF will continue to support the basic [Mandated Reporter Online Training](#) as this provides information for a broad array of mandated reporter types consistent with Wisconsin statutes and is exploring next steps in creating a Spanish language version of this online training. Local agencies are encouraged to continue partnering with their local school districts to discuss mandatory reporting and the process of reporting in more detail.

DCF did some foundational updates to our public website, [Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect](#) to help clarify the types of maltreatment and to provide greater clarity regarding what situations may need to be reported to child protection services. As the child welfare field continues to best support children, youth, and families, understanding the difference between maltreatment and a family's need for supportive services is necessary. DCF also has informational videos on the CPS process once a report is made [Access: What Happens When You Make a Call](#). DCF will continue to consider opportunities, including training and reference materials to provide consistent messaging that is aligned with our Putting Families First transformation efforts.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel and your continued advocacy. Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.

[Click here to read the Jefferson County Citizen Review Panel Report](#)



## Langlade County Citizen Review Panel

The Langlade County Citizen Review Panel is in the northeastern part of the state in Langlade County.

### Key Activities

#### Public Outreach

The panel provided public outreach by creating a Facebook page and sharing resources/information to help those in the community. The panel sent personal invitations to encourage and increase participation in their panel. Information about the panel and its activities were shared at coalition and taskforce meetings throughout the community.

#### Case Reviews

The panel conducted two case reviews.

#### Other Panel Activities

- Supported the Langlade social work team with a staff development day. Provided lunch and a training organized by supervisors. During Social Work Appreciation Month provided lunch, cake and gift cards to social work staff. Panel members also attended the celebration lunch with social work staff.
- Family Strengthening Month pinwheel displays were put up at the fairgrounds along with new signs promoting the month. The signs directed families to the Five for Families website. A media release was also submitted to local newspapers.
- The panel provided funding for a foster parent appreciation meal hosted at the department for Foster Care appreciation Month.
- Provided funding directly and indirectly to families. Examples of this funding included: kitchen items for the family visitation area, dumpsters, car seats and assistance with utilities. The panel also funded parenting classes for families.



## Panel Recommendations

1

While discussing standards during a case review it was brought up that having a standard around the frequency of worker contact with collateral service providers could provide great benefit to both the department and families. Therefore, our panel kindly suggests that the state consider creating a standard as to the frequency of contact a worker should have with collateral service providers who are working with members of the family.

### DCF Response

DSP has established Wisconsin Child Welfare Policies and Standards. In the [CPS Access & Initial Assessment Standards](#), child protective service professionals are required to obtain collateral sources of information during the course of an Initial Assessment. As part of the Ongoing Standards, a child welfare professional must have a minimum of monthly face to face contact with parents and children and must document attempted and completed face-to face contacts in Wisconsin's statewide automated child welfare information system. A core aspect of this practice includes gathering information around the progress a family has made and documenting that in the family's case plan. As part of this process, the child welfare professional is expected check in with service providers to assess the progress toward the



goals identified in the family's case plan. While there are no specific requirements to the frequency of this collateral contact with service providers, these contacts support the ability to team with one another and the family and can be beneficial to all parties. DCF encourages collaboration between child welfare agencies and service providers who are supporting families. These contacts are paramount in monitoring the safety and well-being of children.

2

During a case review it was discussed that the state used to facilitate Permanency Round Tables and how helpful these were in assisting the department and social work staff in how to achieve permanency. It is kindly suggested that the state return Permanency Round Table to support both social work staff and families and children.

### DCF Response

DCF appreciates the value the panel saw in the DSP staff who had assisted local child welfare agencies in the balance of the state with facilitating and organizing Permanency Round Tables to support permanency for the children and families they served. Given the significant investment of time and staff DCF had provided in supporting local implementation of the Permanency Round Tables and the federal FFPSA emphasis toward providing child welfare services to intact family, DSP believed that local agencies were equipped with the knowledge and ability to sustain this practice without continuing assistance. Additionally, DSP needed to shift staff resources toward the state's transformation efforts associated with Putting Families First, which more closely align with the federal FFPSA shift.

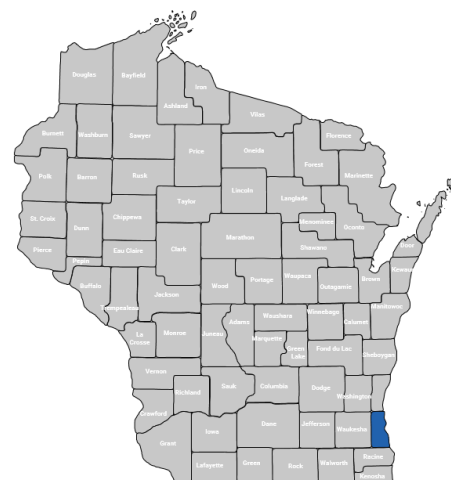
However, the DCF website provides helpful information on permanency support, including [Wisconsin Permanency Consultation Programs](#) and for [Wisconsin Permanency Roundtables \(PRTs\)](#). In addition to these on-line materials, local child welfare agency staff also are encouraged to attend the virtual Out of Home Care office hours held on the second Tuesday of every month from 1:00-2:30 pm as these sessions often attend to permanency-related topics. In addition, local agencies can send child recruitments and requests for Seneca searches to [Dcfseneca@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Dcfseneca@wisconsin.gov). Local agencies are also encouraged to utilize their designated DCF Bureau of Regional Operations Child Welfare Coordinator to discuss other permanency practice needs and to identify other resources and sources of support that may be of further assistance.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the Langlade County Citizen Review Panel and your continued advocacy. Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.



# Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council

The Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council (MCWPC) is in the southeastern part of the state in Milwaukee County. MCWPC functions slightly differently than other CRPs in Wisconsin. MCWPC was designated as a CRP for Milwaukee County under [Wis. Stat. § 48.562](#).



## Key Activities

### Public Outreach

The panel provides meetings in a public forum to allow for community participation via zoom. The MCWPC complies with all open meeting laws. This includes posting information about the meetings and materials on the DCF and DOA websites in advance. The meetings are also published in local newspapers as well as Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS) offices. Time is left on each agenda for community input.

### Case Reviews

The panel did not conduct any case reviews.

### Other Panel Activities

- MCWPC supports DMCPS Breaking Barrier's project with Casey Family Programs. This project aims to reduce the DMCPS congregate care population by 40% to keep youth in family settings.
- MCWPC revised their subcommittees to better align with the needs of the families and youth in Milwaukee County to support interagency collaboration among public health agencies, CPS agencies, and private community-based agencies. The new committees are focusing on prevention services and teen care populations.
- Sent Panel members to the National Citizen Review Panel conference in San Diego, CA.
- Sponsoring staff networking, goal celebration and staff appreciation events.
- Community education and awareness efforts: Talk Read Play-Scape; Born Learning Trail; Child Abuse Prevention Month Pinwheels/Banners; CAP Month Clothing for CRP Members; Foster Parent Appreciation Month, Plaque and Banners.

## Panel Recommendations

1

The Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council did not advance any state-level CPS system recommendations for the department's consideration.

### DCF Response

Thank you for your timely submission of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council 2022/2023 annual report in compliance with the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). The panel did not submit any specific recommendations, so please accept this written response as acknowledgement that we have received and reviewed your report.

[Click here to read the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council Report](#)



## Citizen Review Panel Serving Outagamie County

The Citizen Review Panel serving Outagamie County is in the northeastern part of the state in Outagamie County.

### Key Activities

#### Public Outreach

The panel provides for public outreach via a public Facebook page. The panel posts regularly to help the community learn about issues facing children and families and about events that are held. The panel also participated in the Pinwheels for Prevention campaign in 2023.

#### Case Reviews

The panel conducted two case reviews.

#### Other Panel Activities

- The panel has been working with the Youth Advisory Council to develop an “Advocating for Myself” packet focusing on kids ages 12+.
- The panel has been supporting the County Retention and Resiliency (R and R) workgroup two CRP members are participating on the R and R workgroup.
- The panel sponsored Strengthening Families Month by sending informational materials to area public schools and the YMCA.
- The panel sponsored pinwheels to be displayed at a local minor league baseball team venue.
- The panel sponsored ads to recruit foster parents in a local school districts publication distributed to families.
- Each year the panel supports the County staff during Social Work Appreciation month by providing food for their Social Work Appreciation Day,
- The panel sent two members to the National Statewide Citizen Review Panel conference in San Diego, CA.
- The panel sponsored materials for the safe sleep initiative.

### Panel Recommendations

1

Group homes are putting in extra charges for high need kids that are above and beyond what is affordable. Monitor why placements are being declined and monitor the rate group homes are charging.

#### DCF Response

DCF is aware of and empathetic towards the difficulties local agencies have in finding and paying for appropriate placements and acknowledge the frustration surrounding denials.

Statute mandates a rate regulation process for group homes and other licensed child welfare facilities in Wisconsin. DCF is required under Wisconsin Stat. s. 49.343 to establish per client daily rates for Group Homes and Residential facilities, as well as the administrative portion of foster care daily rates paid to Child Placing Agencies. Rates are established using cost and service report data gathered from providers. Please





refer to memo dated August 29, 2024 "[2025 Rates](#)" as well as our website for detailed information regarding the rate regulation process.

Under the DCF rule for group homes, a group home licensee may request an extraordinary payment from a local agency through a specific process outlined in rule (See DCF 52.74). Based on the criteria and requirements in the rule, the local agency is required to approve or deny the request for an extraordinary payment or to recommend an alternative to meet the child's needs. The local agency is required to send a copy of the request and determination to DCF.

Regarding your panel's recommendation on monitoring the reasons placements are being declined, DCF has implemented a new referral portal called [Supporting Youth and Children \(SYNC\)](#). This application records all referrals made and tracks the reasons why referrals are not accepted. DCF intends to use this data, once available, to better understand referral and admission decisions made by group home and residential care centers and to provide meaningful information as to gaps and challenges in our current continuum of care.

2

Secondary trauma supports are needed: Offer trainings at each county particular to that county's experiences.

### DCF Response

DCF recognizes and appreciates the Panel's recommendation to support local child welfare agencies and child welfare professionals who experience secondary trauma.

Evidence suggests that organizational climate can mitigate some of the effects of secondary traumatic stress. DCF encourages local agencies to invest in strategies to support child welfare professionals with a multidimensional approach to prevention and intervention involving the individuals', supervisors, and organization. Agencies who commit to efforts on recognizing and attending to secondary trauma by promoting self-care, balancing caseloads, using flexible scheduling, and providing supervisor support can have a stronger workforce. An array of multi-modal trainings, resources materials, and other tools, called [The Wisconsin Well](#), has been developed for local child welfare agencies and their supervisors and staff to assist in developing and maintaining a healthy and strong organizational culture.

In addition, DCF uses practices, wherever possible, that seek to reduce secondary trauma and one example where this is evident is in [System Change Review](#), which is the process that is used to carry out the Department's responsibility to conduct Act 78 practice reviews. This approach to assessing critical incidents uses a trauma sensitive approach and has been well received by Wisconsin's child welfare professionals. The System Change Review process is designed to be collaborative in nature and focused on identifying both strength and opportunity across every level of the system. This collaborative process assists in mitigating secondary trauma to affected individuals.

In addition, the Department of Children and Families has implemented centralized training for Wisconsin's group care professionals. DCF and WCWPDS offers [Think Trauma](#) training to all congregate care providers, focused on trauma's impact on development, coping strategies, organizational stress, and self-care.





3

Work with DPI on education payments when kids are placed out of state. Money should be rerouted from school to the county that has to pay for the child's education.

### DCF Response

DCF appreciates the panel's recommendation regarding educational funds and how rerouting these funds could be beneficial when children are placed out of state.

DCF and the DPI have a long-standing partnership focused on supporting educational stability for youth placed in out-of-home care.

This partnership includes a workgroup that attends to increasing knowledge of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) among local child welfare agency professionals and educational personnel and supports efforts to improve collaboration across state agencies. As part of this workgroup's efforts, DCF could explore with DPI how to improve communication to both child welfare agencies and local education agencies regarding responsibilities for out-of-state education costs.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the Citizen Review Panel serving Outagamie County and your continued advocacy. Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.

4

Based on our case review, more training for workers is needed on eliminating bias against bio parents and on improving relations between bio parents and foster parents in order to facilitate reunification. More training is also needed to help workers understand how implicit bias may be impacting placement decisions, especially regarding race and substance use disorder. More training requires funding. State agencies need to advocate for increased funding with our legislature.

### DCF Response

DCF appreciates the recommendation to better attend to bias and for sharing the context in which it has shown up in your community. It is important for our system to address implicit and overt bias and how that may show up in child welfare practice. Over the last few years, DCF has embedded bias training in a variety of learning spaces, including but not limited to WiLearn training for new child welfare professionals and Applied Learning Communities where bias has been addressed within each topic area.

Additionally, in partnership with Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System (WWPDS), DCF is working on providing training opportunities related to the child welfare system, serving both the child protective service and youth justice populations, that support the workforce's continued growth and awareness in areas related to systemic oppression, inequity, and the impact of personal/professional bias. In calendar years 2023 and 2024, in partnership with WCWPDS, DCF has provided local child welfare staff, including staff from tribal child welfare agencies, with the opportunity to participate in AVenueS virtual reality training [Accenture Virtual Experience Solution](#). This training focused on evaluating how race influences our decision making, explicitly in the realm of child welfare.

With regard to supporting relations between foster parents and biological families, DCF is also partnering with WCWPDS to transition to a new foster parent training curriculum that has been endorsed by the federal Children's Bureau. Supporting families, and providers, across the child welfare system continuum is reflected in this curriculum. This transition is targeted to occur mid-2025. DSP also contracts with the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families to meet the statutory requirements related to foster parent campaigns. Current campaign material is being developed that intentionally highlights the importance of co-parenting and



expectations/support aimed at reunification. New materials are targeted for release in early 2025; however, there are several resources for foster parents regarding co-parenting already available on the Coalition's website <https://www.championclassrooms.org/pages/about-the-coalition-for-children-youth-families>. The Coalition is also currently offering a five-week course for foster parents called [Co-parenting Through Connection](#).

DCF commits to continuing its efforts and to supporting practice shifts and professional development resources to focus on including bias training into existing and other related efforts.

5

**Mental health and SUDS:** There is a lack of treatment facilities within Wisconsin and the ones that we have are not willing to take high acuity needs children because of the lack of necessary providers as well as all of the "red tape" providers that serve youth need to go through. Staff work with parents who have had severe and persistent untreated mental health and AODA needs since pre-teen and teen years; some start using as young as 8 or 9 years old. There are a few SUDS treatment facilities available for teens. We know there is a connection between untreated mental health and teen drug usage. We need level 2 foster homes, treatment level homes, and we need local residential treatment facilities, and we need children to have treatment right away to work on positive coping skills so that children can stay in their communities, in their schools, and can stay in a Level 2 foster home. It is their best chance at reunification and if reunification cannot work, it is their best chance at a guardianship with a family member or adoption.

6

More funding is needed for developing more level 2 foster homes, treatment level homes and residential treatment facilities. State agencies need to advocate for increased funding with our legislature.

## DCF Response

Recommendations 5 and 6 are both related to our lack of out-of-home care resources. As such, the DCF response will address these recommendations together.

DCF recognizes that these are continued recommendations and acknowledges and appreciates the continued efforts put forth by the Citizen Review Panel serving Outagamie County for their continued advocacy in bringing this issue to the attention of the Wisconsin Legislature.

Furthermore, DCF is aware of and empathetic toward the difficulties local child welfare agencies have in finding appropriate placements for children, while recognizing the importance of building infrastructure that can support as many children in their communities as possible. DCF is currently revising DCF Chapter 56 to ensure that foster care licensing rules are aligned with current caregiving needs and allow for the licensure of foster parents who live in the same communities as the children in care. Further, DCF is pursuing a relative licensing track, as allowable under updated federal rule to increase the likelihood that relatives are able to safely care for their kin, while receiving important compensation and support for serving in this important caregiving role. Consistent with several national studies, DCF is confident that increasing relative caregiving use and their capacity to provide quality care will have a positive effect on child well-being across our state.

The Governor made an important investment in supporting foster parents through increased rates in the 2023-2025 biennial budget. A key DCF priority is to keep children whose needs require residential placement close to home in the least restrictive setting that meets the child's needs. Multiple efforts are underway at the local, and state levels to address the complex needs of children and youth with high acuity needs.



In addition, the Governor allocated [American Rescue Plan Act](#) dollars to support DCF in meeting the complex needs of children and youth with high acuity needs.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the Citizen Review Panel Serving Outagamie County and your continued advocacy. Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.

[Click here to read the Citizen Review Panel Serving Outagamie County Report](#)



## Polk County Citizen Review Panel

The Polk County Citizen Review Panel is in the western part of the state in Polk County.

### Key Activities

#### Public Outreach

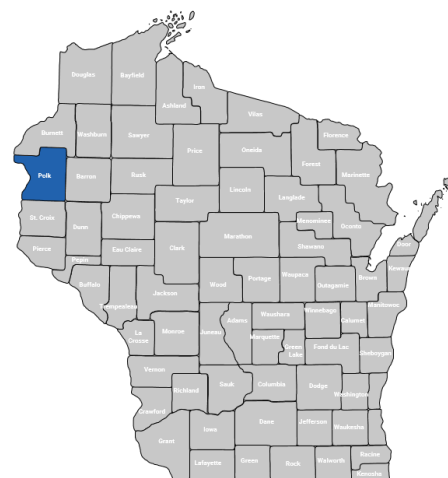
The panel conducts public outreach through multiple projects that benefit families throughout the county, as well as local nonprofits and school districts. The panel created a brochure to be distributed detailing their panel.

#### Case Reviews

The panel, in collaboration with the local child welfare agency, completed one case review.

#### Other Panel Activities

- The panel provided funding to the local child welfare agency to support families with gas cards, drug screens and assistance with visitation.
- The panel provided support for community programs such as:
  - Strengthening Families and Systems which focuses on trauma responses and reactions.
  - Recovering Together Café supported by the Mental Health Task Force.
  - Youth Mental Health First Aid supported by the Mental Health Task Force.
- The panel provided appreciation gifts for social workers, law enforcement and behavioral health staff.
- The panel sent two members to the National Citizen Review Panel conference in San Diego, CA
- The panel supported Child Abuse and Prevention activities for local agencies and schools in their county.
- The panel funded a public speaker on Building Culture of Empathy, Hope and Service for the community.



## Panel Recommendations

1

In Polk County there are currently 9 children in placement and the projected placement total is nearing 2 million dollars. Most, if not all, of these children have experienced significant trauma and/or are special needs adoption situations. In the adult system, there is financial assistance to family members who are required to care for the disabled and are unable to work outside the home as a result. This type of support is not available within the children/youth system. There is a specific case in Polk County where a youth is unable to successfully function within the community setting without the support from his mother due to the secure attachment developed with his mother. It is recommended that the State consider a similar financial support program, one that mirrors the adult program for high acuity youth, for family members who are unable to work due to the high/significant needs of their children. It is the responsibility of a parent/caregiver to provide for their children (financially and security), but if they are unable to provide financial security due to the significant needs of their children and their inability to work outside the home as a result, this provides a financial/responsibility conundrum for families.



## DCF Response

DCF recognizes the importance of families having access concrete supports, like financial and housing resources, in order to meet the needs of their children. Programs like Targeted Safety Support Funds, one-time Family First Funds, Family Keys, and Domestic Violence Housing First Pilot Project seek to provide the type of support identified in this recommendation. It is imperative that families have access to the resources they need to be able to care for their children and ideally those resources can be obtained without families needing to enter the child welfare system. With that in mind, DSP has been partnering with the DCF's Division of Family Economic Security (DFES), DHS, and (DPI to identify ways in which families can receive the supports and services they need early on, including financial assistance, so as to prevent the need for child welfare intervention. Some of this work includes looking at the various state and federal funding streams, like Medicaid, TANF and Title IV-E funds, to ensure maximized use of those funds for as many families as possible.

As mentioned, children and youth with high acuity needs require a lot of support and families often struggle to manage those needs on their own. In January of this year, Wisconsin was one of nine states selected for a Children's Behavioral Health Policy Lab where the states convened to collectively strategize, engage in shared learning, and promote cross-system alignment to drive outcomes for children, youth, and families. From that convening, WI child serving agencies, DHS, DPI, the Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH) and DCF are working collaboratively to identify cross system solutions to support families and their youth who have complex multisystem needs.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the Polk County Citizen Review Panel and your continued advocacy. Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.

[Click here to read the Polk County Citizen Review Panel Report](#)



## St. Croix County Citizen Review Panel

The St. Croix County Citizen Review Panel is in the western part of the state in St. Croix County.

### Key Activities

#### Public Outreach

For Family Strengthening Month, the panel purchased banners, yard signs and pinwheels showing children in out of home care for 2023. They supported a local press release aimed at helping to educate the community regarding Strengthening Families month and emphasize the need for foster families.

#### Case Reviews

The panel conducted one case review.

#### Other Panel Activities

- The panel supported foster families who were Grand Marshall's in the local St. Patrick's Day parade with educational materials they distributed in the parade.
- The panel sent one member to the National Citizen Review Panel conference in San Diego, CA
- The panel provided lunch for the Human Services staff during a presentation on emerging drug trends.
- The panel provided funding for an attendee at the Forensic Interview Training.
- The panel provided significant funding for Shop with a Cop through the County Sheriff's Office.
- The panel provided funds for Public Health to purchase a new curriculum for safety education for families with infants and toddlers.
- The panel provided funds to the local Human Services agency to support meaningful family interactions.



### Panel Recommendations

1

Our recommendation would be to focus on training that promotes individual skill sets which facilitates working within the Family First Initiative.

#### DCF Response

DCF acknowledges and appreciates the panel's recommendation to promote and develop individual skills to support the Family First initiative. DCF's Putting Families First Initiative includes a focus directly related this recommendation, "to support the workforce with solutions and improvements." DCF continues to consider efforts to streamline workload and child welfare practice expectations, while also modifying and improving training to better meet the needs of all public agency and tribal child welfare professionals across the state.

DCF and WCWPDS have collaborated to update and improve training and other professional development opportunities for child welfare professionals. One such training for new child welfare staff is [WiLearn](#), a staff training program that launched in January 2023 for new child welfare professionals. Completion of the WiLearn program is a requirement for child welfare professionals whose job functions include child protective service Access, Initial Assessment and Ongoing Services. The components of this training offer transfer of learning, job shadowing and on the job training with enhanced supervisory oversight and coaching, and during this time the new child welfare professional has reduced case assignments for six





months. In addition to other foundational coursework, DCF supports applied professional development opportunities for child welfare professionals and their supervisors with opportunities to participate in [Applied Learning Communities](#), [Plan-Do-Study-Act](#) projects, and [Spaced Education](#) learning, in addition to other DSP sponsored learning forums and office hours which enable child welfare professionals and their supervisors from across the state to come together with one another and with DSP program and policy professions to learn from each other and share successes and challenges around Putting Family First practices and goals.

In addition to WiLearn, DSP continues to make improvements to child welfare practice through the [Improving Child Welfare Package](#). This is a collection of efforts aimed at better supporting families and the child welfare workforce by streamlining the work and centering family engagement. In June 2024, the Initial Assessment improvement project launched new and improved assessment practices and processes to better center parents, caregivers and family voice in the Initial Assessment process. Also, work is under way in a Quality Case Planning initiative which will assist child welfare professionals in collaborating with families to develop plans specific to the family's unique needs. The goal of this project is to create clarity, efficiency, and consistency in carrying out and documenting child welfare case planning to best meet the needs of both the child welfare professional and the youth and families they serve.

DCF and WCWPDS continue to be committed to developing skills and support for the child welfare professionals in our state and appreciate the panel's identification of this need.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the St. Croix County Citizen Review Panel and your continued advocacy. Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.

[Click here to read the St. Croix County Citizen Review Panel Report](#)



## Youth Advisory Council

The [Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council \(YAC\)](#) began in 2005 and consists of former and current youth in the foster care system who provide a voice for all foster care youth in Wisconsin. Youth generally begin their involvement in advisory work by serving in regional councils and have the ability to become members of the Statewide Youth Advisory Council.



### Key Activities

#### Public Outreach

Every year the State YAC practices strategic sharing training which helps the members of local and state YACs to effectively speak on their life stories to panels state-wide and locally in an effective manner. The board hosted Strategic sharing meetings to empower local and state YAC members. These meetings have proven to be impactful when hearing the voices of those with lived experience. The panel engages in discussion with legislators on pressing issues during legislative day. This provides a direct line of communication between policy makers and the board members.

#### Case Reviews

The panel did not conduct any case reviews.

#### Other Panel Activities

- The state YAC has been spreading awareness for Foster Care Awareness month virtually on the panel's Facebook page.
- The state YAC had 3 members attend the Daniel's National Independent Living Conference in Orlando, FL.
- The state YAC had 3 members attend the National Citizen Review Panel conference in San Diego, CA.
- For Foster Care Awareness month in 2024, the state YAC held a Legislative Day. This focused on bringing a few State YAC members to the Capitol to speak with Legislators who are passionate about making changes into the foster care system. The YAC members met with various people in 10-minute breakout sessions. Areas for discussion included the state budget and funding for independent living services to serve young adults under the age of 23.
- Youth Advisory Councils in Wisconsin are active in initiatives that support and improve the child welfare system. Some of the activities they participate in:
  - Creating social media platforms
  - Participating in feedback sessions with foster parents, child welfare professionals and educational staff
  - Several community service projects, including making blankets for shelters, cooking classes and art sessions.
  - Developing podcasts to raise awareness about youth in care.

### Panel Recommendations



1

Partner with community organizations, schools, and healthcare providers to disseminate information on how families can access support services. Emphasize preventive measures, such as home visitation programs and in-home support services. Collaborating more with other state agencies to disseminate this information. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlights that early intervention programs, like home visitation, can reduce child abuse and neglect by up to 50%. Partnering with community organizations, schools, and healthcare providers ensures that at-risk families are identified early and receive the necessary support services. This collaborative approach enhances the reach and effectiveness of preventive measures, keeping children in family settings.

### DCF Response

DCF recognizes the importance of collaboration with other system partners and ensuring such collaboration extends to local communities. A core aspect of our state's [Putting Families First](#) transformation is to identify and assist in closing service gaps families are experiencing in communities across Wisconsin and to strengthen cross agency/cross program collaboration to address those gaps. Additionally, DCF has focused on working directly with families who have experienced our state's child welfare system as a way to hear firsthand about what improvements can make the most difference in meeting a family's needs and to do so in a way that does not necessitate deepening involvement in the child welfare system.

Over the last two years, DCF has worked collaboratively with DHS to better attend to accessibility and availability of behavioral health services and to support cross agency support of the Birth-to-3, Children's Long-Term Support, and Comprehensive Community Service programs, to better integrate and coordinate policy and program efforts with DPI, and to continue our investment in the state's Family Foundations Home Visiting program. With each of these areas of cross-agency support and coordination, DCF has and will continue to emphasize the importance of helping children, youth and families before there is deepening involvement into the child welfare system. DCF is committed to maintaining these partnerships and increasing accessibility and availability of supports and services more proactively for families, children, and youth as a way to prevent the need for child welfare intervention.

DCF continues to acknowledge and appreciate the continued efforts put forth by the Youth Advisory Council and your continued advocacy. Thank you for your time, energy, and commitment you have made to improve services for Wisconsin children and their families.

[Click here to read the Youth Advisory Council Report](#)



## Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the