



Child Placement Forum Overview  
May 24, 2011  
Summary Report

In 1978, New Jersey enacted the Child Placement Review (CPR) Act to provide oversight of children in foster care placement. The Junior Leagues of New Jersey State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC), with assistance from Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) provided leadership to the passage of this law, which required the establishment of a system of citizen review boards in the Family Court in each county. Due to SPAC's long-standing history of advocating for children in the foster care system, SPAC hosted the Child Placement Forum on May 24, 2011.

The Child Placement Forum brought together 40 representatives from over 15 different agencies and divisions of the judiciary branch involved with the New Jersey foster care placement system. This representation throughout the forum provided sufficient discussions to address the objectives set forth for the day which were:

- To determine if there is sufficient accountability and oversight in foster care placement.
- Define the optimal role of citizen review within foster care for children in New Jersey.

**Issues that challenge the well-being of children in placement**

While determining if there is sufficient accountability and oversight in foster care placement, the first discussion focused on the issues that impact the well being of children in placement. The issues are vast, ranging from direction for families in crisis, funding for services, defining roles, and evaluating organizational consistency. These issues were effectively separated into two distinct groups; individual needs and systemic processes. Attached, for review is a comprehensive overview of the issues that were brought forth.

**Is there sufficient accountability and oversight in foster care placement?**

After reviewing the vast issues that face children in placement coupled with the state's progression of meeting foster children's needs and the extensive number of agencies, organizations and volunteers associated with the protection of the children, it was agreed that there is not sufficient accountability and oversight within foster care placement.

**Independent oversight**

It was agreed that there is a need for independent oversight for both individual accountability in regards to the issues children and families face as well as the systemic process. However, the appropriate role for independent oversight remains an open issue.

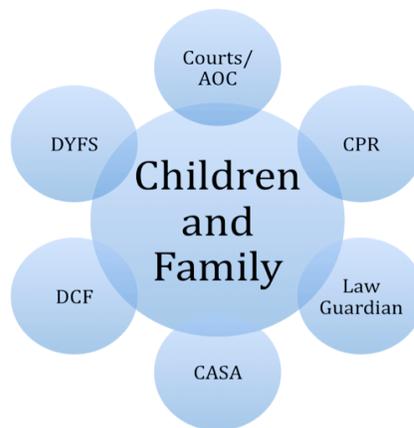
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**Individual Oversight**

Through a common vote process, five (5) areas were identified as the top areas that should be addressed within individual oversight:

- Independent – Does it equal citizen review or volunteer? – CASA, CPR, Courts, Office of the Child Advocate (bring it back)
- Meeting Resource Parents needs DCF, Contract Provisions, FAFS, Citizen Review, judiciary, and providers
- Appropriate Placements – who should be involved to make sure placements are appropriate – DYFS, Judiciary, Citizen Review, Law Guardian, CASA, DCF
- Visitation – parental and sibling – partners, DCF, CASA, Fed Monitor, HHS, Judiciary, Citizen Review
  - Aging Out of system – DCF, Judiciary, CASA, Fed. Monitor, Citizen Review.

**Individual Accountability**

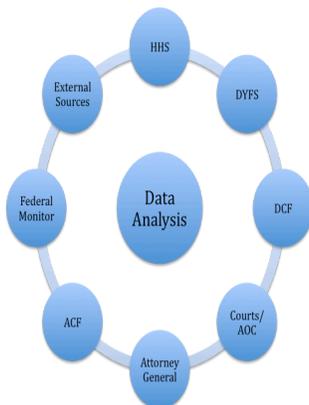


**Systemic Accountability**

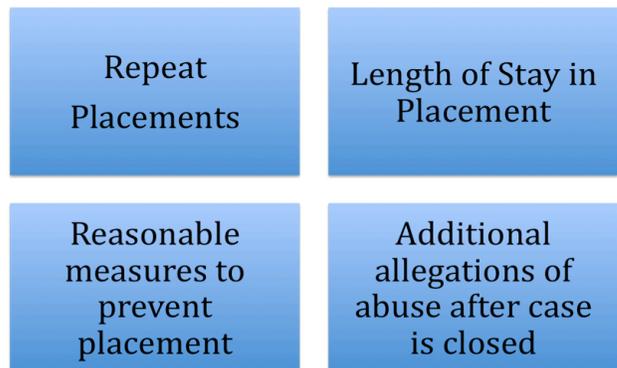
Through a common vote process, four (4) areas were identified as the top areas that should be addressed within systemic accountability:

- Outcome Measurement – Two Areas to review – Organizations to be measured and what should be tracked.

Systematic Oversight – Outcome Measurement  
Data Analysis - Organizations involved



Systematic Oversight - Outcome Measurement  
Data Analysis – What should be tracked?



- Quality consistence of policy implementation – new entity composed of a consortium of stakeholders, Judiciary with public reporting Office of the Child Advocate, DCF, HHS

**Policy Implementation**  
Quality and Consistency – Who Should be involved?  
Example



- Need to review across entire system – Feds, legislators, child advocates, and Governor’s office.
- Transparency – need more information - DCF website, statistics, Office of the Child Advocate, Judiciary, media

**Is there a need for citizen review within the state’s system of systemic and individual oversight?**

The majority of the attendees agreed that there is a need for citizen review but to what extent is still in question. As the needs of the courts have evolved over the years the role of citizen review has changed. To best determine the future of citizen review a complete evaluation of Child Placement Review for both past and present needs to be conducted and areas for improvement need to be identified. Following is a detailed list for the suggested functions of citizen review.

**Conclusion**

While the many agencies, organizations and concerned citizens are all working to provide a safe environment and a better future for the children in placement, New Jersey does not have sufficient oversight among these groups. There is a need for citizen review in New Jersey; however with the recent clarification of the courts role in reviewing the individual child’s placement, it is unclear as to what extend the citizen’s role should play. During the non-competitive environment of the forum, it was agreed that additional individual and systemic oversight is needed in our state with Continuous Quality Improvement as a key component.

**Next Forum**

SPAC will host a follow-up forum in the fall to continue the discussion on oversight in NJ.

The following pages provide details of the discussions that took place as the forum attendees reached the objectives. The discussions addressed:

- I. What are the challenges to the well being of children and families placement?
- II. Is there a need for independent accountability?
- III. Identification of the issues to address with oversight
- IV. Identification of the Top Priorities
- V. Assignment of Top Priorities
- VI. Is Citizen Review needed in New Jersey?

Discussion I. What are the challenges to the well being of children and families placement?  
(Note: these are placed in order of discussion not ranking)

#### Individual Needs

- Families in crisis don't know where to go
- Failed placements create a long-term impact with the trauma of change. Placements need to be done right the first time.
- Changes in Medicare/ Medicaid/ Educational aid have an unknown impact on the children and families.
- Families should be maintained post-DYFS involvement.
- Successful and safe kinship – reinforce and facilitating
- Maintain sufficient funding for prevention and placement
- The lack of services for children in placement
- Immediacy of services for child
- Locating fathers with goal of returning child to him (prevention)
- Homelessness (result of placement problems)
- Challenge of geography (keeping kids close to school)
- Insufficient treatment providers for child's safety
- Finding appropriate foster families
- Continuity of individualized servicing

#### Systemic Process

- Clear definition of roles and responsibilities with the different agencies and organizations and consistent policies within those areas
- Cross-training to share information between organizations and clarify roles.
- Transparency and availability of information to non-DYFS related people
- Collaboration between organizations
- Changes within the system – are they being implemented?
- Effectiveness of family team meetings – is it working?
- DYFS – is it too compartmentalized?
- Disagreement regarding terms “permanency vs. well –being”
- Size and scope of the system is vast.
- Loss of institutional knowledge as people retire
- Value of the 45 day review in determining permanence
- Caseload management in the court system – are there overburdened?
- Lack of neutral oversight
- Training issues that judges may face.

Discussion II – Is there a need for independent oversight?

It was agreed that there is a need for independent oversight for both individual accountability in regards to the issues children and families face as well as the systemic process. However, the appropriate role for independent oversight remains an open issue.

Discussion III, IV and V– Identification of Issues to Address in Oversight, Identification of Top Priorities and Assignment of Top Priorities. Details of these discussions are outlined in the beginning of this summary.

#### Discussion VI – Specific Role of Citizen Review

Citizen Review – citizen review is important. The question is to what extent.

- Following Case is important
- Inconsistency between counties needs to be eliminated – full evaluation of old system to address issues and new system needs to be evaluated too.
- Needed for the lifecycle of the case
- Need to address aging out
- Follow-up needed – perhaps with specialized review
- Citizens of NJ need to know the basic needs of the children are being met
- Continual review does not equal 45 day review
- Variety of people brought to process through review of citizens
- Helps overburdened court systems – brings together a variety of people to review case.
- Recommendation for change to state and court
- May help identify the need for emergent hearings
- Focus groups with volunteer citizens
- Who are the citizens that should be involved?

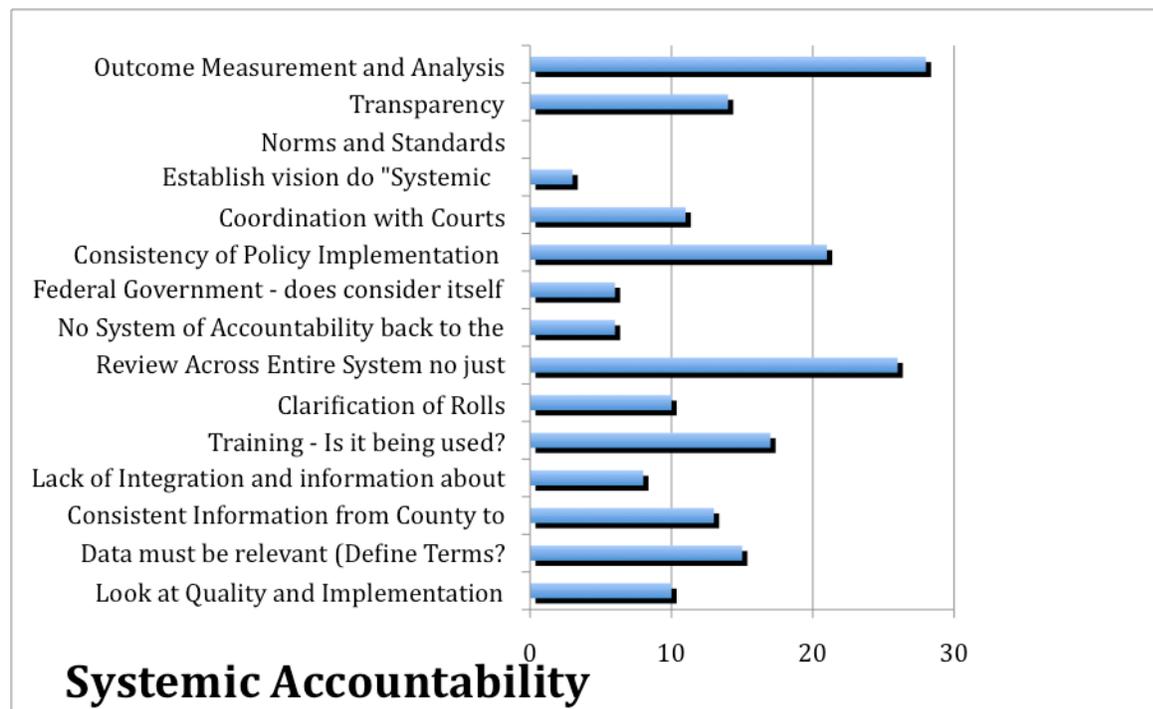
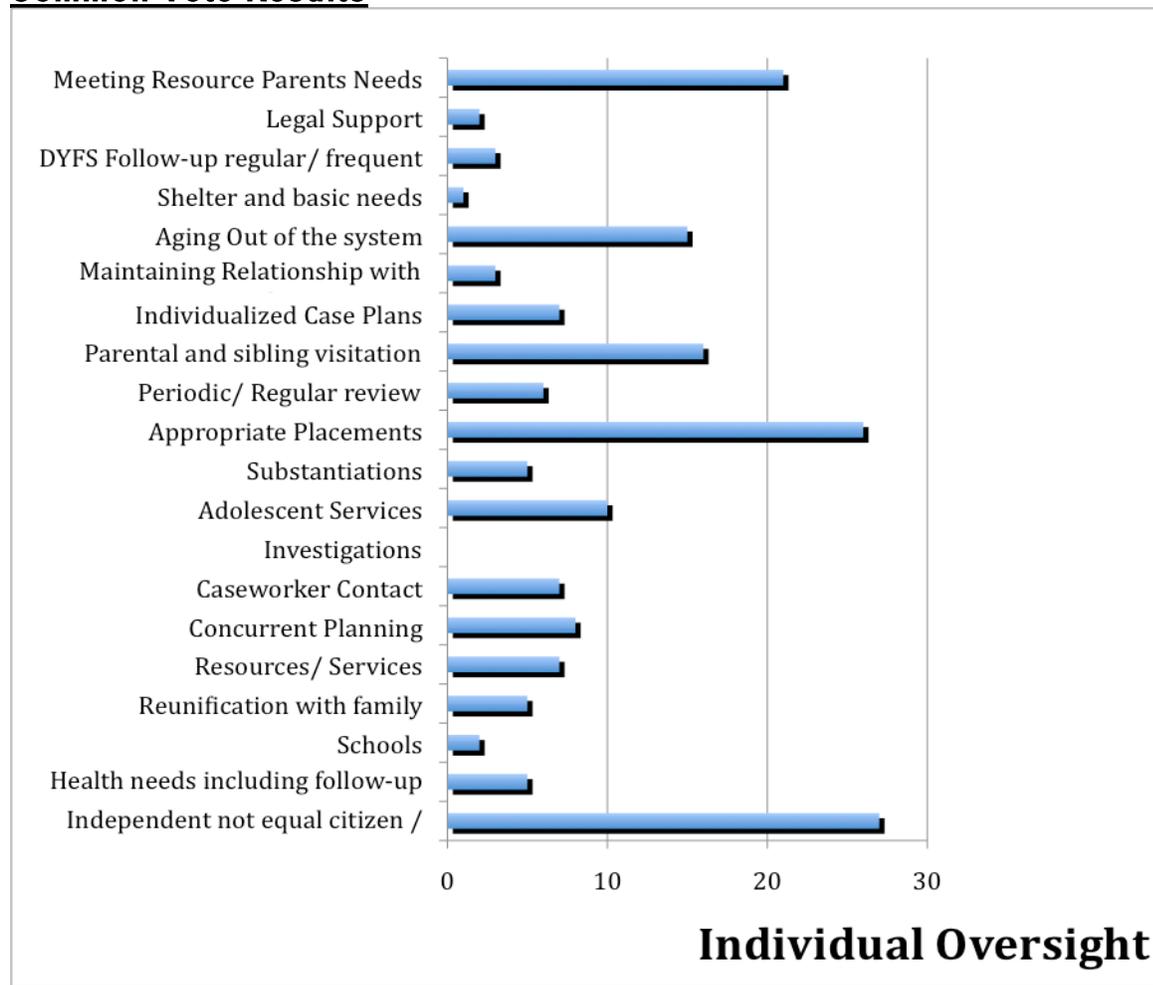
#### **Acronyms**

ACNJ – Advocates for Children of New Jersey  
ACYF – Alliance of Children, Youth and Family Services  
AOC – Administrative Office of the Courts  
CASA – Court Appointed Special Advocates  
CPR – Child Placement Review  
CPAC – Child Placement Advisory Council  
DCF – Department of Children and Families  
DYFS – Division of Youth and Family Services  
FAS – Foster and Adoptive Services  
HHS – Health and Human Services  
OPR – Office of Parental Representation

#### **Attending Organizations**

ACNJ	Foster and Adoptive Services Staff
Caring Partners of Morris/ Sussex	Foster Parent
CASA	IEP Youth Services
Children’s Aid and Family Services	Legislators
Children’s Home	NJACRF
Collier Services	Office of Law Guardian
Court Committee / Former Foster Care Youth	Office of Youth Services Somerset
CPAC	Parents Anonymous of NJ
DCF	Regional HHS Office
DYFS	Robins' Nest, Inc.
Family Intervention Services	Schumann Fund
Judiciary	The Nicholson Foundation
Federal Monitor	

## Common Vote Results



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